the Malays

Anthony Milner

the
Malays

The Peoples of South-East Asia and the Pacific

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To Claire, two esteemed professors, and six
fine children

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'The Malays': the phrase throws up many images. One might recall Joseph Conrad's mysterious, dangerous pirates; the best-mannered gentlemen of the East; the 'lazy natives' of the colonial economies; the 'New Malay' entrepreneurs of modern, triumphant Malaysia; the skilful region-builders of ASEAN; the supporters of a multitude of monarchies and royal courts unimaginable in Europe or elsewhere in the Asian region; a people divided over the proper role of Islam; a Southeast Asian front in the struggle against terrorism. There is something mercurial about the signifier 'Malay'. Thinking about these images, we can rightly wonder – just who are these people? What is the essence of 'Malayness'?

The task of writing a book on 'the Malays' is daunting. A question from the outset is, exactly who ought to be called 'Malay'? According to one type of classification, used by some ideologues today and rejected by most scholars, 'the Malays' number 350 millions, and live across a vast territory from Papua in the East through Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to Madagascar in the West, and up through the Philippines to Taiwan. And then we have to consider the 'Malay' communities in Sri Lanka and South Africa.

The scholarly literature about 'the Malays' is enormous. The Dutch and British officials who administered 'Malay' territories were pioneers in their description and analysis; North American, Japanese and Australian researchers have been active especially over the last half-century, and all this in addition to the major research that has been undertaken in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Historians, language and literature specialists, anthropologists, political scientists, geographers, economists – these, and more, have been developing 'Malay studies' for decades, supplementing the investigations of the scholar-officials of the colonial period. 'Malay studies' has become an exciting field,

and the research conversation in which scholars tend to be engaged is remarkable for the spirit of collaboration as well as debate.

Even if one could master this great body of literature, I do not think a book written today on 'the Malays' would ever seek to convey the type of authority assumed by the colonial specialists. We do not write now about 'the Real Malay' (as governor Sir Frank Swettenham did a century ago); we do not employ confident brush strokes to portray 'the character' of a people and what might once have been called social and cultural facts. Questions of perspective are today nearly always present: how 'the Malays' saw and see their own situation, and just what categories the outside observer has (or might have) employed, have thus become matters of compelling interest.

Inevitably, this book reflects my own research experience and focuses on the particular issues and debates which have caught my interest, and often puzzled me. I try to give the study breadth – in considering social change over many centuries and in the range of 'Malay' communities which I cover – but my preoccupations will be evident. In particular I ponder the issue of who are 'the Malays', and ask how they became 'Malay' and what it means to be a 'Malay'. One thing that has intrigued me in particular is the often-stated 'Malay' anxiety about a lack of permanence – a fear sometimes expressed in terms of an emphatic denial that 'the Malays will disappear from this world'.

This book focuses on how the idea of 'being Malay' developed among the people themselves. I am interested in the history of ideas, and think this has been a relatively neglected area in 'Malay studies'. After discussing the early historical development of the people who were eventually to call themselves 'Malay', and then the particular Muslim civilization they forged, I examine the emergence and the 'localization' of the concept of the 'Malay race' or 'Malay ethnicity'. This process began in the colonial period and has then been influenced in varying fashions in the several nation states into which 'Malays' have been incorporated, sometimes happily, sometimes not. Being 'Malay', it seems to me, means different things in different places, and at different times. In certain contexts, I would suggest, it has entailed a fusion between Western notions of ethnicity and older, local 'Malay' concepts of community.

Reflecting on 'concepts of community' in the modern and certainly the pre-colonial era, I have in fact become increasingly convinced that speaking of 'race' and 'ethnicity' – categories that have had a vital impact on the manner in which we have organized and represented the world around us over the last two centuries – has often caused misunderstanding. As I worked on this book in Japan and Germany,

reading about developments in these and other countries, I found it more helpful to think about 'Malayness' rather than 'the Malays' – and in general about 'civilization' rather than 'ethnicity'.

One of the strengths of the Blackwell's 'Peoples' series is that it is not nation-state-based. Dealing with people, such as 'the Malays', who cross numerous state borders, offers an opportunity to adopt new perspectives – particularly with respect to what nation building itself has meant in social and cultural, as well as political, terms. Taking a post- (or pre-) nation-state perspective may also assist in speculating about the future.

One immediate concern is whether the Asian region will continue to be configured on the basis of the colonial entities that were forged largely by Europeans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Those of us who live in or close to this region are perhaps especially anxious to determine which social or religious forces are likely to be influential over the next half-century and more. The role of Islam is deservedly receiving attention in this light, as is the re-emergence of China as a paramount regional power. In the past decades some proponents of a 'Malay world' consciousness have contemplated a time when what they see as a pre-colonial 'Malay' unity will be restored. Although I think this is unlikely, the angle of vision required in studying 'the Malays' rather than specific nation states does encourage caution – making one wary about discounting altogether the possibility that a specifically 'Malay' vision may have an 'international' potency in the future. Having said this, I will also draw attention to the argument that suggests the opposite might take place: that the idea of a 'Malay people' could become much reduced in significance in the medium future. To make a judgement on this matter (as on many others) requires close consideration of what the phenomenon 'Malay' really is, and in what new ways the meaning may change.

Note about the Author

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Thinking about 'the Malays' and 'Malayness'

Today – even employing a relatively narrow definition of 'Malay' – 'the Malays' are settled across a wide area. Figures are often difficult to determine with accuracy, but apart from the 12 million 'Malays' in Peninsular Malaysia (with more than 300,000 in Sabah and some 500,000 in Sarawak) (Saw 2007: Ch. 5), the year 2000 census in Indonesia put the total there at 7 million (located mainly in the Riau Archipelago, the coastal areas of Sumatra and Kalimantan); in Singapore there are more than half a million; and in Brunei a quarter of a million. There are 1.3 million in southern Thailand (according to an *International Herald Tribune* report of 26 February 2007); and then further afield some 70,000 in Sri Lanka and perhaps 180,000 in the 'Cape Malay' community of South Africa. Only in Malaysia and Brunei are 'the Malays' the majority community.

Who are 'the Malays'?

In the very act of attempting a survey such as this from public documents, the question begins to emerge of just who should be described as 'Malay'. It is a question that in one form or another will concern us throughout this book, and puzzling about it has eventually led me to write about 'Malayness' rather than 'the Malays'. By one classification – proposed by certain 'Malay' activists and not accepted by the majority of scholars – virtually the whole population of Indonesia (at least to the western part of Papua) and most of the people of the Philippines can be defined as 'Malay': that would give a total of some 350 million in all. The Marino of Madagascar are also occasionally added; and there are the Chams of Cambodia and Vietnam. Confronted with this list, the scholarly response tends to urge that

we think not of 'Malays' but of 'Austronesian-speaking peoples', and note that the Malay language is only one of some 1,000 languages in the entire Austronesian language family (Bellwood 2004: 25).

On what basis, however, should we enlarge or reduce the category 'Malay'? Do we simply cite the scholarly consensus view? Or ought we to include all those people who claim to be 'Malay'? One problem with this is that people sometimes change their minds. In certain periods, for instance, the idea of being 'Malay' has had currency in the Philippines: in the early 1960s, President Macapagal urged the concept of Maphilindo – an association of three states (the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya) that would be a "confederation of nations of Malay origin", bound together "by ties of race and culture" (Ismail Hussein 1990: 69). Today these nations are joined in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), but the grouping has no explicit 'Malay' basis, and even in Indonesia the vast majority of people would not consider being 'Malay' to be a primary focus of identity and association. We will see that at the local level – even in Malaysia – certain people claim 'Malay' identity in one situation and Javanese, Indian or Arab identity in another.

Then there are people who appear to possess very 'Malay-like' characteristics but do not call themselves 'Malay'. In Cambodia one group of Muslims traces its origins to Patani (now South Thailand), Trengganu and Kelantan (both now in Peninsular Malaysia) and Sumatra (Indonesia) – all widely acknowledged to be 'Malay' centres – and are familiar with Malay writings in the Jawi (Arabic-based) script. These people, however, generally seem to refer to themselves as (and are called) 'Chvea', not 'Malay' (Collins n.d.: 56; Mohamad Zain 2001: 2). In Sabah in northern Borneo, people who would have called themselves 'Malay' over many years if they had lived in Sarawak (to the west) identify themselves as 'Bajau', 'Brunei' or 'Suluk'.

In Malaysia, where 'Malays' have achieved political dominance, 'Malay' is defined in the Constitution. A 'Malay' is said to be someone who (in addition to fulfilling certain residential requirements) "professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks the Malay language, (and) conforms to Malay custom" (Siddique 1981: 77). Consider first the Islamic requirement: this certainly removes the vast majority of Filipinos – some of whom continue to express a strong 'Malay' consciousness (Salazar 1998) – who are of course Christian. But it is also true that certain Singapore 'Malays' – including Christian Batak from Sumatra – are not Muslim. Adherence to Islam has not been a criterion for being 'Malay' in the Singapore census process (Rahim 1998: 81). Furthermore, even in Malaysia the term 'Malay' has been used by 'Malay' leaders over the last few decades in ways that

suggest the possibility of non-Muslims being included. In the years leading up to independence (1957), one proposal was to allow Chinese and Indians to join the *bangsa Melayu* (the 'Malay race' or 'community') even without conversion to Islam (Ariffin 1993: 195–196, 202). In 1991 a former Malaysian foreign minister from the governing party (UMNO, the United Malays National Organization) proposed that wedding the definition of 'Malay' to Islam made it too narrow (Rahim 1998: 19). In some areas in eastern Indonesia the phrase 'masuk Melayu' (or 'enter Malaydom') can actually mean to become Christian (Reid 2001: 306).

As to the Malay-language qualification: this would necessarily exclude most of the 'Cape Malay' community of South Africa (who tend to use Afrikaans or English); and the Sri Lanka 'Malays' generally speak Sinhala. In Thailand, there are thousands of Muslims who consider themselves to be 'Malay' but speak Central Thai (Collins 2001: 395). On the Peninsula, according to the definitions of 'Malay' in some of the land legislation introduced in the colonial period, there was also no need to speak Malay (Wong 1975: 512–515). A new issue regarding language which has arisen in Malaysia in recent years arises from the growth in importance of English. The warning has been issued that an increasing number of 'Malays' are "losing their ability to speak the Malay language (as English becomes their working language)" (Hooker 2004: 158–159).

On the other hand, speaking Malay definitively does not imply in itself that a person identifies as a 'Malay'. Some people of Javanese background on the Peninsula who now habitually speak the Malay language call themselves 'Javanese'; others call themselves 'Malay'. The 'Javanese' of the Medan region in northeast Sumatra – people who certainly speak Malay in the form of Bahasa Indonesia (the Malay-based Indonesian national language) – by no means see themselves as 'Malay', and are viewed by the 'Malays' of that region as having been formidable rivals. On the Malay Peninsula, Temuan and Jakun aboriginal groups speak Malay as their home language but do not claim a 'Malay' identity (Collins 2001: 395).

The lack of fit between language use and self-description needs particular emphasis for the three or four centuries before colonial rule. In the Archipelago world of sultanates – what Europeans were to call the 'Indian Archipelago' or 'Malay Archipelago' – the Malay language was described by Europeans as a *lingua franca* and a "language of the learned" comparable with Latin or French in Europe. One writer of the late seventeenth century insisted that it was also used beyond the Archipelago "from the flow of the Indus, up to China and Japan" (Sweeney 1987: 47). According to the early eighteenth-century Dutch scholar Valentijn, however, the language was called not 'Malay' but 'Jawi', in its elite form, and 'Kacukan'

(mixed language) or 'Pasara' (market language) when describing the day-to-day communication among commoners (48). Another descriptive term was 'the language of below the wind' (that is, the language of the countries which one could sail to from the west when the monsoon was blowing eastwards) (50; O'Kane 1972: 4). Amin Sweeney, who has analysed carefully these European commentaries, has criticized modern scholars who take for granted that 'Malays' held a "monopoly on the Malay language", any more than Romans did so over Latin. "Malay literature", he insists, should not be seen as the "exclusive domain" of "ethnic Malays" (46, 51–52; Roolvink 1975: 13–14).

With respect to the Malaysia constitution's mention of 'Malay custom', this is frequently portrayed as integral to 'being Malay'. Custom or *adat* has been described, for instance, as "the collective mind of the Malay peoples" (Zainal Kling 1989/1990: 115; 1990: 46). But there seem to be different levels of custom, and different contents. A village has sometimes been described as being "united by a 'secret code', that of *adat* or custom" (Wilder 1982: 115), and it is said that every village " 'has its own' accent, custom, personality and history" (117). The content of *adat* may also change over time (Sharifah Zaleha 2000).

The issue of descent is not raised in the Malaysian constitution, but in other documentation from Malaysia there is confusion here as well. According to legislation in the state of Kedah, for instance, a person of Arab descent can be considered a 'Malay', but this is not the case in Johor (Wong 1975: 512–513). In the Cocos-Keeling Islands (now part of Australia), the majority of the members of the 'Malay' community appear to originate from Java, as seems to be the case with the Sri Lanka 'Malays'. In the case of South Africa, one account suggests that there are more people in the 'Cape Malay' community with an Indian than an Archipelago background (Muhammad Haron 2001: 2–3).

Deciding just what is entailed in being 'Malay', and determining who should be included in that category, are questions of special concern for those people who have in recent decades been fostering an international 'Malay' movement. Prominent among these has been Ismail Hussein (the President of the Federation of the Association of National Writers in Malaysia), who regrets that the rise of nation states has led to what he sees as the "disintegration of the unity of an earlier era" (1990: 73). The promotion of a 'Malay World' ('Dunia Melayu') ethos, supported particularly by the nation state of Malaysia, has involved holding international cultural and networking conferences, and the establishing of an 'International Malay Secretariat'. But the scope of the 'Malay World' has remained somewhat vague. For instance, although Ismail Hussein writes powerfully of the

"unique individuality" and underlying unity of this "world", he himself is frank in puzzling over what precisely are its constituent elements. At times he would appear to consider the Malay language the fundamental element of unity; at other points he refers expansively not just to the Philippines but also to Hawai'i, where in 1879 the Parliament discussed the prospects of uniting the 'Malay-Polynesian' peoples – a proposal Ismail presents as illustrative of "a cognizance of roots and primordial foundations" that transcends both national and religious boundaries (1990: 57). Such a vision of the 'Malay' – and it is only one of many visions developed by proponents of the 'Dunia Melayu' movement – clearly goes far beyond the definition in the Malaysian constitution.

A Mainstream?

Despite this plurality of understandings, it is probably correct to say that a degree of consensus has emerged, at least among scholars. Most academic discussion of 'the Malays' today would conform with the sociologist Geoffrey Benjamin's description of the 'Malay World' as encompassing at least "Isthmian Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, the central east-coast parts of Sumatra, and much of coastal northern, western and southern Borneo, Brunei, parts of Malaysian Sarawak, and parts of Indonesian Kalimantan" (Benjamin 2006: 1). People in other places would certainly be considered for admission, and there would also be questions about some of the 'Malays' in Benjamin's list of regions. But members of this particular 'Malay World' – speaking Malay as a first language and professing Islam – would be widely accepted as 'Malay' and, more critically, would probably today think of themselves as being 'Malay'.

Considering just the 'consensus' viewpoint, therefore, how close have we come to defining this narrower grouping of 'Malays'? It is clear from our discussion so far that this is a difficult issue. During the colonial period, race-minded, Peninsula-based colonial administrators invested effort in formulating a specific 'Malay' character. Early in the nineteenth century, Governor Raffles noted that 'Malays' led a "generally wandering and predatory life" that induced them "to follow the fortunes of a favourite chief" (1992/1830: 235). The 'Malay', he said, was also "indolent" and "feelingly alive to insult" (236). Later in the century, Sir Frank Swettenham described what he sometimes called "the Real Malay" as "a brown man, rather short of stature, thick set and strong, capable of great endurance". The "leading characteristic of the Malay of every class", he said, was "a disinclination to work". He was in addition very "loyal", guided more by the head than

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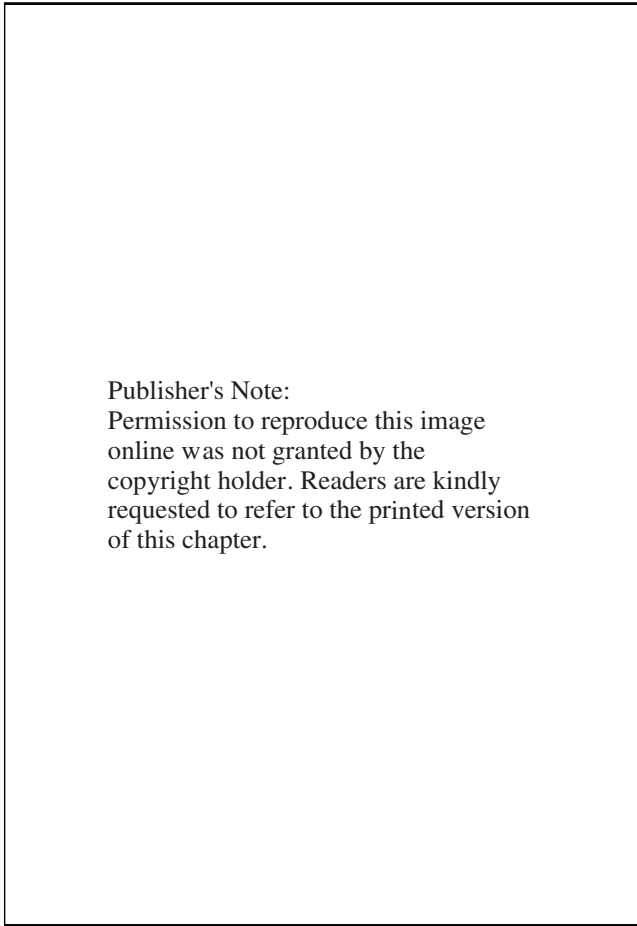
Figure 1   The domestic doorstep in a 1960s Kelantan village, from Rosemary Firth, *Housekeeping among the Malay Peasants* (London: Athlone Press, 1966). Courtesy of London School of Economics Library.

the heart, and "extraordinarily sensitive in regard to any real or fancied insult" (1907: 134–143; 1901). Few write today with such analytic confidence. But there is nevertheless a post-colonial, as well as a colonial, body of 'Malay studies' knowledge which helps to give substance to the 'Malay World' or 'Malay people'.

Let us examine first a formulation of 'Malay studies' designed for a general audience, rather than an academic one – a so-called "culture pack" published in Singapore. With the title 'Gateway to Malay Culture', and an

introduction written by the President of the Central Council of Malay Cul-
tural Organizations of Singapore, this book includes information about the
history, language, personal names, religion, customs (especially those related
to weddings and other life-cycle rituals, including circumcision), crafts,
music, social etiquette (never touch a 'Malay' child on the head!) and living
conditions of 'the Malays'. "Most Malays" – note 'most', not 'all': recall it
is a Singapore publication – are said to be Muslim, and they are especially
concerned about courtesy and sincerity. In greeting another person, these
'Malays' draw the palm of their hand "to the heart as a gesture of sincerity".
'Malays', according to the culture pack, characteristically live in villages (or
"*kampong*"), in wooden houses "built on stilts", arranged in an "open and
informal" manner to encourage "friendly social relations" – and surrounded
by "coconut trees swaying in the wind". Malay women wear a "sarong
kebaya" – a blouse and a pleated sheath of material ("sarong"); and men
wear a "baju" (a "loose, long sleeved shirt") over a sarong or trousers. The
wavy-bladed dagger – the "keris" – is "the most famous of all ancient Malay
weapons". The aspect of a 'Malay' wedding that is highlighted in the book
is the "bersanding", where the couple sit together on a dais, dressed in royal
attire, seemingly enthroned (Asiapac 2004).

The *Gateway to Malay Culture* is deliberate in conveying stereotypes.
The language of modern social science is very different – and yet even here
there are gestures to the 'Malay' essences presented in the culture pack. A
classic study of 'the Malays' of Singapore – a study which admits the
extremely heterodox character of that community and the mix of urban
and rural life styles – reports that "ideally they liked to live in a wooden
house built on stilts, with a verandah, a front room for receiving guests,
one or two bedrooms and a kitchen" (Djamour 1959: 7). "The Malay",
observed Rosemary Firth in a book written at the end of the colonial period
(and one still rewarding to read), "is on the whole a friendly and talkative
person, and he is proud" (1966: 6). William Wilder recorded that Kampong
Kuala Bera in the state of Pahang (on the Peninsula) had "retained many
customs and other features of the classical Malay village" (1982: 24).
Thomas Fraser described Rusembilan, his research site in southern Thai-
land, as "culturally, linguistically, and racially a Malay village" (1960: 7).
David Banks gave his book about Sik, in a hill district in Kedah, the title
Malay Kinship (1983). Such expressions as 'Malay proper', 'authentic
Malay culture', 'authentic Malays', 'ordinary Malays' and 'pure Malay' are
also often used in the accounts of researchers in a way that can seem to
allude to some core or typical 'Malay' community. In a study of a commu-
nity in Kelantan in the 1970s, Manning Nash described the people of his
district as not only "Malay in population" but also "Malay in culture and

social organization" (Nash 1974: 7). I have myself written about "Malay political culture", historically as well as in contemporary times (Milner 1982, 2002). Even in a reflective, recent book by Joel Kahn (*Other Malays*, 2006) – a book intended, as the title suggests, to draw attention to 'Malays' who do not fit the culture-pack stereotypes – there is reference to "mainstream Malays" (xx) and to people being "identifiably Malay" (119). It is understandable that he deploys these phrases: Kahn is concerned to delineate a group in Malaysia that tends not to speak Malay as a first language, is made up largely of immigrants to the Peninsula, is often engaged in urban, commercial pursuits (rather than rural ones), is attracted to reformist Islam and is likely to be highly mobile rather than attached to a particular place and ruler. In portraying such 'others', there would certainly seem to be explanatory – but not necessarily accurate – advantage in juxtaposing them with a mainstream core.

Social scientists' descriptions of these 'Malays proper' often refer to the type of cultural elements singled out in the Singapore culture pack. Apart from the *kampong* lifestyle, references are made to 'shadow plays', *makyong* (traditional theatre), *joget* dancing, séances and the whole shaman (*bomoh*) culture that is said to relate to a cultural substratum – a body of knowledge underlying the Islamic religious practices and beliefs which 'Malays' are said to have gradually adopted over five or six centuries. Certain structural features tend to be identified as characterizing 'Malay' society. The accounts of Japanese scholars are often all the sharper here because of the way they explicitly or implicitly draw contrasts with so-called 'traditional' Japanese society. Descent among 'the Malays', it is pointed out, is reckoned bilaterally – through both mother and father; unlike the Japan case, 'the Malays' "lack the concept of tracing ancestry through a selected line" (Kuchiba 1974: xiii), and seldom remember the names of great-grandfathers. Apart from the potential for such a bilateral system to enhance female roles, there is no basis for establishing ancestral graves, and less sense of "duty and obligation" among 'Malays' than, for instance, Japanese. 'Malays' are less "restrained in fixed relationships" (xviii; Maeda 1975).

Scholars have made warnings, however, about overstressing the 'looseness' of 'Malay' society. Certain forces operated to promote unity, especially when 'Malays' confront outsiders. For all the diversity of the 'Malays' of Singapore, even in the immediate post-World War II period the community was said to feel "considerable in-group solidarity" as one "discrete section" of the island's multi-ethnic assemblage (Djamour 1959: 22). In the state of Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia, antagonism and ridicule have been vividly described as reinforcing 'Malay' solidarity – as 'Malays' have contrasted their own 'refinement' with what they perceive to be physically unclean

Chinese and "black" and "hairy" Indians (Wilson 1967: 25, 30). In Kelantan too, Chinese immigration has been seen as a key factor stimulating "the bloc notion of ethnicity" (Nash 1974: 143).

In writings on literature and history as well, 'Malay studies' have helped to convey the image of a 'Malay' community possessing some real coherence. There are histories of 'Malay literature', survey studies on the 'Malay novel', collections of 'Malay poetry' – books written or compiled by foreign specialists or by scholars in Malaysia, Singapore, East Sumatra, Brunei and numerous other centres in the 'Malay World'. A key text in 'Malay studies' is Sir Richard Winstedt's *A History of Classical Malay Literature* which, as Amin Sweeney has pointed out, portrays 'Malay literature' as a "product of a particular ethnic group, a perception of literatures which had become the custom in Romanticist Europe with the ascendancy of the vernaculars and the rise of nationalism", 1987: 52, 57). By the time Winstedt wrote, Europeans were no longer familiar with the idea of a learned language in which peoples possessing many different mother tongues might communicate. In the field of history, academic and school texts have presented what is conceptualized as the history of the 'Malay race' – reaching back many centuries to the empire of Srivijaya (which arose in the 600s, and was led from Palembang, south Sumatra) and the fifteenth-century sultanate of Melaka (on the Peninsula), and claiming the achievements of these kingdoms on behalf of 'the Malays' (Milner 2005). The first 'Malay'-authored history of the 'Malay World' was published in 1929 (Abdul Hadi).

These writings themselves – even their mere repetition of the phrases 'Malay literature', 'Malay history', 'Malay culture' and so forth – have strengthened the case for speaking of 'the Malays'. The closer one looks, it is my impression that this corpus is not merely to be understood in scholarly terms. It is not limited to description and analysis, but plays what might be perceived as an ideological role. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, it is as much about constituting as studying 'the Malays'. This observation – which I will develop in later chapters – does not, it should be said, make 'Malay studies' any less interesting.

The Fact of Diversity

Despite the impression communicated by much of the work in 'Malay studies', coherence is not in fact a hallmark of 'Malay' communities and historical heritage, even when one focuses only on the narrower Benjamin formulation of a 'Malay' sphere. There are problems with taking for granted

the phrase 'the Malays' – even in this more limited sense – and then projecting a 'Malay' race or ethnicity back into the past, allowing the narration of a long communal history. Some have suggested the existence of a 'Malay homeland'. Borneo and south Sumatra have both been identified (Collins 2001: 385; Andaya 2001: 318). But people who call themselves 'Malay' often deny any sense of being a biological grouping, and there is plenty of evidence that their communities tend to be open to new recruits from widely varying backgrounds. The category 'Malay' brings together many peoples, many histories. The "majority of Malays", so Geoffrey Benjamin has observed, "see themselves or their ancestors as having once been something else (2002: 50). It is clear that previously non-Muslim peoples in Borneo (today often referred to collectively as 'Dayak') and Bataks in Sumatra have 'become Malay', as have Orang Asli (Aborigines) on the Peninsula – but so have Muslim Bugis (from Sulawesi in eastern Indonesia), Arabs, Indians and Chinese. What began to be called 'Malayization' is a theme we will examine in this book – a theme that helps us to get a better understanding of what 'being Malay' might entail.

Given these varied origins, it is not surprising that the character of 'Malay' communities can differ substantially from one place to another – even among the 'Malays proper'. The 'Malays' of Sarawak or Kelantan, for instance, are likely themselves to point to the way they differ from those of Johor (at the south of the Peninsula). Some reports note that the 'Malays' of the western Peninsula see those in the east as more 'traditional'. Accents can vary dramatically – many 'Malays' find it difficult to understand the people of Patani (South Thailand); and there is a distinct form of Malay in East Sumatra. Although the phrase 'Malay custom' (*adat*) is often mentioned, even between villages located in one region, there are different customs, and the people comment on these differences. The special sense of a Kelantan *adat* is often referred to in Kelantan – and indeed one finds an insider/outsider distinction in attitudes to customs in many other regions of the 'Malay World'. To quote Mohamed Aris Othman (1977: 230), "the region one comes from with its customs and cultural paraphernalia can serve as a basis of identity" – with the possibility of great diversity.

Although the word 'Malay' is used across a wide geographical region, it is clear then that we cannot assume it conveys the same meaning. An important further example of this – one to which we will give attention – is the contrast between the idea of 'Malay' in Indonesia (for instance, in the northeast Sumatran or Riau regions) and on the Peninsula. The topic is difficult, but in Indonesia 'Malay' is categorized in a way that makes it a less significant form of community than it is in Malaysia. 'Malays' form a *suku* or *suku bangsa* (terms for ethnicity) in Indonesia, but the more potent term *bangsa*

(usually 'race' or 'people') is used in Malaysia. In Indonesia the whole 'Indonesian people' are referred to as a *bangsa* (the 'Bangsa Indonesia') (Kipp 1996: 65). What is more, to demonstrate loyalty to the *suku* has been seen as divisive in Indonesia. It is an expression of *sukuisme* or tribalism – something perceived as disloyalty, though perhaps less so in the period since the fall of President Suharto in 1998. In other ways too, 'Malay' tends to convey different things in Indonesia. For instance, in northeast Sumatra – a region characterized in the past by a cluster of small sultanates, a situation not unlike that on the Peninsula – 'Malay' developed as an identity and a consciousness far less strongly in the colonial period than it did on the Peninsula; it was also far less inclusive, and has remained so in the decades since the region was incorporated in the modern Indonesian state.

This division and groupism makes it difficult to speak of a 'Malay history'. When we recall Srivijaya, Melaka and other kingdoms – all claimed today as part of the heritage of 'the Malays' – several further questions need to be asked. First, although such kingdoms of the past experienced triumphs, can these automatically be formulated as achievements on behalf of a race or an ethnicity? Monarchy and race (or ethnicity, or nation) are different phenomena; it might be asked how far the people of these early kingdoms possessed a racial or ethnic consciousness? Did the ancestors of people who think of themselves now as 'Malays' also define themselves in that way, or even in what we might call ethnic terms? Many (as we have noted) were of Bugis, Javanese, Indian, Arab and other (including Dayak, Batak and Orang Asli) backgrounds; but we might also ask the question of natives of Melaka or Johor, places claimed today to be central to the 'Malay' narrative. We need to assess which peoples' pasts can be said to constitute 'Malay history'. How possible is it to project the idea of a 'Malay people' back into the past?

Could 'Malay' be a Relatively Novel Concept?

Some historical analyses certainly assume the presence of such an ethnic consciousness in these historical situations. A recent and stimulating overview essay by Leonard Andaya, for instance, observes that a "Melayu ethnicity was being developed along the Straits of Melaka beginning perhaps as early as the seventh century" (2001: 316). The concept became so powerful that by the fifteenth century the Melaka sultanate promoted itself "as the new centre of the Melayu" (327). In the seventeenth century, according to Andaya, the sultanates of Johor and Aceh both claimed "Melayu leadership" (328; Andaya 2001a: 86, 102). In this formulation it is therefore being suggested that 'Melayu' was something worth fighting for; but I am not

sure to what extent it was in fact a powerful concept at the time. Can we be sure that people were driven by allegiance to 'Malay' ethnicity rather than, for instance, loyalty to a particular ruler, or some other local attachment? There is strong evidence that the declaration 'Hidup Melayu' (Long Live the Malays) became a powerful rallying cry on the Malay Peninsula during the late 1940s (Ariffin 1993: 103), but can we read such sentiments back into time?

Similarly, Ismail Hussein, in one of the seminal essays in the field of 'Malay studies', has referred to the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries as "the golden age of Malay consciousness" (1990: 72). This period, with its illustrious courts, renowned entrepots, literary and religious writings, musical performances, lavish textiles and so forth, does have claims to being a golden age. But was it a golden age of 'Malayness'? Ismail himself recognizes that he is making a retrospective claim. He has warned us that in the pre-colonial period, "the term 'Malay' was seldom used", and "Malay awareness" is a feeling that "perhaps never existed" at that time (58). The term 'Malay' was undoubtedly employed in a broad way by European observers after the sixteenth century and some historians have concluded that this reflects the way people identified themselves in those centuries (Reid 2001; Sutherland 2001). It is striking, however, that even in the late eighteenth century, William Marsden – who spent many years at a British post on the west coast of Sumatra and later became the English authority on that island – noted that in all the letters from "Malay" states that he received in his official capacity, the writers "very rarely" referred to themselves as "Malay" (1930: ix).

In so-called 'classical Malay literature', it might be asked just when we do, and when we do not, encounter a specifically 'Malay' consciousness. It will be seen to be significant that even the now emblematic 'Malay' text, the *Malay Annals*, was actually given that name by a British translator; the name the author (or copyist) gave it was the *Genealogy of the Rajas* or *The Rules of All the Rajas* (Hooker and Hooker 2001: 35–36; Reid 2001: 303). The question that might next be posed is to what extent 'Malayness' is a central theme in this or other works from the royal courts of the golden age. The issue is all the more difficult because these classical works tend to exist today only in manuscripts copied over the last two centuries (Proudfoot 2003: 2–3). The fact that copyists are known to have edited or 'updated' texts means we cannot take for granted that these texts provide direct evidence of what concepts were dominant in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. With this caution, however, it is still striking that 'Malay' is used to denote a much narrower range of peoples in these Malay-language writings than in contemporary European accounts of the period.

In these comments I am making an historian's observation – calling for caution rather than making assumptions about the past, particularly in projecting back to earlier centuries a modern concept of 'Malay' ethnicity. But if it is true that 'Malay' consciousness is a relatively modern phenomenon, what we have is a topic of enormous interest: just how and why did 'Malays' come to think of themselves as 'Malay'?

In considering how far one can speak of a specifically 'Malay' history, a further issue arises: whether people identifying as 'Malay' today can claim even the historical unity of having once participated in a common state or community, whether called 'Malay' or not. It is true that several polities or empires in the Archipelago achieved an international renown – were admired, for instance, in Chinese or Arab accounts, or in later European reports. Srivijaya and Melaka are two examples – each said by foreign observers to hold sway over communities on both sides of the Straits of Malacca, Srivijaya for some five centuries. But we cannot be sure that either of these – or any other empire – ever dominated what would later be called the 'Malay World' (even by the narrower definition which Benjamin uses). Scholars suggest Srivijaya faced strong challenges in the eleventh century, and may never have been a "genuine empire" but was more a 'Hanseatic-like' league of polities (Kulke 1993; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 1990). In the fifteenth century there were Patani (today in southern Thailand), Pasai and Aru (in north Sumatra), Brunei (in north Borneo) and numerous other polities – all today likely to be claimed as 'Malay' – operating outside the Melaka sphere. The sultanates of Johor and Perak on the Peninsula assert genealogical links to rulers of Melaka, as would the now defunct sultanate of Lingga (some 150 kilometres south of Singapore). But other sultanates – Kedah, Aru, Deli, Patani – have claimed quite different heritages.

When we seek to focus, therefore, on the history or the society of even just 'mainstream Malays' (or the 'Malays proper'), we find much more diversity or heterogeneity than the Singapore culture pack, or even some of the academic analysis, implies. It seems a formidable challenge to isolate an analytical mainstream. There are many groupings and multiple histories. It could be said that there are 'other Malays' everywhere. Floods of people from southern Thailand, Java, Sumatra and elsewhere in the Archipelago have come to the 'core' Peninsular sultanates over the last century – in certain cases (especially on the west coast) seeming to make up today a majority of the 'local' population. In addition there are the regions where 'Malay' communities are largely made up of pagan converts; and others (for example, in Kalimantan) where the leadership at least seems largely Arab in background.

How People have been Transformed

Putting aside, if we can, the problem of how to define a 'Malay people' who might be the subject of historical narrative, there is the common historian's problem of establishing historical unities in the face of immense social change. It is not just a matter of how people classified themselves in the past, or where their loyalties lay. The social transformation is such that we cannot simply take for granted any continuity of consciousness over the centuries – some core 'Malay' (or even 'para-Malay') substratum. Especially in Malaysia, but in other regions as well, there has in recent decades been a great migration to cities – with an influx into higher educational institutions, an expanding range of urban employment, and a sharp encounter with both Islamic and Western liberal ideas. In this new social context, old values, attachments and manners of thought are challenged in ways that demand the reconstruction of both the individual and the community. Individualizing economic changes and new concepts of freedom are examples of such forces for change – and their impact has been felt well beyond the 'Malay World'. In earlier centuries the Archipelago peoples engaged with Hindu and Buddhist civilization, and (from about the thirteenth century) with that of Islam. We cannot merely assume that an underlying cultural resilience allowed the local to triumph over the novel and the foreign in such encounters.

Allowing for the possibility of radical disjunction in fact offers an analytic advantage – for instance, in encouraging speculation about the difference in 'lifeworld' between 'modernity' and the pre-colonial sultanates. The mental framework of people living in eighteenth- and seventeenth-century sultanates (and of course communities of earlier periods) is difficult to imagine now, even for modern 'Malays'. The literature that people in those periods appreciated, the all-night narrations, the sophistication and symbolism of the textiles, the details of etiquette, the particular logic of what we would today call their political systems – these are matters hard to comprehend in societies where experience is now shaped in one way or another by the encounter with egalitarianism, secularism, the concept of economics, psychological individualism, the novel, Impressionist art . . . and so forth. The French historian Lucien Febvre (1982) once suggested that it would have been impossible in the sixteenth century to conceptualize the secular; we can equally ask about the problem today of being able to comprehend, for instance, the particular forms of religiosity that operated in certain societies (including in Southeast Asia) in earlier eras.

When we look at transformations in detail, some have been intended, some not. Seeking a specific economic or political advantage, for instance, can entail top-down ideological leadership – a frequently encountered theme in 'Malay' societies – that radically and unintentionally transforms the social order. Some strategies employed by Archipelago sultanates and later by colonial regimes turned out to be cases of this, virtually creating or legitimizing new and rival elites. A modern example is the unpredicted rise in 1970s Malaysia of a powerful and radical Islamic movement that followed the implementation of programmes designed to address 'Malay' economic disadvantage. But there are also clear instances of deliberate, top-down implementation of social change – some dating back to the kingdom of Melaka and earlier. Chronicles make clear, for instance, that when the ruler of Melaka converted to Islam, he then "commanded" all the people of Melaka, "whether of high or low degree", to become Muslims (Winstedt 1938: 84). A recent example of such elite religious and ideological engineering adds to the problems entailed in conceptualizing 'the Malays'. In the 1980s the Malaysian government instituted a policy aimed at "mental revolution and a cultural transformation" in the 'Malay' community, stripping away many "feudal" values involving deference and a tendency to fatalism, and promoting the concept of a confident, frank, highly motivated, entrepreneurial "New Malay" (Khoo 1996; Shamsul 1999). Can the product of so radical a programme, one might enquire, still be referred to as 'Malay'? This invokes again the ever-present puzzle of what is entailed in being 'Malay' and, furthermore, in the idea of ethnicity. Similar concerns arise when we consider the efforts of the religious reformers over the last three decades to remove from 'Malay' society a wide range of customary (*adat*) practices and beliefs – often understood to be quintessentially 'Malay'. The reformers consider such practices to be contrary to the teachings of Islam, but their defenders might argue that the condition of being 'Malay' requires some continuing cultural essence. Certain reformers reply again that this itself is no great concern: what matters is that 'we' are members of the community of the Islamic faithful, not our identity as 'Malays'.

Losing continuity with the past – ceasing to see old ways, rituals and entertainments as relevant – can have a profound impact on identity. In the Riau region of western Indonesia – where, as in other regions, there has been a decline of narrative performances that express "traditional *adat* values" – one 'Malay' leader has declared that the very survival of the "alam Melayu" (Malay World) depends on the survival of "Malay moral, social and cultural values" (Turner 1997; 657–658). In Malaysia the fear has been expressed that there may soon arise a generation that is not only poorly acquainted

with traditional literature, "but will continue to reject these works as prod-ucts of a benighted past that has become useless for them" (Muhammad Haji Salleh and Harun Mat Piah, quoted in Maier 1988: 155). The anxiety that underlies this statement is made explicit time and again in Malay writing; it is that 'the Malays' might 'disappear from this world'.

At least over the last couple of centuries, this fear, ironically perhaps, has been one of the great themes in 'Malay' society.

Focusing on 'Malayness', not 'the Malays'

The point should by now be clear: when we try to talk of 'the Malays' as a people, we seek to get a grip on subject matter of bewildering diversity and contradiction. Just who is 'Malay' and what it is to be 'Malay' remain open questions, and an attempt to establish a narrative over time for the 'Malay people' would confront profound disjunctures. Which of the many constituent 'Malays' should be given prominence, how do we disentangle one narrative from another, how can we convey lines of continuity where there appears only rupture? But if such concerns frustrate the task of giving an account of 'the Malays', it is this diversity and contention that makes 'Malay studies' so interesting, and ought properly to be our central concern.

To examine this multiplicity and its implications, it is more effective – so I argue in this book – to focus on 'Malayness' rather than on 'the Malays'. It makes best sense to examine the development of an idea (or more accu-rately several ideas, and the contest around them) than to speak of the evolution of a people. To investigate these ideas, of course, I start with the earliest people who have been claimed as 'Malay', and communicated in a language we call 'Old Malay'. Even where the term 'Malay' was actually used in stone inscriptions, or texts on paper that are assumed to have been composed at an early date, we cannot take its meaning for granted. Can it be seen, for instance, to carry notions about a social formation that are enunciated in manuscripts dated with certainty from the eighteenth or nineteenth century? It is a difficult business to speculate about the types of identification, allegiance or solidarity that operated in what some today would call the period of 'early Malay history', and then in the 'golden age' before colonial domination.

In making the development of the idea of 'Malay' our central concern, it is vital to examine the period of European colonial involvement in 'the Malay World'. Formulations imported and imposed from Europe – particularly related to the classification of humankind by 'race' – were

critical, but we also see 'Malay' ideologues, often with much skill, engaged in the fashioning of a new form of community. In different parts of the Archipelago the historical experience has varied widely, and the 'ideological work' has been pursued in divergent ways – and this helps to explain why today there are great contrasts between 'Malay' communities. It is not just a matter of their varying social and economic situations, and their differing degrees of political influence, but the whole concept of what it means to be 'Malay' can vary from one region to another. What is more, it seems to me that wherever we look, it has proved impossible to find a notion of being 'Malay' that has achieved stability – that has become secure. It is an idea in motion – something which can present danger as well as opportunities. Malayness is often a matter of anxiety: it is always open to contest – and the most pressing contest today is the Islamist insistence on the dominance of 'Islamic' over 'Malay' identity and community.

Focusing on 'Malayness' (at least as much as on 'the Malays') provides a perspective on the nation state as well as religion. 'Malayness' is shaped in one way or another by experience in different territorial states – Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand and numerous others – just as it has been by contrasting experiences of colonial rule. As I have suggested, however, it is also to some extent an active agent. In practical ways a transnational 'Malay' consciousness continues to foster ambiguities and sometimes tension in border areas. The fate of southern Thailand – in the opening years of the twenty-first century perceived to be one of the most serious terrorist fronts in Southeast Asia – is at least partly bound up with such a consciousness. There is also the possibility – depending on the long-term resilience of the Archipelago nation states – that 'Malay' aspirations will make a contribution to some future reconfiguring of Southeast Asia.

As we move from one situation in the 'Malay World' to another, identifying contrasts in the development of 'Malayness', we inevitably raise one further issue. What is it that we are talking about here? Where does this project fit in the categories social scientists use today to classify human association? In this sense a book about 'the Malays', or 'Malayness', necessarily confronts questions about what we mean by 'ethnicity', 'race', 'culture' and 'civilization' – and when it is appropriate to use such concepts, and when not. Considering what it can mean to be 'Malay', I suggest, offers the opportunity of hearing a 'Malay' view on the profound issue of how best to classify humankind.

In the next chapter we examine early references to 'Malay', and also historical developments among peoples who were eventually to assume a 'Malay' consciousness – or at least were to be swept in modern times into a grand 'Malay' narrative.

2

Early Histories: Engaging India and Islam

'Malay', 'Melayu'

When do we begin to hear about 'the Malays', or at least first read the word 'Melayu'? Scholars have identified a 'Mo-lo-yu' or 'Malayu' in Chinese records, which appears to refer to the Jambi region in East Sumatra (Coedes 1968: 79–80). According to these records, the ruler of a polity with this name sent a mission to the royal court of the Middle Kingdom in the year 644 AD. Later in that century there are reports of a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim visiting 'Malayu', and he reported that 'Malayu' had now "become one of Srivijaya's many polities" (Wolters 1986: 18). Srivijaya, which Arabic accounts called 'the empire of the Maharaja', and which left behind seventh-century stone inscriptions in the Old Malay language, was ruled from Palembang (south Sumatra) for many centuries, and then moved to the Jambi area. Srivijaya was reported to be an empire on a grand scale, and a great port for trade between East and West, possessing (according to a tenth-century account) "an enormous population and innumerable armies" (Coedes 1968: 131). Malayu also achieved wide renown, up to the fourteenth century, when the inscriptions of the ruler Adtityawarman suggest the presence of a most powerful leader.

The word 'Melayu' survives today as the name of a river in the Jambi region – and it is in this area that some thirty *candis* (temples), broken statuary and large amounts of ceramics have been uncovered (dating especially from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries). It has been described as the "most extensive . . . and probably the most important archaeological site in Sumatra" (McKinnon 1985: 26–27; Miksic 2004: 248). At Palembang, generally accepted as having been the capital of Srivijaya from the seventh century until at least the eleventh century (Manguin 1993), there

is also a Melayu river (Schnitger 1989: 6). In different ways, Palembang and Malayu (which appears to have moved further into the interior of Sumatra in the 1300s) have been portrayed as important in the 'Malay' story. The chronicle of Melaka, the fifteenth-century sultanate that in modern times has often been assessed as the most glorious achievement of the 'Malay' people, presents the rulers of Melaka as descendants of a prince from Palembang – who is described as appearing miraculously on the hill Bukit Seguntang and claiming to be descended from Alexander the Great. The chronicle – which was later given the name *Malay Annals* – only gives sparse attention to Jambi. Yet the importance of Malayu – or 'Malayupura', as it is called in some contemporary writings – in the period from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries is testified to in inscriptions as well as archaeological evidence (Drakard 1999: 21–22, 241–245; de Casparis 1985). The neglect of this polity in the chronicle, it has been argued, may have been a strategic move by the author, who was concerned to press the claims to regional leadership of the Melaka court (Wolters 1970: 91, 125, 170).

Did early 'Malay people' – that is, people who would eventually be called 'orang Melayu', 'anak Melayu' or 'hamba Melayu' – derive their name from their association with the Melayu river (either in Palembang or Jambi, or both)? It was common for people to be known by the name of the river on which they lived; and it would not be surprising – in terms of what we know about the naming of places elsewhere in the Archipelago – if a group of settlers, known by the name of their previous river, gave this name to a second river. In the nineteenth century, for instance, it is said that Kuantan (on the east coast of the Peninsula) got its name from settlers arriving from the area of the Kuantan river in Sumatra (Kato 1997: 745). 'Malay people' in the Palembang area may well have brought that name to Jambi, or vice versa.

What is certain is the widespread practice of identifying people with local place names, usually rivers. In some cases the significance was very local in reach, as in the case of the people of Sarapat near Banjarmasin, the 'orang Sarapat' (Ras 1968: 382); in others the river and its people were associated with a polity that became known across the region (the people of Johor, the 'orang Johor' or those of Brunei, the 'orang Brunei'). In the fourteenth century, a kingdom based on the large Pahang river, which flows from the centre of the Malay Peninsula down to the South China Sea, seems to have achieved such a reputation that a Javanese text referred to the Peninsula in general as 'Pahang' (Robson 1995: 33–34). The prominence of Pahang at that time was remembered well into the sixteenth century, long after the sultanate of Melaka and then the Portuguese had become dominant on the Peninsula (Wheatley 1966: 303). Something similar may have happened in
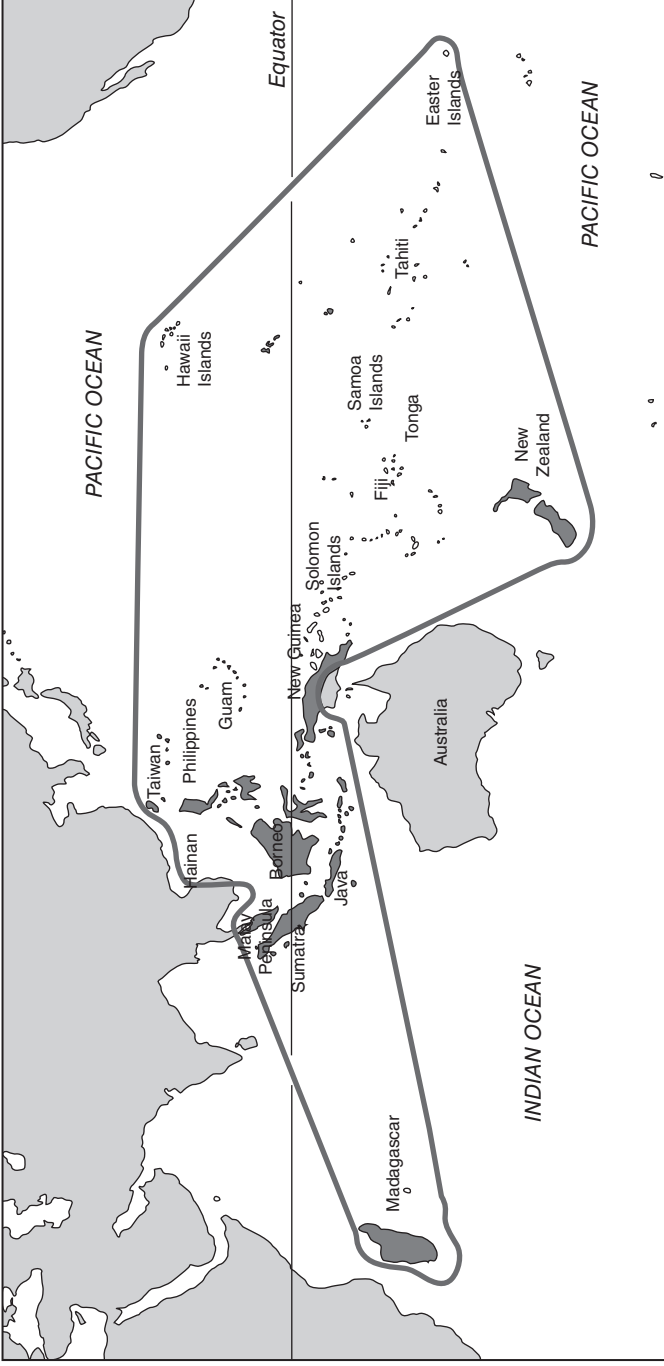
Map 1 The global distribution of the Austronesian languages.
Source: Based on James T. Collins, *Malay, World Language: A Short History* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1998), Map 1.

the case of 'Malay'. Late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century inscriptions use the term "Malayupura", presumably indicating a region (Coedes 1968: 201; de Casparis 1985: 246), and then the fourteenth-century Javanese text mentioned above seems to use the word 'Malayu' in reference to Sumatra as a whole (Robson 1995: 33).

In some of the first Portuguese accounts of the region (dating from the early sixteenth century), we encounter a reflection of this earlier situation in Sumatra. By the time the Portuguese had arrived in the region, a substantial shift of influence had taken place from Sumatra to the Peninsula: Melaka, claiming genealogical links to Palembang/Srivijaya, had become established as a major empire and entrepot, and its rulers were said to have brought with them to the Peninsula some of their former 'Malay' subjects from Sumatra. Yet continuing memories of the prominence of 'Malayu' at least until the late fourteenth century would also have been significant – and this helps to explain why a century later Portuguese sources used 'Malay' with reference to territory and people in a quite wide area of East Sumatra (Cortesao 1990: 148–154).

Another consideration that has led to the incorporation of the early Sumatran-based kingdoms in modern narratives of the 'Malay people' (Ariffin 1993: 21, 40) is the fact that some inscriptions from that area are written in what has been called 'Old Malay'. We noted in the last chapter that speaking the Malay language does not necessarily imply that a person or group possesses a 'Malay' consciousness or identity – but it is true that the connection is often made, especially in modern times. It is therefore understandable that the relationship between 'Old Malay' and the language used in texts from Melaka and from many other parts of the Archipelago – a language known as 'Malay' or 'Jawi' – has been carefully noted by those tracing the development of 'the Malays'. Old Malay, it has been pointed out as well, is one of the Malayo-Polynesian family group of languages that is now commonly called 'Austronesian', and which spread from southern China and Taiwan through island Southeast Asia and much of the Pacific, and westward to Madagascar (Collins 1998: 7). To quote a recent analysis, by the year 1500 AD, speakers of Austronesian languages "formed the most widespread ethnolinguistic population in world history" (Glover and Bellwood 2004a: 11).

The Austronesians and India

These Austronesian speakers are said to have colonized the region, but they did not completely replace those there before them, such as the speakers of

Austroasiatic languages (associated with Mon, Khmer and Vietnamese). Certain of the polities that are well established in the archaeological and written sources (for example, Kedah on the Peninsula) – which are sometimes claimed today to be jewels in the 'Malay' heritage – may have been Austroasiatic- (in particular Mon-speaking) rather than Austronesian-speaking (Bulbeck 2004: 324; Benjamin 1987), and there are certainly still speakers of Austroasiatic languages on the Peninsula today. Also, analysis of genetic data demonstrates the mixture of populations (Bellwood 2004: 22, 26), suggesting that people from pre-Austronesian times became Austronesian (including Malay) speakers.

The expansion of the Austronesian speakers – not surprisingly, perhaps – is captured in heroic terms in the Singapore culture pack which I discussed in the previous chapter. It expresses the view that Borneo was the 'Malay' homeland, and from there the 'Malays' "spread in all directions by sea as far as Madagascar, Taiwan and the Pacific isles". Academic research tends to favour Taiwan as the point of Austronesian language dispersal, and then western Borneo as the region in which the 'Malayic subgroup' of languages developed (Bellwood 2006: 58). But whatever the point of origin may have been – and we must continue to remember that languages spread not only by migration but also by political and social expediency (Bayard 1979; Sellato 2006: 106–107; Wolters 1999: 157) – there is no certainty about just how widely Malay or Old Malay were spoken, or what those languages were called at the time. We also do not know whether some form of 'Malay' consciousness operated in the seventh century, or the thirteenth century. I have already noted how supposedly early Malay-language texts have generally only survived in quite recent manuscript form. It is really only in the sixteenth century that we have solid contemporary evidence that 'Malay' had come to imply something more than a place name or a specific group of people. In the early 1500s a Malay word list was collected by the Magellan expedition: the phrase "cara Melayu" ('Malay ways') was included, and it was defined as the "ways of Melaka" (Reid 2001: 30). There is the suggestion here of a 'Malay' civilizational style (and perhaps a 'Malay' consciousness) that – as I will discuss – is consistent with what we find in the pre-modern Malay-language writings that focus on Melaka. The evidence of earlier centuries, however, does not allow us to speak of 'Malay' with such confidence.

What do we know about the people who could communicate in Old Malay or other Austronesian languages? Linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests that Austronesian-speaking people had long possessed skills in pottery and weaving, as well as seafaring and the building of wooden canoes and houses; they grew rice and millet, kept pigs, used the bow and

arrow and chewed betel. They characteristically possessed a bilateral (rather than unilinear) kinship system, with corresponding prominence in the role of women and a relative lack of concern about descent (as distinct from group origins) (Bellwood 1985: 97, 204, 232; 2004: 29; Macknight 1986: 218–219; Fox 2006). These societies had much to offer in trade, including resins and aromatic woods from the forests, and marine products such as tortoise shells and sea slugs. A second-century Tamil epic is said to refer to the Archipelago when invoking the image of "aloes, silks, sandal, spices and camphor" (Wheatley 1966: 182). The extent to which the Austronesian speakers were active in trade (and not merely visited by foreign traders) is suggested by the large number of local terms relating to shipping that continued to be used – for example, the word for 'shippers' is in one of the earliest Old Malay inscriptions from Sumatra – and by the influence of the Malay language right across the Indian Ocean to Madagascar (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 16–17; Manguin 1993: 36; Wheatley 1966: 184).

Exactly what type of wooden houses Austronesian speakers lived in three thousand years ago is not known with certainty; but Chinese records of a thousand years ago mention wood and *atap* (thatch) houses, and sometimes note also that a town was fortified by a wall of bricks or a wooden stockade. In Srivijaya, as in other polities, the houses were said to be "scattered outside the town" (Groeneveldt 1960: 62) and often close to rivers. A Chinese account says they "make rafts of trees bound together, and build houses on the water" (Groeneveldt 1960: 106; Wheatley 1966: 49). This practice had advantages in times of fire: according to an Arab description, if fire was "detected each owner cuts the cables, floats away and then ties up elsewhere far from the conflagration" (Tibbetts 1979: 47). You can still see wooden and *atap* houses today in places along the dark rivers of the Peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo. And the term 'scattered' does seem to capture well the 'open and informal' arrangement of Malay houses in a *kampong* (village) – as described, for instance, in the Singapore culture pack on 'the Malays'. Clothing style (at least from records of the early historical period) also displayed characteristics familiar in later centuries, especially in the use of the 'sarong'. In a seventh-century Chinese account of Langkasuka (Patani), it is said that "men and women go with the upper part of the body naked, with their hair hanging disheveled down their backs, and wearing a cotton kan-man" (which seems to indicate 'sarong') (Wheatley 1966: 253). Arab writers referred to people wearing "a single piece of cloth" (217).

From the early centuries AD local inscriptions, some Arabic and Indian references and Chinese reports – as well as items of statuary, temple remains, potsherds, beads and other items of trade – tell of the way the Austronesian

speakers in many parts of the Archipelago engaged both culturally and commercially with India. Polities which were Indianized in character emerged on the Peninsula: for instance, Langkasuka (from the second century AD) (Wheatley 1966: 263); Chitu to the south (described in a seventh-century Chinese account) (26); and Kedah (where fifth-century Sanskrit inscriptions have been found) (273–274) in the west. There were also Kutei in east Kalimantan (with an early fifth-century Sanskrit inscription) and Gantuoli in southeast Sumatra; and possibly a century later Barus in north Sumatra and Brunei (Manguin 2004). In these polities – often appearing to be city-states – the rulers tended to possess Indian titles, issued inscriptions (using Indian script and employing key Indian concepts), attracted both Brahman 'priests' and Buddhist adepts to their courts, built Buddhist and/or Hindu monuments, and dispatched embassies to China and India. It was reported by the seventh-century pilgrim I-Ching that Srivijaya (which became the most influential and famous of these Indianized polities) possessed a community of more than one thousand monks and was an ideal place to study (Coedes 1968: 81) – which suggests that by that time Buddhism had already become well established there.

One result of the introduction from India of writing – ironically, perhaps – is that it allows us to detect the continuing influence of pre-Indian ideas. Consider, for instance, concepts and institutions relating to government and the spirit world – in particular the way in which Malay-language terms for 'leader', 'curse' and 'shaman' have remained potent within a vocabulary heavily peppered with Sanskrit. I will return to these terms, but the observation should be made at the outset – and it is one that is relevant time and again over the centuries – that identifying the interplay and often fusion of local and foreign concepts does not mean insisting on the continuing dominance of 'the local'. In the case of Indian influences, we cannot assume that Indian beliefs, language and rituals had a role that was restricted to articulating a lifeworld that was already in place. As Sheldon Pollock has said of Sanskrit in South as well as Southeast Asia, it was "one element" in "a continuous process of becoming"; it participated "in the very creation of these cultures" (1998: 33). Indian influences certainly became integral to the concept of 'being Malay'. With reference to the 'Malay' wedding, the *bersanding* – in which the bride and groom sit together royally on a dais – is portrayed in the Singapore culture pack and many other places as quintessentially 'Malay custom' (*adat*); but in recent decades Islamic reformers have been critical of its non-Islamic, Indic origins, and it is sometimes dismissed as 'adat Hindu' (Hindu custom) (Karim 1992: 209, 212; Peletz 1997: 247–255; Nagata 1974: 344). One of the Indic elements likely to be present is the 'Mount Meru' motif on the dais where the couple is

seated – Mount Meru being the axis of the universe in classical Indian thought (Bosch 1960: 95–98).

Similarly, in considering what would later be called the 'Malay Muslim monarchy' (a phrase used particularly in Brunei today), again the Indian ingredients are substantial. Malay polities tended to have four major chiefs, eight secondary chiefs and sixteen minor ones – following Indian cosmological principles. Titles such as Laksamana, Sri Nara-diraja and Bendahara are also imported, and the enthronement of a sultan could involve a lustration ceremony (in Perak water is poured down a banana leaf over the ruler's shoulder), just as coronations have done in Indianized Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. The Perak sultan wears a golden necklet and golden armlets (like a Hindu god), and he carries a weapon associated with a renowned Hindu-Buddhist Sumatran ruler. He sits on his throne (the Sanskrit *singgasana*) immobile – again in a god-like manner (Winstedt 1947; Gullick 1988: 10). In the ceremony leading up to the circumcision of a prince of Muslim Patani a hundred years ago, the young man was described as travelling in a "huge processional car, shaped like Vishnu's garuda" (Skeat and Laidlaw 1953: 63). Finally, to oppose a Patani or Perak ruler was to commit *derhaka* (treason) – a Sanskrit-derived word that has been highly potent in 'Malay' polities from the seventh to the twenty-first centuries (de Casparis 1956: 17).

Srivijaya

Srivijaya, which has become so prominent in modern 'Malay' historical consciousness (Abdul 2001), emerged as an empire in the late seventh century. Inscriptions in Old Malay and Chinese reports show it sending embassies to the court of China and exercising influence over many (but not all) of the other polities in the region. It appears to have held sway over portions of the Peninsula and Sumatra until the eleventh century, and by some accounts the thirteenth century (So 1998). In the view of one modern authority, it was "the first known large-scale state, clearly of world economic stature, to have prospered in Insular Southeast Asia" (Manguin 2004: 305). A great commercial centre, it was described (in an early twelfth-century Chinese report) as "the most important port of call on the sea routes of the foreigners from the countries of Java in the east and the countries of the Arabs and (the Indian coast) in the west; they all pass through it on their way to China" (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 26). An Arab source called the ruler, the Maharaja, "one of the richest kings of India" (Tibbetts 1979: 58). It was said that "no king was more charitable than he" (51), and he

maintained a port famous for "honesty", "courtesy" and the "flexibility" of its commerce. It was "for these things" (as an Arab account explained the matter) that Srivijaya was "so frequented by foreigners" (52). It was certainly a cosmopolitan place: there were "innumerable streets" of merchants and money changers (46) and the parrots there spoke Arabic, Persian, Greek and "Hindu" (Wolters 1970: 39, 207).

The Maharaja was vital in the commerce of the empire. His armed forces were formidable – "foremost", according to the Chinese, in both land and sea warfare (So 1998: 300). Merchants did not only come to the Srivijaya port because of the favourable commercial atmosphere and the charitable reputation of the ruler. "Traders from all countries" (noted a Chinese account of 1100) "must pass through this area to reach China", and if foreign ships did not come to Srivijaya, an "expedition" was sent out "to destroy them" (300). The ruler, when he thought it necessary, would impose a monopoly. In the case of sandalwood – much sought after in China – the Maharaja "ordered merchants to sell it to him". The subjects of his country would "not dare to sell it privately" – and this royal strategy was viewed in an early twelfth-century Chinese account as "an effective way of governance" (299). There are also many references to "Srivijaya ships" (including "large vessels") being sent with trade goods to China (303).

Archaeological research has added to this picture of a thriving entrepot, with much imported ceramic ware and other evidence of settlement extending many kilometres along Palembang's Musi river. There were evident connections with centres upstream into the interior, from where Srivijaya must have drawn jungle produce and minerals for trade. The finds also show an engagement in long-distance trading (Manguin 2004: 306–309; 1993). In the vicinity of the Palembang hill, Bukit Seguntang, there have been discoveries of inscriptions, statuary, bricks from stupa-like monuments, a large amount of Chinese Tang (eighth to ninth century) ceramics and boat timbers dating from the fifth to seventh centuries – indicating local building techniques such as "lashed-lug construction using no nails or other metal" (Manguin 1993: 26–27; Miksic 2004: 239). There is little monumental evidence of the greatness of Srivijaya – which is a dramatic contrast, for instance, to Angkor in Cambodia. Temples or temple bases sometimes used brick or stone (and tend to have been located on high ground), but in general wood was used in building – which explains the lack of architectural remains not only from such early polities as Srivijaya, but also from later kingdoms such as Melaka and Johor.

The hill, Bukit Seguntang, given sacred significance in the chronicle of the Melaka dynasty, is called 'mahameru' – the Mount Meru of Indian mythology. The Palembang ruler was one of three princes – descendants of

Alexander the Great – who are said to have appeared there magically, the crest of the mountain seeming to have turned into gold. In Muslim tradition Alexander was portrayed as having had the duty to conquer the world and spread "the original monotheism" – that is, the faith of Ibrahim (or Abraham) which preceded God's revelations to the Prophet Muhammad (Braginsky 2004: 176). The three princes were accepted by the local people, and became rulers in different parts of the Archipelago. One was acknowledged as the founder of the Palembang-Melaka dynasty, a second went to Minangkabau in central Sumatra, and a third to Borneo (Winstedt 1938: 55–57). The genealogical link with Alexander the Great (or Iskandar Zulkarnain) became a claim of great potency in the kingly politics of the Archipelago (Wolters 1970; Andaya 1975; Drakard 1999).

Foreign accounts of the region – not surprisingly, considering the imperatives of trade – say a good deal about the material interests of the people, and also the products they were able to provide. Among products imported by the Archipelago communities, textiles seem to have remained a persistent interest. Cotton and silks are stressed; umbrellas are singled out; and there is often mention of porcelain vessels, glass beads and gold and silver items. In the region itself, textile making had probably been carried out by Austronesian speakers for many centuries, and in such places as Brunei, Santubong (Sarawak) and perhaps Johor we know pottery had long been produced (in Brunei in the seventh century) (Bellwood and M. Omar 1980). But what the foreign accounts give most attention to (to quote a tenth-century Arab account) are "all sorts of spices and aromatics" (Tibbetts 1979: 38). Apart from the sandalwood, aloes wood and camphor already mentioned, there was benjamin (incense), cloves, mace, nutmeg, cardamom and cubeb. The Chinese valued as well rhinoceros horn, ebony, ivory, tortoise shell, beeswax, peacocks and parrots (Groenveldt 1960; Wheatley 1966; Hirth and Rockhill 1967; Tibbetts 1979; Wang 1958: 113). In such places as Kutei in Borneo and the Kelantan region on the Peninsula, gold was also to be found (Bulbeck 2004: 327). Running through such lists is a reminder that what would later be called the 'Malay world' had an exotic, commercial appeal for Chinese and Arabs long before the arrival of European merchants, colonialists and romantics.

The fragmentary evidence of this period also raises questions about 'golden periods'. In the last chapter I quoted Ismail Hussein's description of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries as a 'golden age' – and there was a vigorous commerce in ideas as well as goods at that time (Reid 1993). But the lists of trading items in Chinese and Arab reports, and the parrots who spoke a multiplicity of languages, draw our attention to these earlier centuries, when Srivijaya was prominent. The report of the salvaging of a

tenth-century ship in Indonesian waters is one of many new contributions that add to the picture: the ship is said to have carried 422,000 artefacts, including ceramics from China, Lebanese glassware and an Egyptian flask "made of a brilliant emerald green translucent glass" (McDowell 2005). Pottery is something which does tend to survive over the centuries in the tropical conditions that must have destroyed wooden palaces and other buildings – structures which might otherwise have conveyed a sense of the achievements of the early 'Malay world'. Extraordinary collections of Chinese sherds – for instance, at the Koto Cina site near Medan in East Sumatra (Milner, McKinnon and Tengku Luckman 1978: 25–26) – do indicate the presence of a sophisticated aesthetic, and can help our appreciation of the societies which valued such products.

Civilizational Perspectives

Gaining access to the thought world of the people of such poorly documented societies is not easy. To say they had a strong interest in magic and the spiritual seems trite. Yet it is true that the seventh-century, Old Malay inscriptions of the Palembang area (from the early period of Srivijaya) are heavy with references to special potions, curses and anxiety about the afterlife. Apart from their use of Indian concepts and vocabulary, the repeated use of such a key term as curse (*sumpah*) – a Malay word – suggests a desire to deploy supernatural powers that goes back well before the period of Indianization. The word which has continued to be used for 'shaman' – *pawang* – is again of clear Malay origin. There are also Chinese references to spiritual concerns in the Indianized polities. Thus, in a kingdom that was probably located in the region of present-day Kelantan (on the Peninsula), a Chinese source notes that the ruler's father had actually abdicated "so that he could preach the Word" (Wheatley 1966: 27). Although Brahmans are described as having had political functions, both they and Buddhist adepts must have been especially valued for their perceived religious expertise. There is a description of Brahmans in one Peninsular polity "doing nothing but studying the Sacred Canon" and "practicing piety by day and night" (Wheatley 1966: 17). Many Buddhist statues in bronze and stone have been found in south Sumatra (Manguin 1993: 31), and we should recall the Chinese respect for the thousand monks in Srivijaya – described as being "bent on study and good works" (Coedes 1968: 81). The doctrines these religious specialists brought to the Archipelago were evidently up to date in international terms.

Leadership itself would seem to have been conceptualized at least partly in religious terms. One way in which rulers used Indian religious expertise was to threaten or reward their subjects. Inscriptions from seventh-century south Sumatra are particularly concerned about disloyalty – the word used is the Sanskrit *drohaka*, which was to be so strong a term for 'traitor' in later Malay-language texts. In the inscriptions disloyal people are threatened repeatedly with a terrible curse (*sumpah*). But supernatural measures were also employed in rewarding loyal people – the latter often described with the Sanskrit *bhakti*, suggesting 'worship' or 'devotion'. As one inscription spells out, these subjects were to be rewarded with "an immaculate Tantra", which was probably "a secret formula leading to Final Liberation" (de Casparis 1956: 29, 15–46; Sastri 1949: 115–116). In these glimpses from a distant world there is a strong hint of the ruler being constructed as a Buddhist *bodhisattva* – the concept of a seemingly enlightened being who postpones his own spiritual liberation in order to assist the religious welfare of his subjects. Certainly there have been *bodhisattva* images discovered in the vicinity of what are believed to have been royal centres in the Archipelago (McKinnon 1985; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 1990: 74), and the type of Buddhism that was reported to have prevailed in Srivijaya (from the seventh century) is consistent with a *bodhisattva* concept of leadership. The *bodhisattva* ideal continued to be influential for many centuries. A fourteenth-century ruler of Malayu in central Sumatra was described in an inscription as a "manifest incarnation of Lokeswara" (a *bodhisattva*) (Drakard 1999: 254), and the Melaka chronicle presents the founder of its dynasty in a manner that strongly suggests he was a *bodhisattva*. His headgear is said to contain five ornaments and he appears on Bukit Seguntang, from which golden rays emanate – "a familiar attribute of bodhisattvas" (Wolters 1970: 128–135). To conceive of leadership in such religious terms would not be surprising in a context where the people possessed urgent concerns about the supernatural. A ruler who could harness the latest religious techniques would be deserving of special loyalty.

The ruler as an institution, it should be stressed here, appears to have been an axial component in the lifeworld of the community. It was the ruler, not a priest class, for instance, who dominated: one does not get the impression that the ruler (as tended to be the case in India) was conceived to have merely implemented a sacred law which a superior Brahman class interpreted (Dumont 1972: 262–263). The inscriptions of early Srivijaya speak of the ruler engaging in a military expedition, of the need to be loyal to the ruler, of the punishments and rewards that accompany loyalty or disloyalty, and of the ruler's particular anxiety about people who might "induce my

harem women to get knowledge about the interior of my house". The ruler is presented at the head of a hierarchy: when he addresses his subjects in inscriptions, he seems to list them by rank. In the words of one proclamation, he addresses "sons of kings . . . army commanders . . . confidants of the king, judges . . . cutlers . . . clerks, sculptors . . . washermen of the king and slaves of the king". He refers also to subjects of "low, middle or high descent" (de Casparis 1956: 36–37, 39).

The ideological centrality of the ruler is present in the earliest documentation of Srivijaya, and is expressed to some extent in Old Malay as well as Sanskrit vocabulary. The question must be asked whether this type of stress on rulership may have been a local contribution to the constituting of the Srivijayan and other Indianized polities in the 'Malay' heritage. The local term used for 'ruler' in the inscriptions is *datu*, which is found widely in Austronesian languages. The further term *kedatuan* has been the subject of scholarly debate, some considering it to mean 'palace', others suggest 'province', 'empire', 'kingdom' or 'royal centre' (Kulke 1993, 1993a; de Casparis 1956: 18, 43). It may be the case that there is no direct equivalent in the English language, and to some extent the word may convey all these things. We will see that a similar range of meanings surrounds the key term of later centuries, *kerajaan* – which continued to be used in the polities of the Islamic period. It seems significant that in both cases the term for the political entity has at its centre the ruler, *datu*, then *raja*. Consistent with the common Malay construction, *ke . . . an* – where *suka*, for instance, means 'happy' and *kesukaan* means 'happiness' – *kedatuan* or *kerajaan* might most accurately be defined as 'rulerness'. To be in a *kedatuan* or a *kerajaan* was to be simply in the 'condition of having a ruler'. The *kedatuan* was something established of course among people, and people lived in territory (*bhumi* in the Old Malay). But the meaning of *kedatuan* was not specifically territorial; the *kedatuan* was not territorially defined. One presumably would be likely to be 'in the *kedatuan*' when one entered the palace; one may or may not have been 'a part of' the *kedatuan* living many kilometres away.

Such a pivotal role for rulership would seem to be reflected in some of the scanty foreign reports on the early historic polities. Reading through accounts in Arabic of Srivijaya (translated in Tibbetts 1979), one constantly encounters phrases such as "the empire of the Maharaja", "the isles of the Maharaja" and "the lands of the Maharaja". The impression is unmistakeable here that, in the view of these writers, what we might today call the political architecture of the region was constructed around the institution of monarchy. The great dignity of that Maharaja was definitely remarked on: one Arabic account noted that he wore ornaments of gold and "a tiara

of gold" (Tibbetts 1979: 29); another notes that people who came before the ruler – be they native, foreigner or Muslim – had to sit with legs "crossed in the position known as bersila" (the term is still used), and must not stretch their legs out (Tibbetts 1979: 47). Chinese reports also stress that dignity, noting that when the ruler travelled he was "sheltered by a silk umbrella and guarded by men bearing golden lances" (So 1998: 301). A ninth-century Arabic text states that the Maharaja "worshipped the Buddha" (Tibbetts 1979: 29) – and a Chinese adds the observation that each ruler "before ascending the throne has cast a golden image to represent his person" (and offerings appear to have been made to these images) (So 1998: 301). The suggestion is here again of a ruler who was expected to play a *bodhisattva* role for his people.

In other polities as well we see the stress in foreign accounts on the institution of rulership. In Chitu (possibly in the Kelantan region), the seventh-century ruler was said to sit "on a three-tiered couch, facing north and dressed in rose-coloured" garments with a "necklace of varied jewels", and his four senior officials are named. When a Chinese mission visits Chitu, the ruler sends a Brahman "with thirty ocean-going junks, to welcome them" (Wheatley 1966: 28–29). An eighth-century description of Tan-Tan (a polity that may have been located near Trengganu on the Peninsula) gives the ruler's family name and personal name, and notes that he "holds audience for two periods each day, in the morning and evening". Following Indian cosmological principles he has eight high officers of state. He also "daubs his person with fragrant powder" and "wears a head turban (with exaggerated corners)" (51). Is this the type of head turban or headkerchief, one wonders, that has been worn in recent centuries? Sultans wear these today on formal occasions – made out of fine *songket* (embroidered) cloth, and styled in ways (often with "exaggerated corners") that are distinctive of a particular sultanate.

Community and Region

What is conveyed in these texts – both foreign and local – is the importance of a ruler-centred polity (or *kedatuan*) as a category of community and identity. Were there other solidarities, other types of groupings of peoples? At the local level one assumes families and villages were important, and the inscriptions categorize people by occupation ("washermen", "sculptors", "clerks" and others listed in the Srivijaya inscriptions). But when an Arabic text refers to the "people of the country of the Maharaja" (Tibbetts 1979: 32), are we to conclude that at the broadest (or highest) level these people
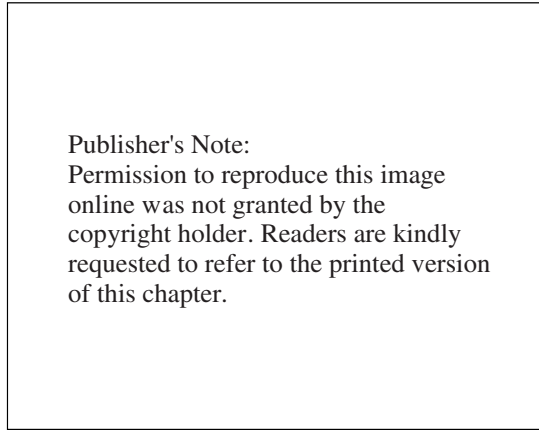
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Figure 2   Malay schooner, from Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1907). © British Library, London.

would simply have defined themselves as royal subjects? The Old Malay inscriptions do convey that this would have been the primary form of identification, and that people were classified hierarchically – as being of 'low, middle and high descent' – in that context. But these inscriptions, after all, were actually issued by the ruler. What we cannot determine, as far as I can see, is the presence or otherwise of some form of pan-regional 'ethnic' identity – but again, there is so little evidence to go on.

Nor can we speak confidently of a specifically religious identity. Pierre-Yves Manguin has made the interesting suggestion that there may have been competition between rival Buddhist and Vaishnava trading networks (2004: 305). There is also the Arab mention of 'Muslims' as a group included amongst those who had to sit *bersila* before the Srivijaya ruler. It may be the case, however, that 'religion' ought to be understood in terms of techniques rather than affiliation. We must be careful of using 'isms' – 'Buddhism', 'Hinduism' – in the way they began to be used in later centuries, suggesting an integrated, exclusive system (and community) of knowledge. Because one ruler drew upon Sivaite (Hindu) rather than Buddhist doctrines, for instance, it cannot be assumed that he possessed one form of religious identity rather than another; and when he accessed the first body of spiritual knowledge rather than the other, he was not necessarily undertaking a conversion from 'Hinduism' to 'Buddhism'. Kedah, beginning in about the fifth century, provides an example. There is evidence (particularly architectural remains) of a shift in religious preferences from

'Buddhism' to Saivism, and then to Buddhism again, and, after that, to being "strongly Hindu" (Wheatley 1966: 273–281). But it is difficult to draw confident conclusions from this about the extent or the type of religious change taking place in this society, even just within its elite. Quite apart from the issue of projecting modern concepts of religious affiliation back ten centuries and more, Manguin has reminded us that 'Brahmanism' and 'Buddhism' sometimes prospered in a single polity at the same time (Manguin 2004: 303).

In later centuries – as I will discuss in some detail – communities in this region were sometimes known collectively as people 'below the winds' or 'Jawah', and some eventually began to assume a trans-polity, 'Malay' identity; but such collective concepts do not appear to be used in the writings of the early historical period. The Arabs, it is true, sometimes spoke of 'Indians' – 'Kalah' on the Peninsula was in one text said to be "inhabited by Indians" (Tibbetts 1979: 48), and the Maharaja of Srivijaya is described in an Arabic source as one of the "richest kings of India" – but elsewhere the Archipelago polities appear to be defined outside 'India' (56, 22). In any case, when 'India' is used with reference to these polities it simply incorporates them in a very broad category which includes the Subcontinent. In the absence of some trans-regional concept, the impression I gain from the documentation is that the region was configured most of all in terms of monarchies – and a framework of relations between royal courts was also the basis of what we might today call international relations in the Archipelago. More accurately inter-monarch relations, they were not governed by a concept of equality – fictional as it often has been in modern times.

Inter-monarch relations tended to be hierarchically ordered, with rulers sending envoys with tribute to other rulers – including (at certain times) the emperor of China, and the Thai court as well. Elaborate ceremony – with carefully chosen gifts, rich entertainments and highly structured audiences – accompanied these diplomatic exchanges. Within the Archipelago itself, a number of monarchs were said to send tribute to the ruler of Srivijaya. When we get any sense at all (from the vague Chinese and Arab accounts) of the Archipelago polities comprising some form of regional sphere, it is only with reference to a network of kingships focused in particular on the 'Maharaja' of Srivijaya. Just how broad this network was is again unclear. It seems at one stage to have included Langkasuka and Tan-Ma-Ling (probably in the Ligor area) on the Peninsula (Wheatley 1966: 67–69, 264); but we cannot assume it always included Kedah or Pó-ni (which may have been in the Brunei region of northern Borneo). Pó-ni sent missions to China from the tenth century, and was later described as having a capital of some

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Figure 3   The capital of Brunei in the early nineteenth century, from Frank S. Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian Archipelago* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848). © British Library, London.

10,000 people and a navy of 100 ships. The ruler determined the prices of all imported goods and the times when they might be traded (Hirth and Rockhill 1967: 155–159; Wheatley 1966: 281, 300; Brown 1970: 132–133).

Dynamics and Transformations

Attempting to give some account of these people who would at least in later centuries be claimed as 'Malays', I have ranged across many centuries and regions, perhaps inevitably conveying the impression of a lack of transformative change. In fact, although weaving, pottery, wood and *atap* dwellings, sarongs, spiritual preoccupations and monarchy appear to have been long-term features in the region, there were dramatic changes. Polities, of course, rose and fell: some polity names lasted for centuries, others completely disappeared. Dependent as they were on trade rather than on large-scale agricultural production, one might have expected even more volatility,

Map 2   Some pre-Islamic centres.

but the argument has been put that certain policies of the Chinese government helped to promote stability, or at least an element of predictability, in the dynamics of the region. China was certainly not the only power from outside the region to make an impact on local developments. The eleventh-century Chola dynasty in southern India claimed to have conquered key centres on Sumatra and the Peninsula, and their dramatic intervention was remembered in the Melaka chronicle (the so-called *Malay Annals*) written many centuries later. Kedah seems never to have recovered from its defeat by the Cholas (Wheatley 1966: 281, 300). In the fourteenth century the Ayutthaya empire (based in present-day Thailand) expanded its influence right down the Peninsula, and attacked Jambi and Singapore (Tumasek) – this being recalled for centuries afterward (McKinnon 1985: 28; Wheatley 1966: 301). In the same century the Java-based Majapahit rulers claimed overlordship across most of the Archipelago, and there is evidence of one type or another suggesting Javanese attacks on many places, including Jambi, Singapore and Aru (in Sumatra) (Wheatley 1966: 303; Wolters 1970: 45, 78; Milner, McKinnon and Tengku Luckman 1978: 39–40).

In the long run, however, it was China more than Java, the Thais or India which was most instrumental in the development of the 'Malays' and other peoples in the Archipelago. The Chinese sources – dynastic histories, geographies, travellers' accounts and so forth – demonstrate just how longstanding an interest the Chinese have had in the polities, people and products of the region. The Chinese people continued to value the luxury products, and to offer attractive items in return. Especially important in terms of Chinese influence is the likelihood that changes in imperial policy regarding trade were able to shape regional political dynamics. Oliver Wolters (1967) has suggested that in periods when the Chinese rulers sought to funnel trade through a single Archipelago centre – the Chinese saw this as tributary trade with a barbarian vassal – there were real opportunities for an ambitious local ruler to build an extensive empire. On the other hand, when the Chinese court allowed Chinese merchants to move freely around Southeast Asia, able to trade where they wished, polities which wished to free themselves from such a hegemon were favoured: such polities were able to gain new material resources through direct trade with those merchants. Such an account of the 'rhythm' of the Archipelago certainly helps to explain the rise of Srivijaya, and then its long period of dominance from the seventh to the twelfth centuries – based on its continuing tributary relationship with China. It also throws light on Srivijayan decline, with the appearance later of an array of restless and ambitious polities. It is in the period when Chinese traders were moving around the region – beginning in the twelfth century – that we see the growing importance in the historical records of

Aru, Tamiang, Kampe and Lamuri (all in the northern half of Sumatra). The later rise of Melaka on the other side of the Straits has been explained in terms of the expectation that the Chinese court would restore the tributary system. As Wolters pointed out, the "Ming victory, extending to southern China in 1368" raised expectations of the "restoration of the tributary system and the prohibition of Chinese voyages overseas" that had helped to undermine the authority of the Srivijaya hegemon. With such a restoration in prospect, the founders of Melaka saw the opportunity to establish once again an empire in the western Archipelago (Wolters 1970: 48).

Despite the critical nature of the China relationship, commercial and other relations between the Archipelago and the Subcontinent developed much earlier – back into the prehistoric period (as indicated in early Indian writings) – and, as Paul Wheatley suggested, "it is hardly less certain that Indonesian traders . . . frequented the Indian coast equally early" (Wheatley 1966: 184; Bellina and Glover 2004). Even the spread of Islam from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards occurred partly in the context of this long relationship between the Subcontinent and the Archipelago: many of those bringing Islamic doctrines to the Sumatran, Peninsular and other polities were Indian rather than Middle Eastern in origin.

I have stressed the impact of Indian ideas, but a topic that has been the subject of intensive academic debate is just why that Indianization occurred. Several points require highlighting. First, so-called 'Indianization' might well have been instigated by Archipelago leaders themselves. The evidence from that era does not encourage the conclusion that Indian doctrines, art forms and so forth were imposed by people coming from the Subcontinent, or that Brahmans or Buddhist priests were in any way superior to the ruler. Secondly, we cannot take for granted that the 'Maharaja' or other rulers were driven primarily by commercial or political aspirations – seeking to advance their interests through expanding trade or obtaining Indian ideological support to legitimize their claims to influence. Such interpretations may tell us more about present-day assumptions – and the drivers operating in our own societies – than the type of world view that might be encountered in the Archipelago in the early centuries AD. That is not to deny, of course, that Indianization took place in the context of trade across the Indian Ocean and the building of more sophisticated polities in Southeast Asia. Thirdly, the evidence we do have draws attention to what might be termed the knowledge-seeking and specifically religious dimension of Indianization. Leaders who already had an interest in oaths (*sumpah*), in intensifying their personal 'soul stuff' or spiritual energy (*semangat*) (Wolters 1999: 18–19, 93), and in other aspects of the supernatural, may well have

wished to experiment with new doctrines or techniques. Writings from the region (admittedly from later centuries) often refer to the way leaders would leave home to travel in search of knowledge (*ilmu*) (Drakard 1999: 210). In the first instance at least, such investigation may have been done in something of a piecemeal manner, looking into one set of ideas, then another. Thinking in terms of conversion and 'isms', as I have suggested, tends to give the impression of a systematic and perhaps wholesale acceptance of a new knowledge and belief system, and can disguise the experimental character of this process.

The way 'Malays' (or future 'Malays') and others in the Southeast Asian region appropriated new ideas from Indian sources can be seen in terms of what Oliver Wolters has called 'localization' – at least in its early stages. By 'localization' Wolters meant the process by which foreign ideas (specifically Indian materials) might be "fractured and restated and therefore drained of their original significance" as they were fitted into "various local complexes" (1999: 55). In trying to understand the initial drivers involved in so-called Indianization, it does make sense to speculate about the possible perspectives of the *datu* of Srivijaya, reaching out for Buddhist expertise. Similarly, as Wolters has suggested, we can imagine that a local shaman (known by the Malay word *pawang*) or other people in the Archipelago who were "already concerned with the passage rites and welfare of the dead, would have paid particular attention to Hindu devotional techniques for achieving immortality in Siva's abode" (1980: 478). The absence of a dominant Brahman class in island Southeast Asia and the continuing centrality of the *datu* or *raja* (as I have already suggested) may be further examples of changes made to suit local circumstances, in the course of 'localization'.

As Pollock warns, however, we must be wary of interpreting 'localization' as a phenomenon involving little more than "ancient and persisting indigenous beliefs" being brought "into stronger focus". The long-term consequence of appropriating key elements from a new structure of belief was to be transformative (Pollock 1998: 33; Day 2002: 94–95). To review this transformation takes us even beyond noting the role of Brahmans and Buddhist monks (and the ideas they brought) in the communities of the region, or the structure, ideology and titles of the royal courts (a system still in operation in some areas today). Sanskrit vocabulary is encountered not only throughout the 'Old Malay' inscriptions of Srivijaya but everywhere in later Muslim writings of the Archipelago, and also in the modern language of Indonesian/Malay. The everyday use of Sanskrit words in the Malay language proceeds without reflection on the foreign origin. Thus, although the word for 'language' (*bahasa*) is Sanskrit, it is sometimes said

today to lie at the heart of Malayness – and here too a Sanskrit term (*bangsa*) came to be used to describe the 'race' itself. When the first pan-Peninsular Malay movement chose a slogan in the 1930s, it was *Hidup Bahasa*! *Hidup Bangsa*! ('Long live the Language! Long live the Race!') – using these words of Sanskrit origin (Hooker 2000: 90). When a national 'Loyalty Song' – a "regime stabilizing anthem", in Clive Kessler's words (1992) – was composed for the Malaysian government in the 1980s, it was filled with highly emotive terms, and it is striking how many of these – *bakti* ('devoted service') and *setia* ('loyal'), as well as *bangsa* ('people or race') – are Sanskrit in origin.

Outside the royal courts the depth of penetration of Indian influence is seen, for instance, in the way the great tale of the *Ramayana* entered popular literature (Wolters 1979: 103; Coedes 1968: 253; Ismail Hussein 1989; Braginsky 2004). It was retold in Malay writings (even in post-Islamic texts actually using the Arabic-derived script) and in shadow-play performances, just as it is encountered right across the Southeast Asian region. A warrior in a Malay-language Muslim text from Sulawesi is said to "fight like Maharaja Rawana" (the villain of the Rama tale) (Skinner 1963: 169). Those performing Rama tales in the 'wayang Siam' (shadow puppet) theatre in recent times actually believe the epic to be locally situated, not foreign (Sweeney 1989: 128).

Once the Archipelago people had become engaged in this Indian cultural world – employing the vocabulary, the doctrines, the imagery which operated on the Subcontinent – they were inevitably susceptible to new developments arriving from that direction. To be familiar with the latest doctrines and speculations would in particular be an expectation of leadership. It is not surprising that a seventh-century pilgrim should recommend Srivijaya as an appropriate place to study for someone headed for India, or that the Old Malay inscriptions of that time suggest Srivijaya was familiar with recent trends in Buddhism. In the Medan region of East Sumatra – where Aru would appear to have been located – two seated Buddha statues have been discovered at a site dating from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, and they reflect Theravada Buddhist developments underway in Chola South India and Sri Lanka at that time (Milner, McKinnon and Tengku Luckman 1978: 24). In the Malayu polity of the fourteenth century, we find a ruler (Adityawarman) experimenting with a new "syncretic form of Siwa-Buddhism", presenting himself in statuary as an emanation of the god Siva, with a *boddhisattva* figure in the head-dress (Drakard 1999: 23). In the restless Archipelago world of the fourteenth century, however, it should also be remembered that the other increasingly potent religious influence coming from India (among other places) was Islam.

From the early centuries AD, therefore, people who were later to be identified as 'Malay' (and other Austronesian-speaking peoples) – communities which already possessed concepts relating to leadership and the supernatural – had engaged in cultural as well as what we would call commercial and political relations in numerous directions. But the dominant civilizational encounter was with the Subcontinent – and it helped to shape 'Malay' thinking about political and social life, personal identity and relations with the supernatural (including prospects for the afterlife). The encounter assisted also in forging the ruler-focused polities – in which the monarch's role was as religious as it was commercial or political – that became characteristic of the Archipelago, even after the adoption there of a new religion. It was into this Indianized world that proponents of the faith of Islam began to introduce a new civilization from about the late thirteenth century. Polities such as Perlak, Semudra, Aru, Pasai (all in northern Sumatra), Melaka and Brunei began to appear in the historical record as Muslim, and their rulers acquired the Islamic title 'sultan'. These Muslim polities stand at the beginning of what Ismail Hussein calls the "golden age" – but I hope it is clear by now that (on the basis of current research) this was not the first civilizational triumph of 'the Malays'.

Turning to Islam

Although I have already alluded to vital continuities between the 'Indian' and 'Islamic' eras, on the face of it the contrast between the Indianized kingdoms of the Archipelago and the doctrines of Islam was immense. On the one hand, there were fundamentally hierarchical polities with rulers claiming spiritual prowess, and a multitude of gods; and on the other, a religion that stressed equality before the one God, and exhibited a degree of cynicism toward monarchs. The Prophet Muhammad himself is said to have observed that "whenever a man accedes to authority he drifts away from God". When an Arab chief called Muhammad "a prince", the Prophet replied: "the prince is God, not I" (Milner 1981: 53). Considering such statements, it is perhaps not surprising that although Muslims had been in Southeast Asia over a long period – recall the Arab report of Muslims having to sit "bersila" at a royal audience in Srivijaya – it took many centuries for Archipelago rulers to adopt Islam. When Muslim polities were eventually established in the region, however, the sources suggest that – as was also likely in the case of 'Indianization' – it was in fact a process led by the local elite, and not imposed from outside. Rulers are portrayed as directing their people to convert to the Islamic faith. The Melaka-Johor

chronicle, as we have noted, presents the newly converted ruler of Melaka as commanding all his people, 'whether of high or low degree', to become Muslim. An early Portuguese account describes the ruler as coming to "like" the "mullahs" who accompanied Muslim merchants to his port and sought to convince the ruler "to turn Moor"; later the new sultan is portrayed as "instructing" the monarchs of other polities "in the things of Mohammed, because he knew all about them" (Milner 1981: 51; Jones 1979). The question needs to be asked: what had happened to make Islam so attractive?

Muslim merchants had certainly become more significant in the Indian Ocean trade (Milner 1981: 51; Andaya 1998), and we have noted that changes in Chinese policy toward trade may have had a destabilizing effect on the region in the period of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, encouraging rivalry between polities. But changes were also underway in the wider Muslim world which could have made the religion more attractive to both rulers and their subjects in the Archipelago. It has been argued, for instance, that from the thirteenth century Sufi mysticism had exercised a profound influence in Muslim societies. This particular trend in Islam could be expected to have had a special appeal in the Indianized Archipelago – where there was a longstanding preoccupation with supernatural beliefs – and it is known that Sufis (who were often associated with traders) were willing to use the language and ideas operating in pre-Muslim contexts in order to win adherents to their cause. The use of the Sanskrit 'Dewata Mulia Raja' rather than 'Allah' for 'God', which we find in a renowned fourteenth-century inscription from Trengganu (on the east coast of the Peninsula), could well be an example of this technique (Johns 1961: 19).

One type of development in Muslim societies to the west that would have been of particular interest to the Archipelago rulers concerned a changing attitude to kingship. Partly owing to the growing influence of Iranian thought, kingship had become a highly respected institution. There was a proliferation of 'sultans' across the Middle East and India; in eleventh-century Delhi the people prostrated themselves before this 'Shadow of God upon Earth', and they were told that 'He who obeys the Sultan obeys God'. Other titles used in the expanding galaxy of Muslim monarchies were the Persian 'shah' and 'khalifah'. Adding to this strengthening of rulership was a specific doctrine associated with Sufism: the concept of the 'Perfect Man'. A saintly figure who achieves essential oneness with God, and who guides his followers down the path he has trodden, the 'Perfect Man' has obvious affinities with the *bodhisattva* ideal in Buddhism. It is a concept that is known to have appealed to some Muslim rulers (among them the Indian Emperor Akbar) (Milner 1981). Both this mystical doctrine

and the Persianized celebration of kingship had the potential to make Muslim 'political culture' infinitely more attractive to the leaders of Indianized polities in the Archipelago. It is no surprise to find in the source materials (including coins) from the early 'Malay' sultanates the use of such epithets as 'Shadow of God', or the report from a Portuguese traveller that the people of Pasai believed their 'king' was the 'one who governed on earth in place of God' (Dion 1970: 140). There are other strong hints of the influence of the 'Perfect Man': rulers are recorded as having had a special interest in esoteric knowledge and sometimes as possessing supernatural powers; a sultan from north Sumatra is described in a Sufi poem as a 'saint', and it is suggested that he had reached a divine perfection (al-Attas 1966: 44; Milner 1981: 55–56).

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, therefore, given developments underway in the wider Muslim world, the Archipelago leaderships (including ones which would later be brought within the 'Malay' narrative) could be expected to have been more attracted to the spiritual and political doctrines emanating from the Muslim world. Certainly, Islam was less likely to be characterized by what in earlier centuries would have seemed an uncompromisingly egalitarian and subversive ethos, including an antagonism toward leaders – especially those who claimed special supernatural powers. But the issue then arises: once Islam was adopted, how much did it transform these societies?

A New World?

There has been debate over this issue. One view suggests that there was "profound disruption of the social order", with dramatic changes in dress, eating (pork and wine prohibitions in particular) and other cultural aspects (Reid 1993a: 152). It has been argued as well that Islam brought a "cultural revolution" and a transformation to a "scientific world view" (Al-Attas 1978: 170–171). Against these views, others have replied – and I have been one of them (Milner 1981) – that the process of change was likely to have been far more gradual, at least in the first few centuries. Over time, of course, proponents of the Islamic religion certainly brought about deep-running transformation in the Archipelago societies – including 'Malay' societies – but the task is to identify just when and how this occurred. We have already noted the way key vocabulary, religious and political doctrines, ceremony and imagery from the Indian period survived the adoption of Islam, and I have referred to the deliberately gradualist techniques of the Sufi 'missionar-

ies'. Even eating and drinking habits do not appear to have altered quickly with the coming of Islam. The first Spanish who visited the Muslim court of Brunei reported "distilled wine" in a "porcelain cup the size of an egg" (Nicholl 1975: 10) – though by 1600 another visitor was told that the people "would rather die than eat pork" (87). When a Muslim Chinese visited Melaka in the fifteenth century (after the sultan's conversion), he noted "fermented wine" there (Mills 1970: 112). With respect to dress, an early fifteenth-century account of the Muslim polity of Semudra said that although women wore a "coloured cloth" around the lower part of their body, the upper part was naked (Groenveldt 1960: 88). Local accounts sometimes admitted the slowness with which Islamization was likely to move. Anthony Reid has drawn attention to the admission in a court text from Patani that it took a long time to build a mosque, and that the people continued "making offerings to trees, stones and spirits" (Reid 1993a: 156).

Among other signs of gradualism are a north Sumatran Muslim grave-stone of 1380 which is inscribed with a poem in a Sanskrit metre and written in the Pallava (Indian) script – the script that was used centuries earlier in Srivijayan inscriptions (Collins 1998: 9). The much discussed fourteenth-century Trengganu inscription refers to Islamic law and uses the Arabic script, but we have seen that it includes Sanskrit terminology, including for 'God'. A law text associated with the sultanate of Melaka – the 'Undang-Undang Melaka' – lists Islamic legal penalties for crimes, but also often provides alternative options. In the case of stealing, a fine is mentioned and then the comment is made that "according to the law of God" the thief's hand should be amputated. Reports by foreigners on the region suggest it tended to be the local, customary penalties that were imposed in Melaka and many other polities (Milner 1981: 480).

The historical records – Portuguese as well as Malay – make clear that the Islamization of the Archipelago did not generally entail the constituting of new polities, though this did occur. Not just in the case of Melaka, but in Aru, Pasai, Kedah, Brunei and Banjarmasin (Borneo), and many more polities, the adoption of the new religion is presented as being led by established rulers (Jones 1979; Milner 1981; King 1993: 123–124). Just as the Melaka ruler 'instructed' his people, so others were described in court writings as "expounders on earth" of Muslim law or as "disseminating Islamic (as well as customary) law" (Milner 1981: 49–51). Here we see that strong theme in 'Malay' history of top-down ideological leadership; and one imagines (though on the basis of much less evidence) that such leadership had been just as critical a component in the appropriating of Indian knowledge and institutions many centuries earlier.

The way in which new Muslim polities were built on older foundations is apparent everywhere. Court texts describe even the Islamic Shari'ah (considered the Divine Law) as being "in the hands of" the ruler; law codes (incorporating elements of Shari'ah) announce that they are "in the possession of" and "laid down by" the ruler, and they are administered by his officials (Milner 1981: 49; 1982: 97). Beautiful Qur'an which were specifically prepared for royal courts, and are today able to be seen in lavish exhibitions, are decorated with yellow and gold in a manner that confirms they were exclusively for royal use (de Guise 2006: 264). As we have seen, in the new Muslim polities old titles and old rituals were often combined with rather than replaced by Islamic ones. This includes the title of the ruler himself – who might be referred to not only as 'sultan' but also by the Indian 'raja', or the Malay-language 'yang dipertuan' ('he who is made lord').

Such processes of fusion are also being revealed by archaeological research. In Palembang, recent work has revealed that the palace of the former Muslim sultan was located in an area of extraordinary activity – judging by ceramics and other finds – dating back to early Srivijayan times (Manguin 1993: 27). E. Edwards McKinnon has commented on the way that "Islamic" sites would "appear to legitimize themselves by their establishment at or on earlier Hindu Buddhist sacred sites" (1985: 13). It was common also for Muslim gravestones from the early centuries of Islamization – in Pasai (north Sumatra), Patani (southern Thailand), Trengganu and elsewhere to the south – to employ pre-Islamic art forms: some were shaped like the tiered roof of a "stupa", suggesting the form of Mount Meru from Indian religious iconography, and perhaps hinting at the continued influence of the idea of rebirth (Kamaruddin 1997: 247, 251; Zakaria 1994: 36; Bougas 1988). Similarly, the earliest mosques in the Archipelago polities drew upon pre-existing traditions of architecture. We do not find the onion-shaped domes encountered in the early centuries of Islam in the Middle East – a style which became popular in Malay countries as well, but only a century ago. As far as can be seen from the mosques that have survived – remember that in Southeast Asia they were built in wood – they featured full-panelled, layered roofs supported by timber columns. Some are pyramidal in a way that is again reminiscent of Mount Meru style; and they were often not unlike buildings with centralized hipped roofs that continue to be encountered today in Hindu Bali. Many basic rural mosques, especially on the east coast of the Peninsula, have a structure similar to that of Malay houses – with 'A-shaped' gables at the end of a long roof. The Kampong Laut mosque of Kelantan (which may be 300 years old) and the Telok Manok mosque in Patani are

both erected on stilts, like Malay houses – as are a number of the older mosques in the interior of Pahang. Such structures also display techniques for promoting the ventilation that is so essential in that climate (Abdul Halim Nasir 2004; Mohamad Tajuddin 2005; O'Neill 2002; Sheppard 1972).

In speaking of 'Islamization' – as with the earlier 'isms' – there is a danger of assuming a complete transformation. In fact, we should keep in view that long tradition of experimentation with novel spiritual doctrines. In the early stages of 'religious change' leaders in the region may have believed themselves to be adding to rather than replacing spiritual resources and techniques accumulated over the years. This would be consistent with the gradualism and fusion that I have described. From the point of view of the faith itself, the practice of drawing upon (sometimes exploiting) pre-existing beliefs and forms was not limited to sufis. To take one example, there was no designated style of mosque that was seen to be obligatory for a good Muslim community. The dome, for instance, was not essential. With this "almost total lack of requirement for material or symbolic features" (Frishman and Hasan-Uddin Khan 2002: 14), different regions across the widespread Muslim world developed their own local styles. There was often in fact a desire to make buildings speak to the local community, invoking local notions of religiosity. Even in the development of Islamic law we know there was a recognition of the need to acknowledge local specificities. Although the Shari'ah may not always have been strictly adhered to in the Archipelago, its scope was also often radically restricted in India and western Asia.

The expansion of Muslim civilization, therefore, whether expressed in the development of mosque architecture, legal institutions or other ways, tended to be characterized by the creation of new and often subtle cultural syntheses (Ismail Serageldin 2002). With this in mind, it is not surprising that, despite the gradualism and instances of seeming compromise in the spread of the Islamic religion in the Archipelago communities, the reports of contemporary foreign Muslim travellers in the region are not generally marked by accusations of religious laxity. When the fourteenth-century Ibn Battuta or the fifteenth-century Ma Huan visited the region, they did not condemn the new Muslim polities which they visited. Condemnation would come later, and with far-reaching results.
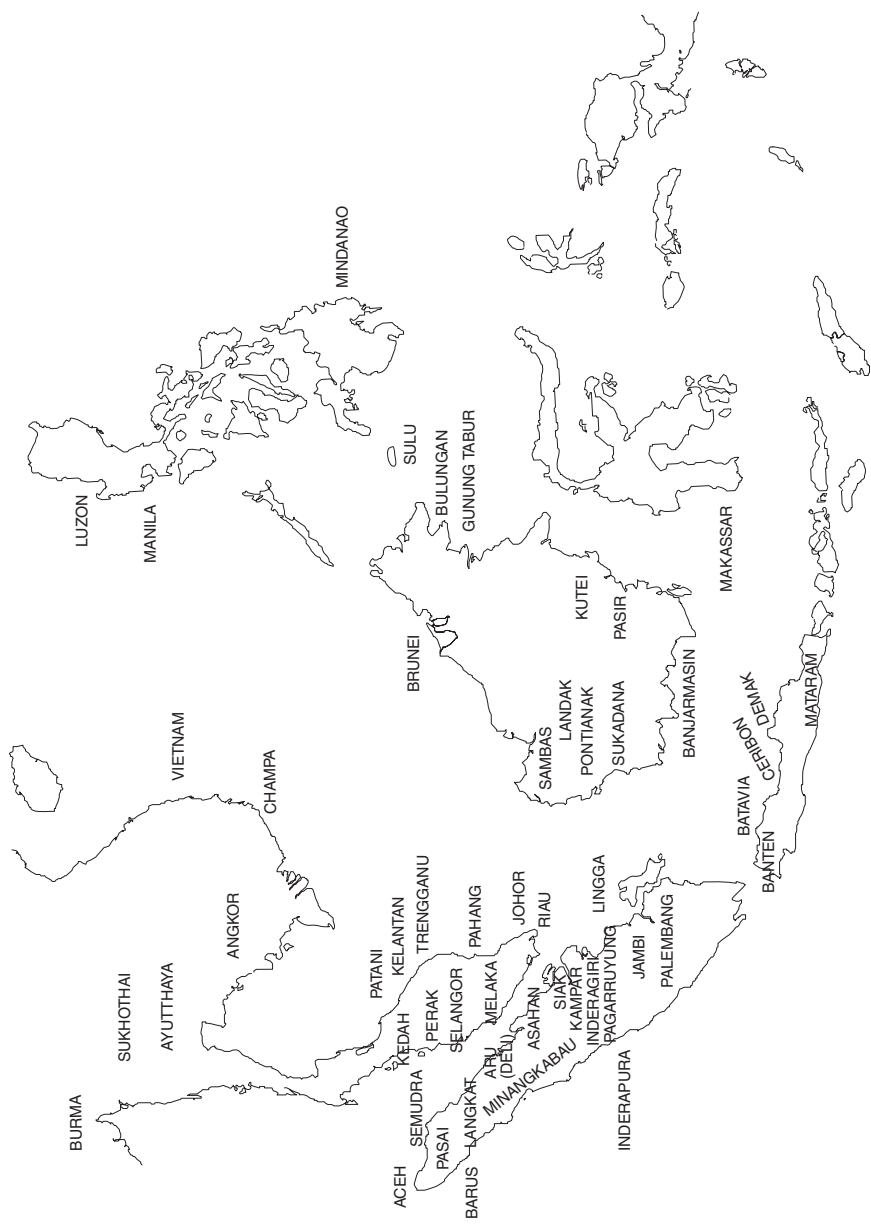
In time the Islamic religion was to become a critical ingredient in the formulation of 'Malay' identity – at least by most definitions of 'Malay'. In some parts of the Archipelago the building of a specifically 'Malay' community may have been underway before the Muslim period; in others it occurred in later centuries. What cannot be doubted is that Islam became

essential in the formation of a community of monarchies – often called *kerajaan* – which dominated the Archipelago after the fourteenth century, and up to the time of the imposition of European and Thai colonial rule. This is the 'golden period' about which Ismail Hussein has written. But it may be more appropriate – if we are to take seriously the perceptions of people who lived in these polities – to call it a golden period of the *kerajaan*, or of Archipelago sultanates, rather than of 'the Malays'.

3

The Sultanates

In Malaysia today discussion of the 'golden age' – 'Malay' or otherwise – is usually focused on Melaka, which emerged early in the fifteenth century and whose rulers claimed to be descendants of the ruler of Palembang (himself the descendant of Alexander the Great). Melaka is sometimes presented as an inspiration for modern state builders, and a model of what 'Malay' people can achieve. The sultanate is celebrated as a successful international entrepot; its palace has been reconstructed in the modern city of Melaka; the quintessential loyal courtier of Melaka (Hang Tuah) is highlighted in the national museum; and there is the seemingly everlasting popularity of the post-war films of the actor and director P. Ramlee in their historic Melaka setting (Kahn 2006: 120; Kessler 1992; Milner 2005). It is true that Melaka was a polity of substance: like Srivijaya, it drew its wealth from trade and exercised power on both sides of the Straits of Malacca. It also played a key role in the expansion of Islam in the Archipelago. An early sixteenth-century Portuguese report – influenced, it seems, by a desire to impress the home government – said that "men cannot estimate the worth of Malacca on account of its greatness and profit" (Cortesao 1990: 287). It was located at "the end of the monsoons and the beginning of others . . . every hand must come to Malacca" (286). A "collecting centre for the spices" of the Archipelago, and a "distributing centre for the textiles" of India (Wheatley 1966: 313–315), Melaka was so cosmopolitan that eighty-four languages were spoken there (Cortesao 1990: 269).

It was not the only sultanate, however, with claims to international stature, nor the only one to be celebrated as a jewel in the 'Malay' heritage. Brunei in north Borneo, Patani in present-day southern Thailand, Aru and Siak in eastern Sumatra and Melaka's successor polity, Johor, were among many others. They operated in a region that also included Java-based sultanates, Aceh (the north Sumatran sultanate that conquered numerous

MINDANAO

LUZON

MANILA

SULU

BULUNGAN

GUNUNG TABUR

BRUNEI

KUTEI

PASIR

SAMBAS
LANDAK
PONTIANAK
SUKADANA

BANJARMASIN

MAKASSAR

VIETNAM

CHAMPA

ANGKOR

BATAVIA
BANTEN
CERIBON
DEMAK
MATARAM

BURMA

SUKHOTHAI

AYUTTHAYA

PATANI

KELANTAN

TRENGGANU

PAHANG

JOHOR

RIAU

LINGGA

PALEMBANG

JAMBI

KEDAH
PERAK
SELANGOR
MELAKA

SEMUDRA
PASAI
LANGKAT
ARU
(DELI)
ASAHAN
SIAK
KAMPAR
INDERAGIRI
PAGARRUYUNG

ACEH

BARUS

MINANGKABAU

INDERAPURA

Map 3   Sultanates.

sultanates in the western Archipelago in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and Makassar in Sulawesi – polities where Malay was not the spoken language and which have not generally been gathered together in modern constructions of a 'Malay' narrative (Milner 2005). Even when modern historical accounts highlight 'the Malays' as a community through time, they admit that the 'Malay world' was a fragmented and fluid region. No single polity can in fact ever be said to have incorporated all of the others: there was a multiplicity of polities, and competition between them was rife. As I have already suggested, there must as well be doubt about just when people living across the region actually began to claim the bond of a common 'Malayness'. Against this impression of heterogeneity, however, it is also the case that many of the sultanates that would eventually be labelled 'Malay' – in their mode of living, their language and literature, their state rituals and titular systems, and the particular logic of their political and cultural systems – shared common features. In what sense we can call this even retrospectively a 'Malay' world – rather than see it as being configured primarily around sultanates (or *kerajaan*, to employ the term I introduced in the last chapter) – is a matter of concern.

A Political Order?

At first encounter the fragmentation of the pre-colonial Archipelago is remarkable. It is perhaps partly to make the 'golden age' more comprehensible to people today that some accounts simply refer to it as one of 'Malay feudalism', or seek to structure it entirely around the history of a single ruling house – the sultans of Melaka and Johor. It is true that the ruling family of Melaka was an important force in the western Archipelago over a long period – tracing its origins back to Palembang and then, after Melaka fell to the Portuguese, establishing itself in various other locations, eventually founding what came to be called the sultanate of Johor. There is a Johor sultanate today in the Malaysian federation, but the links back to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sultanate of that name are (to say the least) highly complex. The political succession, Srivijaya–Melaka–Johor, certainly has the appeal of analytic simplicity – and I will be stressing the vital contribution it made to constructing the idea of 'Malay'. But we cannot say that these polities encompassed all of what was later to be called the 'Malay world'.

To begin with, scholars are uncertain as to how much authority Srivijaya could exercise across the 'Malay' Archipelago (Kulke 1993a; Manguin 2004). In the case of Melaka, both Malay and Portuguese sources make

clear that it had serious rivals. Apart from the Thai empire of Ayutthaya to the north, the Melaka-Johor chronicle (the *Malay Annals*) – which seeks to celebrate Melaka – states that at the fifteenth-century Melaka court letters from the Sumatran polities, Pasai and Aru, were received with full ceremony because the "Rajas of these two countries were regarded as equal in greatness to the Raja of Melaka" (Winstedt 1938: 85). A Portuguese account relates that "since Malacca began", its ruler and that of Aru had "always been at war" (Cortesao 1990: 147). The same Portuguese writer (Tome Pires) observed that although Perak, Pahang and others on the Peninsula had paid tribute to the Melaka ruler, as had such polities as Siak and Kampar on Sumatra, there were others such as Kedah and Patani (as well as Aru) which did not usually acknowledge his supremacy. Also, the royal genealogies that survive from Kedah and Patani – and, for that matter, from the sultanate of Deli, which appears to have succeeded Aru in the Medan region of northeast Sumatra – make no claims to a Srivijaya/Palembang/Melaka genealogical inheritance (Maier 1988; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970; Milner 1982). In the case of Brunei, the founder of the dynasty tends to be presented as having local and divine origins (in one account his father descends from heaven), though in the Brunei chronicles he marries the daughter of the sultan of Johor and receives royal regalia from that court (as well as other places) (Brown 1970: 134–136; Sweeney 1968).

Surveying the Archipelago from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries tends to give the impression that its political fragmentation actually increased over time. By the early nineteenth century many polities there tended to be presented in Western accounts as petty in scale, limited in resources, squabbling among one another and attracted to piracy. Polities that had "once cut a splendid figure in the eyes of our first navigators", reflected one observer at the end of the eighteenth century, had fallen into decline (Leyden 1968: 14). Another English report of the period referred to them "mouldering in self-decay and mutual destruction" (Hunt in Moor 1968: B13). In considering such judgements, however, we should take into account that by this time the British and Dutch were building empires in the region – and sought ideological justification for their project. Also, by the nineteenth century European peoples had themselves experienced remarkable progress (as they were likely to describe it) in economic and political development, with a corresponding sense of confidence and growing superiority. A nineteenth-century commentator, flown back in time, may well have been far less impressed by the achievements of fifteenth-century Melaka than were the first Portuguese who came to the region. Even Srivijaya – the renowned 'empire of the Maharaja' – was likely to have been relatively loosely structured, and subject to centrifugal forces. We have noted that one of the

earliest inscriptions of Srivijaya persistently calls for loyalty – threatening punishments and offering rewards. As Jane Drakard has observed, the "entire inscription is structured around a rhythmic repetition of the phrase 'you will be killed by the curse'" (1999: 235; de Casparis 1956: 36–46; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 1990: 69–70, 74).

Another reason for caution in adopting a narrative of decline is that fifteenth-century Melaka was by no means the last successful 'Malay' polity. After the Portuguese conquest of Melaka, sixteenth-century Brunei certainly impressed its European visitors. The sultan's influence extended to Luzon (in the present Philippines), and there were a hundred prows in the Brunei port and "25,000 fires" (possibly 100,000 people) (Brown 1970: 40) in the capital. The ruler received Magellan's mission of 1521 inside a great hall adorned with silk hangings, and he was surrounded by "three hundred foot-soldiers with naked rapiers at their thighs" (Nicholl 1975: 8–9). Patani in 1600 was considered by Europeans to be "strong and may hardly be conquered"; it had a "good harbour" and traded not only around the Archipelago but also with Thailand, Cambodia, Japan and the Europeans. In later years it was remembered as having once been "the greatest Port for trade in all those seas" (Nicholl 1975: 85; Hamilton 1930: 84; Reid 1993: 211–212). Seventeenth-century Johor was also described with respect. A Dutch official in 1687, visiting the then capital at Riau (just off the south of the Peninsula), said the number of ships there was "so great that the river was scarcely navigable" (Andaya 1975: 38). In the same year, an audience with the sultan was held in front of one thousand people, including Chinese and Thai (Andaya 1975: 149). Brunei, Patani and Johor have all been incorporated in the 'Malay' story, but they had to relate to, and often compete with, other powerful 'non-Malay' polities (or empires) – such as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Aceh and Makassar, and Ayutthaya (or Siam). There were also the rulers of Minangkabau, whose royal letters claiming divine authority were attested even in Dutch reports to have exercised wide influence in Sumatra (Drakard 1999) – rulers who are sometimes claimed as 'Malay', but often not. It was a region, as we saw in Chapter 1, in which Malay (or Jawi) was a language of communication and knowledge.

Commencing in the 1500s, these polities had to cope with new European powers, but external forces – for instance, China and the Colas – had of course been protagonists in the region over many centuries. Also, the European impact was not immediately negative – as Anthony Reid has pointed out. In the sixteenth century a growing demand for spices and other products from Europe and Japan, as well as from China and India, had benefited the trading polities of the Archipelago (Reid 1993). Archipelago leaderships

sought to centralize control, tightening trade monopolies; urbanization reached levels higher than in contemporary Europe, and substantial numbers of people were engaged in one way or another in international trade. In the seventeenth century, however, the growing European role in the region became more threatening: local monarchies were losing the competition over long-distance trade; also, especially with the military presence of the Dutch East India Company, it was increasingly difficult for an indigenous polity comparable in scale to the old sultanate of Melaka to maintain itself in the region.

This is not to deny that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were significant elements of dynamism – particularly as different polities responded to an expansion in the number of Chinese merchants caused by a change in government policy in China (Reid 1997: 10–14, 62–63). In the 1760s Trengganu was "large and very populous, abounding in good Provisions of All Sorts" (Francis 1969/1970: 76; Shaharil 1990). In the 1740s Siak (on the east coast of Sumatra) was also a lively centre of trade – Chinese traders and Malay records reported the port was "filled with goods" and bustling with ships (Barnard 2003: 82–83). In the late eighteenth century it expanded its influence over neighbouring polities (Marsden 1966: 356); and in the 1820s a British mission (led by the perceptive John Anderson) noted Siak was "no longer the powerful and independent state it was only 15 or 20 years ago" but encountered there "a display of magnificence and splendour far beyond what I had been led to expect" (Anderson 1971: 343, 174). By the 1850s, the Dutch, who were beginning to establish control over the Sumatran east coast polities and had an interest in denigrating independent polities, dismissed Siak as being poverty-stricken and depopulated (Schadee 1918: 9, 12).

In the early 1800s Brunei, despite its reduced circumstances, was still called by a British visitor "the Venice of the East" and its capital (a "most extraordinary town") was judged to possess "from thirty to forty thousand inhabitants". The houses appeared to "float on the water, and the uniformity (was) broken by gay flags and banners which indicate the rank and office of those who hoist them" (Marryat 1848: 106, 112). (We will be examining in detail the issue of ranks and offices.) In 1833 the sultan of Lingga (on the Equator south of Singapore), who made widely acknowledged claims to being the rightful ruler of Johor, could still muster fifty boats to join Dutch forces on an anti-piracy expedition (Netscher 1862: 262); and in 1826 this ruler had welcomed visitors to his court in a large audience hall, and was able to summon an impressive range of cultural performances, including *gamelan* music, *makyong* theatre, shadow plays and dance troupes (Angelbeek 1826: 13, 40; Matheson 1986: 14, 30). The

Lingga sultans continued attempts to reassert their authority on the Peninsula, but especially after the signing of a treaty between the British and Dutch in 1824 (which in effect made the Peninsula a British 'sphere of influence' and gave the Dutch a relatively free hand in the islands to the south and Sumatra), any reunification of the Johor empire had to be impossible. The influence of the Lingga rulers continued to be reduced, and eventually the Dutch removed them from their thrones.

Fluidity

Representatives of developing European nation states would certainly have seen the region not only as politically fragmented, but as characterized as well by competition and fluidity. It was a long-term pattern, apparent on a comparatively large scale in struggles between the regional 'great powers' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Aceh and Johor (Andaya 1975, 2001a). It appears on a much smaller canvas in the early nineteenth century in the flux and struggle that existed on the east coast of Sumatra, involving such sultanates and principalities as Deli, Serdang, Langkat and Asahan – and their varying relations with the sultanates of Aceh and Siak, and the Dutch and British. An added dimension of this struggle concerned attempts to control the different 'Batak' peoples who tended to be located in inland areas (Reid 1969; Milner 1982; Barnard 2003). In Borneo too the sultanates, based on rivers, were concerned not only to control the trade from the interior – the birds' nests, camphor, 'wild rubbers', bezoar stones, rhinoceros horns and so forth (Rousseau 1990: 291) – and maintain the loyalty of their Muslim subjects, but also to draw often resistant Dayak leaders into the framework of their polities (*kerajaan*). There was always in pre-colonial times (as Jerome Rousseau puts it) an "uneasy balance" between the "coastal Malay sultanates" and the "central Borneo groups" (298).

Time and again we find kingdoms seeming to struggle to retain authority (including authority over trade) – and often small principalities asserting their independence or expanding on the periphery, apparently seeking to establish their own trajectories.

Very small communities indeed (or at least their leaders) seemed to aspire to become kingdoms. Even in the early twentieth century a Patani man came to Kemaman in the Trengganu region, and having established a settlement, his son refused to acknowledge the sultan of Trengganu, and gradually began to "give himself airs as if he were a Sultan" – building himself a "great pavilion" and "being carried on a litter" (Sheppard 1949: 58).

Among the smallest polities of the early nineteenth century was Gunung Tabur in eastern Borneo, with only some 5,000 inhabitants, a tiny revenue and tax paid mainly in the form of birds' nests. Located up the Berau river – approached (in the words of a British navigational report) through "an extensive estuary, formed by many uninhabited islands" – this ruler (who lived in a miserable residence) depended on trade like many other rulers (Magenda 1989: 103; Sherry 1966: 119–124; Rousseau 1990: 285). Pontianak, in west Borneo, is a case of a polity that started with almost nothing (in the 1770s) but became a place of some substance, controlling trade on the Kapuas river (Heidhues 1998).

The novelist Joseph Conrad described well this type of fluidity in the nineteenth century – the possibilities and aspirations that might break one royal dream and then sustain another; the strategies for securing the profits of trade; the ever-present likelihood of the emergence of new *kerajaan*. The dynamics of this Conradian world seem applicable to a very wide range of Archipelago situations – perhaps even those recorded in the earliest historical records, when a polity might appear only briefly, emerging in early Chinese records (sending perhaps one mission to the imperial court) and then mentioned no more (Wheatley 1966). In later times there were places like Klang (in the west of the Peninsula), which is mentioned by the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century, along with Perak and Pahang, but survives today only as a town in the state of Selangor (Cortesao 1990: 260–261). Some place names like Aru or Tanjung Pura in west Borneo seem sometimes almost to disappear – in the case of Aru, probably as a result of the deliberate policy of a conqueror (Milner, McKinnon and Tengku Luckman 1978: 18–19; Kato 1997a: 9–11; Nicholl 1975: 25).

One aspect of the fluidity of this Archipelago world was the way rulers themselves often moved from one region to another, creating new settlements and polities. This is a theme in many of the chronicles of royal houses. The Melaka line did not merely migrate from Palembang to Melaka to Johor, but established settlements in Bintan (near Singapore), Singapore itself and Muar before choosing Melaka; after the Portuguese conquest, they went to Pahang, Bintan and Kampar (on Sumatra), before settling on the Johor river. When the former ruler of Melaka (Sultan Mahmud) was chased out of Bintan by the Portuguese, he was comforted by an adviser (according to the chronicle) with the observation that "every country has a Raja, and if Your Highness is granted length of days, we can find ten countries for you" (Winstedt 1938: 212). There seems to have been the perception of a boundless frontier. Chronicles from the region often refer to a ruler 'opening up' a settlement. In many cases a ruler just seems to arrive at a spot, and a settlement and kingdom form around him. In the

founding of Semudra in north Sumatra (according to the chronicle) Merah Silu, on a hunting trip, comes to some high ground where he encounters an ant as large as a cat; he then orders his followers to cut down the grass there and build a palace. He calls the place *semudra*, which means 'large ant', and becomes raja there (Hill 1960: 55). In some instances monarchs are described as arriving in a territory, marrying the daughter of a prominent local and then being installed as ruler. The polity of Deli in East Sumatra developed in this way (the future monarch coming originally from India); the founder of the Kedah dynasty is said to have come from Rum (Turkey). In the case of eighteenth-century Pontianak, it was a man of Arab descent who married the sister of the ruler of Mempawah, settled on the Kapuas river, attacked the neighbouring polities of Sanggau, Mempawah and Sukadana, grabbed as much of the river trade as possible and took the title 'sultan' (Heidhues 1998).

Moving Populations

It was not only rulers, however, who moved around. Subjects (*rakyat*) shifted from one sultanate to another. Large numbers of people fled from Melaka to such other polities as Pahang and Patani after the Portuguese conquest of 1511 (Reid 1993: 208). Thousands left Siak for Riau, Trengganu and Pontianak in the early nineteenth century (because of the political disturbances in that time) (Anderson 1971: 166, 343). Thousands again left Pahang during a 'civil war' there in the 1850s and 1860s. The population of Asahan in East Sumatra included many people from Banjarmasin in Borneo (e.g. Milner 1982: 7, 121). In 1816 the sultan of Perak complained that 80 per cent of his people had fled to another ruler (Khoo Kay Kim 1972: 25). The inhabitants of Sik, a district in the hill regions of Kedah, told an ethnographer in the 1960s that their ancestors had come from Patani. They were escaping the Thai advance in that region and the Kedah authorities granted them asylum (Banks 1983: 26–27).

The reality was that in this case and many others, sultans were not merely generous: they actively sought subjects. A newspaper report of the 1880s expresses well the situation that probably had operated over many centuries. It noted that some two thousand people had come from Kelantan, Patani, Patalung and Songkhla (the last three most directly under Thai control) to Kedah, bringing their belongings with them. They had told the ruler they were "all hungry" and had "come to submit ourselves to Your Majesty". He asked them "what type of work can you carry out here?" and they answered that they were accustomed to planting rice. The report

continues: "The Raja was happy because the country of Kedah is filled with wet and dry rice lands" (*Jawi Peranakan*, 26 September 1887).

The *rakyat* (or royal subjects) did not merely include a rice-growing peasantry – settled for the most part along the banks of rivers and characterized by mobility rather than long-term stability. The gathering of forest products (rattan, bamboo, dammar and many more), like the growing of coconut trees, could be a valuable source of income, as was fishing in the coastal areas. There was some engagement in commerce, but one account after another insists that trade was never of a substantial nature among commoners (Gullick 1988: 31; Leyden 1968: 105; Kassim Ahmad 1964: 45). Craftsmen of various types – carpenters, silversmiths and others – benefited from royal and aristocratic patronage, as did those engaged in making textiles. Such work, however, would often be done not for wages but in the form of *kerah* (or corvee) – unpaid labour that was due to the ruler (Gullick 1988: 31). Some polities were famed for textile production. In the fourteenth century the people of Kelantan were described in a Chinese report as occupying "themselves in weaving cotton cloth" (Wheatley 1966: 79), and Kelantan continued until modern times to be celebrated as a major centre for both silk and cotton (Newbold 1971, vol. 2: 178; Clifford 1961: 116). In nineteenth-century Batu Bara (East Sumatra) it was said that "in almost every house" there were "one or more looms"; the people produced not only "great quantities" of "coarse cotton" but also "rich silk and gold cloths" – presumably the *songket* fabric in which gold or silver thread is woven in intricate patterns into the weft, standing out "in subtle relief on the background cloth" (Selvanayagam 1970: xv). These materials were exported to many parts of Sumatra and the Peninsula (Anderson 1971: 312). Batu Bara continues to be a textile centre today. Trengganu and Kelantan have also been renowned for *songket* (Clifford 1961: 116; Hill 1949). Skills, along with craftspeople, might move from one sultanate to another: thus, in the eighteenth century *songket* making was established in Inderapura (on Sumatra) by a weaver from Trengganu (Maxwell 1990: 413).

With peasants rather than artisans, the sense of mobility was reflected in residential concepts and attitudes to land 'ownership'. The village house, set on stilts, and usually easy to move, was perceived as a "separate entity from the ground on which it stands" (Raja Bahrin 1988: 15). Boundaries between houses were often not demarcated, and residents tended to "find it difficult to point out the exact shape of the plot of land on which the house is built". When new settlers came to a village it was relatively easy to get permission to put up a house, and rent was not usually demanded for the land. The idea of a village "as a territorial group", Raja Bahrin has explained, is based on the European image of settlement. He suggests that

in the case of 'Malay' village settlement, it is sometimes merely the "distance up to which the prayer call of a particular kampong mosque is heard" that has defined the *kampong*'s boundaries (15).

Land itself was frequently cultivated and then abandoned. It tended to be used rather than possessed. Land not under cultivation was 'dead land' – in contrast to 'living land', which was in use – and nobody had rights over this 'dead land'. Colonial administrators tended to see this 'migratory' approach to land settlement – often with the planting of only one or two crops on high-quality land before moving elsewhere – as "mischievous" and strongly condemned it (Kratoska 1985: 18). They did not appreciate that the established custom relating to land (to quote the legal scholar Haji Salleh Haji Buang) was that the "nature of ownership" was "not one of absolute ownership" but rather of "proprietary rights". The "right of ownership" extended not to the soil as such but to the "usufruct or the right to utilize the soil" (Salleh Haji Buang 1989: 3–4). A legal text from Johor declares that land is either "appropriated" or "unappropriated"; indications of the former included "wells, fruit trees, signs of culture". In the case of "unappropriated" land, it was said to have "no owner" and "He who reclaims such land and builds thereon" – thus making it 'living land' – "shall not be molested in his possession" (Hooker 1970: 86). Certainly, by comparison with many other parts of the world, land seems to have been 'there for the taking' – a situation which is familiar also, for instance, in the history of early European pioneering in Australia.

Labour mattered more than land in such a society. Paul Kratoska has put it well: "In the indigenous Malay economy human labour was the form of capital that underlay economic relations" (1985: 19). From the point of view of a ruler, subjects paid taxes in the form of labour – *kerah*. It was also possible to mortgage labour by so-called 'debt slavery' in order to borrow money. What rulers sought most of all – and the revenue from trade could assist this end – was more people, more subjects. Financial wealth was not seen as an end in itself. To quote the shrewd European observer John Anderson, "the moment a Malay [became] possessed of a little money, he entertain[ed] as many attendants as he [could]" (Anderson 1971: 268). There is plenty of evidence to suggest this was a widespread practice (Gullick 1988: 125–131; Brown 1970: 66). Significantly, the same term (*makmur*) was used for 'prosperous' as well as 'populous'. Rulers celebrated a gain in subjects and bemoaned their loss. When a nineteenth-century sultan of Deli learned that he had lost some of his subjects, he was described as displaying *malu* – a potent term suggesting embarrassment (Milner 1982: 27). The sultan of Kutei (Borneo) was equally concerned when Dayaks moved away from his control: it was reported that the ruler "wanted his

kingdom to be thickly populated and (the Dayaks) that had left were to come back, or be fetched back by force if necessary" (Rousseau 1990: 297). In the literature of the royal courts, a great ruler was one to whom many people owed allegiance. When the sultan of Melaka (according to the Melaka-Johor chronicle) wanted to impress the emperor of China, he sent him a ship full of sago. The emperor was told that the sultan had ordered each of his subjects to roll a single grain. "That will indicate", declared his envoy to China, "how many are the subjects of our Raja" (Milner 1982: 27). Time and again in court literature, and in the reports of statements from the ruling elite, the priority of people over land or financial wealth is spelt out.

The Polity

Unlike the sensitivity 'Malay' rulers expressed with respect to subjects, they sometimes admitted to having almost no idea of the territorial dimensions of their realms. Even in the 1870s the sultan of Trengganu revealed to an English enquirer that it was not known "where the Trengganu boundary ran" (*Singapore Daily Times*, 19 July 1875); his neighbour, the sultan of Kelantan, expressed similar confusion (Burns and Cowan 1975: 269). Much territory seemed to be a type of no-man's land; what mattered was whether there were people working there, and if so, to whom these people owed allegiance. An account by Charles Gray of crossing the Peninsula in 1827 captures well this attitude, when he makes no references to a boundary as he headed down river toward the Pahang capital. But Gray does mention that on arrival at a certain Kampong Brah there were a number of inhabitants there "under the control of the Rajah of Pahang" (Gray 1852: 371–372). What certainly would have concerned the Pahang ruler was whether he had subjects in the region, not the presence of any specific territorial markings. In Borneo the situation was similar. Victor King has observed that sultanates there as well were "more interested in the control of people and their activities, and the right to take tax and tribute from them, than in ownership of land". Here again the "territorial boundaries between states were usually very vaguely defined, especially as one moved further inland and away from the capital" (King 1993: 224).

In the 1870s a visitor to the Peninsula said she believed the people there had "no knowledge of geography"; they would, she said, "measure distances by the day's walk, and by the number of times it is necessary to chew betel between two places" (Bird 1967: 21–22). There is a nineteenth-century locally produced 'map' from Perak (Andaya 1979: xiii; also Burns 1976:

72) which portrays little more than rivers, sketched out in the most sche-
matic manner, with little topographical detail even with respect to major
river contours. It gives the impression of an inside-out perspective on Perak.
We gain no sense of the state having an external periphery that might define
it territorially. Consistent with the notion that it was population that mat-
tered, however, and assuming people tended to live on rivers, the map would
probably have made more sense to the people themselves than the type of
document that surveyors would later produce. With this map in mind, it is
no surprise to find that although certain words in the Malay language can
be translated as 'boundary' or 'border', they do not generally appear in the
writings of the 'Malay' sultanates, or *kerajaan*.

The Malay word that is often translated as 'state', *negeri*, requires closer
analysis here – and it has attracted the attention of scholars (Reid 2000a;
O'Connor 2000; MacRae 2005: 397). In pre-modern times it does not seem
to carry the meaning of a territorially defined polity. It was used for small
or large settlements; a ruler or raja might possess one or a number of *negeri*;
often a new *negeri* is described in court writings simply as being established
in the jungle, and then given a ruler and institutions. The substance of the
negeri, however, was neither the land nor the institutions – it was simply
the people. The phrase *isi negeri*, literally the 'contents of the *negeri*', was
used in a matter-of-fact manner to refer just to 'the population'. As I under-
stand it, *negeri* carried no particular emotive value. That was attached to
the institution or structure into which the people (the *isi negeri*) were built
– the *kerajaan*. The way in which *negeri* is used in royal letters is worth
noting here: a ruler was usually described as being (literally) 'on the throne
of a *kerajaan* located in a specific *negeri*'. Thus, in 1787 we see a letter
from Sultan Alauddin who is "on the throne of the *kerajaan* that is in the
negeri Perak" (Gallop 1994: 203; Marsden 1930: 137–151). He is not
described as 'the ruler of the *negeri* Perak'.

In such formulae and in other ways, *kerajaan* appears to be the key term
– and, as suggested in the previous chapter, it also strikes me as being
analogous to the term *kedatuan* in the Srivijaya inscriptions, written many
centuries earlier. Perhaps the comparative significance of the *negeri* and the
kerajaan is suggested most clearly in the Melaka-Johor chronicle (the *Malay
Annals*), in the way it handles the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese. The
event was clearly a serious blow for the ruling dynasty, but the chronicle
continues – tracing the moves of the sultans from one base to another. The
focus is always on the royal line and, as the dejected Sultan Mahmud was
told when he retreated from Bintan, there were always communities some-
where waiting for a raja. The raja–*rakyat* (ruler–subject) relationship is
the critical one in what might be called the *kerajaan* ideology – taking

'ideology' to mean a "system of ideas and values" or a "social set of representations" (Dumont 1992: 9, 279) – and court writings present it as a relationship benefiting both sides. Just as the ruler needs subjects (and material wealth is only a means to that end), so do subjects need a ruler. The perception that rajaship is essential is spelt out with particular clarity in the epic that is closely associated with the Melaka court, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. When a rich Indian merchant – who happens to live in a land without a raja – learns of the availability of a particular raja, he thinks to himself that it is "best that I expend my property to bring a *raja* to this land; because my property is very extensive, and the property of this world can have no use" (Kassim Ahmad 1968: 70).

The Raja

The raja as an institution, therefore, was an identifiable (and in a sense stable) element in the fluidity of the Archipelago world. The ruler is set apart from the rest of the community in various ways. Like other monarchs in the extensive Muslim world, he was the 'sultan' and often called the 'Shadow of Allah on Earth' and 'Caliph' (Milner 1981: 52). He was exceptional too in his manner of dress and accommodation, the use of a special language in conversing with him, and the stress on his descent through a male line – while the wider community was generally characterized by bilateral (or cognatic) descent, which gives importance to both genders and reduces the significance of genealogy. But what exactly did the raja offer the *rakyat*? The Indian merchant's comment suggests the ruler provided purpose or meaning – and there is an implication there as well of spiritual meaning. It is necessary to explore this type of 'insider' perspective – certainly if we want to go beyond obvious (and in some ways true) generalizations about providing (or not providing) law and order, and about the promotion of a 'false', compliant consciousness among the subject class.

The splendour of royal courts should not itself be underestimated: it would have conveyed the capacity of a ruler to extend patronage of many types. The awe-inspiring silk hangings in the Brunei audience hall have been noted. The Melaka chronicle describes the pride involved in building a magnificent wooden palace for Sultan Mansur Shah. It had seventeen bays, each interspace between the pillars being 18 feet, and the "pillars being in circumference the span of a man's arms". Having noted the decorative woodwork and the Chinese mirrors, the text concludes with the comment that "so fine was the workmanship . . . that not another royal palace in the world at that time could compare with it" (Winstedt 1938: 114). Much

later, in the eighteenth century, another chronicler praised a particular sultan of Perak for the fine palace he built, including the carvings of *naga* (snakes) on the roof, with water spouting through their mouths down to the bathing place below (Andaya 1979: 192–193). There are so few wooden structures surviving from the *kerajaan* polities that it is easy to overlook their architectural and artistic value. I have referred already to the wooden mosques, some reminiscent of earlier Indian-influenced structures. One fine old mosque (the Kampong Laut mosque) with a two-layered roof has been preserved in Kelantan, but most of the so-called old mosques in *kerajaan* centres on the Peninsula and Sumatra – usually domed, and no longer made of wood – are in fact products of the last century or so (Abdul Halim Nasir 2004: 120–132). Occasionally, European accounts of the region remark on the quality of pre-colonial building, noting for instance the "elegant lattice-work" in Perak houses (McNair 1972: 167–168) and the "shady inner rooms with their carved doorways and portieres of red silk" (Bird 1967: 297). In recent years there has been a burgeoning interest in the beautiful wood carving from earlier periods, and there have been exhibitions featuring prayer screens, calligraphic panels and Qur'an boxes. Qur'an themselves – richly decorated in a manner that may be inspired by wood carving – are also being displayed, and are attracting international admiration (de Guise 2005, 2006; Bennet 2006).

Textiles were undoubtedly a part of the splendour. Even in the nineteenth century these fabrics could be magnificent. In the case of Brunei an account published in the 1840s describes the audience hall as having walls "lined with a sort of cloth, and ornamented with shields"; the chiefs were "handsomely dressed in silks, satins and gold embroidery". The sultan was attired in a "loose jacket and trousers of purple satin, richly embroidered with gold, a close-fitting vest of gold cloth, and a light cloth turban on his head". In the sash around his waist "he wore a gold-headed kris of exquisite workmanship" (Marryat 1848: 108–109). In Siak in the 1820s (by which time the polity was already in serious decline), John Anderson found the audience hall "fitted up with elegant canopies of gold and silk cloths hung all around". He believed that "nothing can surpass the elegance and the richness" of some of the fabrics that were worn "by the king and his family". In Batu Bara (further up the coast), "the wives and daughters of the principal chiefs (were) most superbly dressed in their gold thread sarongs and salindangs (head scarfs)" (Anderson 1971: 165, 354, 131). Dress certainly expressed status. Seemingly minor variations in dress were known to be of much significance – something which Indian merchants had to come to terms with in the seventeenth century, when their potential Archipelago customers insisted not only on cloth of high quality but also on conformity

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Figure 4 Visiting the court of the sultan of Brunei, from Frank S. Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian Archipelago* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848). © British Library, London.

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Figure 5 A village in Perak, from J. F. A. McNair, *Perak and the Malays* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972; orig. pub. 1878).

to exact designs (Maznah 1996: 100, 81). The way a headcloth was tied might indicate whether the wearer was of noble or commoner status; in some regions it would convey whether someone was a fisherman, farmer or carpenter (Maxwell 1990: 307; Sheppard 1972: 110–113). Silk rather than cotton was another sign of rank, as in fact was the wearing of yellow or gold. The *pinding* or waist buckle was also significant: the ruler of Siak in the 1820s wore "a most magnificent *pinding*, set with brilliant diamonds of a large size" (Anderson 1971: 173). Rank was represented in such a *pinding* simply by the type of tiers it displayed (Sheppard 1972: 150).

Magnificent textiles must have reinforced the dignity of an individual as well as a court – but their significance may have gone further. The English axiom 'clothes do not make the man' alludes to the greater importance of an inner personal character. In the case of *kerajaan* communities, however, we sometimes gain the impression that external appearance and manner did have a fundamental significance. Even the accounts of outsiders occasionally convey that clothing had a meaning beyond its practical or aesthetic quality. John Anderson was so taken by the Siak ruler's attire that he imagined him to be "in fact like one beautiful sheet of embossed gold" (183). It comes as no surprise to learn (as described in a recent essay on the arts of Muslim Southeast Asia) that a sarong may be described structurally as having a 'body', 'head', 'teeth' and so forth; also "the ways in which textiles were worn reflected the wearer's personality", and to "be clothed properly" was to be "courteous and well mannered" (Dzul Haimi 2005: 22; Selvanayagam 1970: 45).

It is in the Malay writings of the sultanates – the *kerajaan* literature – that the person-defining role of clothing is presented with greatest clarity. In the midst of the description of a battle, for instance, the chronicle of the Pahang sultanate pauses to describe the raja entering the fray, flanked by his soldiers: dressed in "the costume of a warrior captain. He was awe-inspiring: he wore short tight Bugis trousers, a sleeveless jacket, a decorated fez, and a sword" (Milner 1982: 46–47). The way clothing communicates status is suggested when a text from Perak declares: "if (people) were rajas, they were given the clothes of a raja; if *orang besar* (chiefs), the clothes of an *orang besar*; if *hulubalang* (district officials), the clothes of *hulubalang*" (Andaya 1979: 192). When a person was promoted in the *kerajaan* hierarchy (so it is spelt out in court writings), he was granted a new set of clothes; in the installation of a chief it is always said that 'robes of honour' are bestowed, and bestowed by the ruler. Raiments, along with rank, flowed outward from the raja. Service to him – not just in a military expedition but even for participation in the building of a palace – was rewarded with robes of honour, and these robes immediately had implications for status (Andaya 1979: 196, 268, 287; Milner 1982: Ch. 6).

Status and Ceremony

Status – rank, reputation (the word often used was *nama*) – was assumed to be of vital importance, and was carefully regulated. Even on a fishing expedition in eighteenth-century Perak, "each person's place in the hierarchy and his social distance from the Sultan was publicly demonstrated by the clothes he wore, the place where he sat, and the order in which he was served with food or *sireh* (betel leaf)" (Andaya 1979: 187). Similar comments have been made about seating arrangements in the Brunei court (Brown 1970: 20–21; 1971). We cannot assume the presence of a longing for equality. Sumptuary laws – a prominent part of the custom (*adat*) of a polity – determined the type of clothes a person could wear, or the house he or she could live in, and there is plenty of evidence to show that these laws were taken seriously. A trenchant nineteenth-century critique (by Munshi Abdullah) of the sultanates and the '*kerajaan* system' claimed that the rajas were obsessed with sumptuary laws – about when an umbrella might be raised, shoes worn or yellow displayed – and that ordinary people were frustratingly willing to submit to them (Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir in Milner 2002: 18–19). The legal texts used in the *kerajaan* polities certainly gave priority to these laws. A law text from Melaka actually opens with a list of directions about the wearing of yellow, and notes that the punishment for disobedience could be death. In the Melaka-Johor chronicle, regulations about dress and housing are the first matters mentioned when the establishing of the new Muslim polity by Sultan Muhammad Shah is described; it was this ruler, says the text, who introduced the royal privilege of possessing enclosed verandahs (Milner 2002: 18–22).

Such priorities are not treated defensively in royal texts: there was obvious pride in having a well-regulated polity in which every individual – every *rakyat* – was given his or her place, and was treated (and behaved) in a manner appropriate to that place. Status was displayed in particular in court ceremony and rituals. In such events it was critical to be dressed and to behave appropriately, and also to be treated appropriately. Everyone had to be seated according to rank (*dengan taraf*). Not surprisingly, it was seen as a necessary accomplishment of kingship that ceremonies be well ordered. The word used to describe a raja's role in such seemingly festive events, in fact, was *kerja* ('work'). In one text a ruler is praised on the basis that the reputation (*nama*) of not one of his subjects was wronged (Milner 1982: 72). Even in modern times I have heard particular sultans of the past (in Sumatra and on the Peninsula) praised for knowing the names and status of everyone at an audience, and for treating each of them correctly. How

a ruler spoke and behaved toward *rakyat* was (and in some areas still is) critical. In a *kerajaan* text from Barus (northwest Sumatra), a ruler is complimented for his "soft and gentle" (*lemah lembut*) manners (Drakard 1990: 78). A Pahang raja is said to possess "refined (*halus*) and graceful (*manis*) speech"; he is "clever at capturing the hearts" of his followers (Milner 1982: 41). A chronicler praises an early eighteenth-century Perak prince for being "generous in all his words" (Andaya 1979: 162), In the Melaka-Johor chronicle, in a covenant agreed to by the founder of the Melaka ruling dynasty with his new subjects, the latter pledge never to commit treason (*derhaka*); but they request that they themselves should never be "reviled with evil words" (Winstedt 1938: 56–57; Brown 1952: 16).

The concern about appropriate language and behaviour – the stress on manners and form – characterized not only behaviour within a *kerajaan*, or sultanate, but also inter-polity (or rather, 'inter-raja') relations. Different polities were recognized as having their own customs (*adat*) (Milner 1982: Ch. 5; Drakard 1990: 120), but one also gets the sense of a regional, ceremonial framework. There were expectations about which ruler should pay visits on another, and not to fulfil such expectations was read as a sign of hostility (Winstedt 1938: 204–205). The clothing that was worn (and given as gifts), together with the manner of speech and deportment, all seem to have been well defined. *Kerajaan* texts are repetitive in the way they detail such matters. When a ruler's behaviour was not in accordance with such prescriptions, this is commented on – and sometimes a sense of danger is communicated. To take just one example, when the ruler of Aru courts the daughter of the former ruler of Melaka, Sultan Mahmud (by then based in Bintan) – with Aru's warships hovering around Bintan – the Aru sultan's manners seem to flout convention. For instance, he turns his back on Sultan Mahmud in his passion while watching a cock-fight. The Aru monarch even tears his own clothes in his anxiety about obtaining the princess. After he eventually succeeds, and returns to Aru, the text reports that he admits to his mother that the plate, bowl and trays of the Bintan court were superior to those of Aru (Winstedt 1938: 206–210).

The world of the Archipelago sultanates was by no means static – there was clearly competition between rulers, and sometimes the precedence of one ruler over another was determined by war. The dramatic expansion of Melaka in the fifteenth century, for instance, created the need for some redefinition of relations with the Thais – the "Raja of Siam", to whom (as the Melaka-Johor chronicle admits) "all rulers of the regions below the wind" had once been subject (Winstedt 1938: 93). The redefinition is also a reminder of the way the Archipelago monarchs engaged in a wider, regional system. As portrayed in the chronicle, it required some success in

battle on the part of Melaka, but also some prudent and carefully crafted diplomacy. The Melaka sultan ordered a letter to be written to the Thais that was "not a letter of obeisance, nor one of greetings, nor one of friendship", and then the letter was borne in procession to the Thai ruler (the procession being carefully described). The mission was a success and cordial relations were established, with a Thai mission bringing a return letter to Melaka, and the Melaka ruler sending back a further one of his own (having presented the Thai envoys with "robes of honour") (Winstedt 1938: 93–100). It has been argued that in the nineteenth century the tributary structure established between the Siam court and a number of Muslim rulers on the Peninsula – which included the ceremonial of sending 'gold and silver flowers' to the Thai ruler – was successful in maintaining a degree of stability, and without interference in the internal administration carried out by those rulers. The situation was transformed in the twentieth century when a more direct colonial rule was imposed by both the Siamese/Thai government and the British (Kobkua 1988). The ritual in inter-raja relations, so *kerajaan* texts indicate, must have helped to provide definition and predictability. As the anthropologist Ronald Provencher has suggested in the case of interpersonal relations within Malay communities, conformity to proper codes of behaviour – to specific "interactional routines" – can be "part of an efficient communication", especially between those of unequal status (1971: 206).

The *'Kerajaan* System'

Reading court (or *kerajaan*) literature, one begins to detect a type of civilizational logic – a key, perhaps, to interpreting much of the description of these seemingly ceremonial polities in foreign as well as Malay-language accounts. The sultan or raja was the lynchpin of this system – as the term *kerajaan* would suggest. Rank (and the associated 'reputation', *nama*) was determined in relation to him; it issued from him. The royal court offered opportunities to display rank, and making sure that this was done properly – that all the subjects of the ruler were treated appropriately, according to rank – was an aspect of the ruler's 'work'. The ruler himself had reason to satisfy his subjects' needs, because he needed subjects. The more *rakyat* he had, so *kerajaan* texts suggest, the higher his own status – his own *nama* – among other rulers (Milner 1982). (Recall the Melaka sultan sending a load of sago to China to suggest his own large population.) To appreciate better the importance of this *kerajaan* logic, however, requires spelling out some assumptions that appear to have been present in the court texts. The

communities we are dealing with do give a value to public status that is hard to imagine today. The royal literature implies a lack of concern for the individual consciousness and personality behind the public face; the stress is persistently on public recognition, or reputation. Details of dress, ceremony, manners, speech and other elements in the observance of custom (*adat*) had to be critically important in such a society – they signalled and protected one's *nama*; they secured the hierarchy within which each person's *nama* was secured. Hierarchy itself was valued, not denigrated. With such a stress on public presentation, a ruler might in a sense be encapsulated in the mind of a loyal subject as "one beautiful sheet of embossed gold". It was the institution or position that mattered – judgements made about individuals would focus on the appropriateness of dress, manners and speech because it was in these areas that an individual exhibited the capacity to occupy that position.

In a community of 'Public Men' – a phrase used by Richard Sennett in reference to such a sociological condition (1976) – to behave or be dressed inappropriately, to be seated in the wrong place or to be spoken to rudely will have a sharp significance. The ceremony of life mattered. To sum up the polity as a "theatre state" (Geertz 1980) does not capture this serious- ness, nor the logic underpinning the ceremony. Transgressions necessarily raised issues of personal identity and security; what today might be thought of as psychological damage. In such a community (to cite a 'Malay' maxim), it could well be felt that life was "contained within custom (*adat*)" (Maha- thir Mohamed n.d.: 44), or that it would be better to "let the child die but not the *adat*" (another well-known saying) (Hussin Mutalib 1990: 14). It is not surprising that "a general tendency in Malay storytelling" was to stress "convention, custom, and consciousness as opposed to individualism and nonconformism" (Derks 1994: 623).

When court texts declared that *adat* lay "in the hands of" a raja (Milner 1982: 75, 108) or was determined by or disseminated by a raja (Milner 1982: 41, 48, 50; Drakard 1990: 72, 119–120; Kassim Ahmad 1964: 40), they made a substantial claim: the status and reputation of the royal subject (the *rakyat*), and the rules by which that reputation was expressed and protected (the custom), were all grounded in the *kerajaan*. When royal documents treated the concept of 'treason' (*derhaka*) with horror, and royal courts punished it with utmost severity – and this extreme response to 'treason' was commented on by outsiders – we must at least acknowledge an element of consistency. Whatever the personal qualities of a particular ruler may have been, this *kerajaan* logic would suggest that the concept of removing the raja – the condition of an absence of kingship – conjured up fears of complete social (and psychological) anarchy. Thus, a Patani

chronicle describes a period in which that polity possessed no raja as one in which "customs and orders of procedure" no longer existed. It was a time of *huru hara*, or 'utter confusion' (or, perhaps, of 'an absence of meaning') (Milner 1982: 109).

There was one further and critical dimension to status, and therefore to the benefits that a sultan could offer his *rakyat*: the point is made in some *kerajaan* literature that "rank in this world is honoured in the next" (Milner 1982: 107). These exact words are used in one text from East Sumatra – a text that seems to have been written in part to explain *kerajaan* doctrines to people of Batak background, who were being drawn into the orbit of the sultan of Deli (Milner 1982: Ch. 5). And this view of the spiritual significance of status is at least implied in many other texts, including the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, when the Indian merchant sees no "use" for the "property of this world" in the absence of a raja. In the same text the protagonist (Hang Tuah) is made to remark 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 reputation (*nama*) which is good" (Kassim Ahmad 1968: 319). That *nama* had value in the afterlife as well as this one needs also to be recalled when we consider that a raja's own *nama* was raised by gaining more subjects. The maximization of *nama* was an understandable objective – and might be understood to have been an imperative determining the dynamics of regional, inter-raja relations.

The claim that spiritual wellbeing flowed from the interaction between raja and *rakyat* would eventually face determined Islamic criticism. But it is the case that formulations of the raja's religious role in *kerajaan* texts had been consistent with claims made for rulers elsewhere in the Muslim world. The phrase 'Shadow of God on Earth', for instance, was not just used in the Archipelago but widely employed. It was said of a ruler of Delhi in India that "He who obeys the Sultan obeys God" – just as the Melaka-Johor chronicle explains that the royal subject must give loyal service (*bakti*) to both God and the raja. The "just Raja and the Prophet of God", the chronicle states, "are like two jewels in one ring. . . . When you do *bakti* for the Prophet of God it is as if you do it for God himself" (Winstedt 1938: 144; Milner 1981: 53). The presence here of the Sanskrit *bakti*, of course, is also a reminder of continuities in the ruler–subject dynamic going right back to the seventh-century inscriptions of Srivijaya – to a great 'Maharaja' who tended to be presented as a *bodhisattva* rather than a 'Shadow of Allah'.

Seeking to answer the question 'what did the rajas offer?', I have drawn from court texts to identify an internal perspective on the *kerajaan*. Occasionally, elements of this *kerajaan* ideology – for instance, the stress on

ceremony and form – seem to be reflected in foreign accounts, and are not always accompanied by condemnation. A Chinese account of fourteenth-century Kelantan describes the people as "lovers of ceremony" (Wheatley 1966: 79). In the Kelantan court six centuries later, it was reported that "the natives of the higher rank sit near the chief, the next grade on a lower step and so on, decreasing until the common people sit on the ground"; an account from Trengganu in the 1870s notes there was "no hustling or pushing . . . everybody seems to be contented with the position he may have taken up" (Milner 1982: 49). European writers certainly commented on the politeness of the people: in the early eighteenth century, Valentijn called them "the politest people of the whole East" (1884: 520). In the middle of the nineteenth century Alfred Russel Wallace said the "higher classes of Malays" were in fact "exceedingly polite" (1962: 448). There were also complimentary remarks about the "sweet manners" of sultans and other members of the elite: in the 1820s John Anderson observed the "look of apparent sincerity, something expressive of kindness and attachment" with which he was treated by the ruler of Siak (1971: 174); and a ruler of Pahang (much praised for his charm in a Malay chronicle) was also noted among the British for his "softness of voice" and "refined manners" (Milner 1982: 44).

Rulers were often said to be treated with respect – at least as institutions. At a coronation in Brunei a British spectator was amazed at the "exhibition of loyalty and homage" of the crowds (Brown 1971: 75). At the opening of the nineteenth century another account remarks on the "high veneration for the authority of the prince" that was to be encountered "in all ancient Malay states" (Leyden 1968: 94). As to the attractiveness of royal titles, a later official was struck by the manner in which chiefs were not "content with the reality of power" but would "imperil it for the sake of obtaining empty titles" (Wilkinson 1971: 304).

The *Kerajaan* Critiqued

Attempting today to imagine an ideology developed in an earlier era has rewards in itself – expanding our experience of the possible range of social representations, or concepts of belonging. But we are inevitably suspicious about how such royal courts were perceived by the ordinary people of the time, and the extent to which commoners signed up to the *kerajaan* is difficult to assess. We have the reports of outsiders attesting to the attractiveness of 'empty titles' and to the way people pressed forward in homage at a royal ceremony. Other commoners may have attempted to distance

themselves from royal courts, keeping as much as possible to their own family or district (often river-based) communities, or might simply have been resigned to the sultanate as the only type of broader attachment and community they knew. It is these people who disappointed the early nineteenth-century reformer Munshi Abdullah – a man who lived in the British-governed settlements of Melaka and Pinang, knew personally many members of the educated British elite (including the extraordinary Thomas Stamford Raffles), and helped develop a new social and racial vision for 'the Malays'. When visiting Pahang, Abdullah asked people why they did not alter what he considered foolish and damaging customs (*adat*), and they answered that they feared even the wrath of dead rulers: "the magical power of the rajas of old" (Kassim Ahmad 1964: 40; Milner 2002: Ch. 1).

In thinking about the influence or otherwise of the *kerajaan* we know that individual rulers (or courts) were unpopular; and it is also likely that some people who claimed authority would have been considered to have done so on the basis of false genealogical or magical claims. As Ian Proudfoot has argued, there is no need to assume that commoners were gullible (2001). There is a deal of irreverent cynicism about royalty in Malay literature, including oral literature (Sweeney 1976; Braginsky 2004: 341, 381) – and this had to be a resource at least in the long term for nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideologues, as they brought about a "radical reversal of values" (Maier 1991: 71). The authors of court texts were themselves often well aware of the failings of individual sultans, and one of the purposes of their writings was to point out the qualities of a good ruler as a model for others. A central theme of the Melaka-Johor chronicle (the *Malay Annals*) is injustice, and the way unjust rulers can bring down their kingdoms (Cheah 1998: 111).

It was also common practice for subjects to abandon a ruler who was unjust – who behaved inappropriately – and move to a new polity. As John Gullick has expressed the situation: "flight was the final sanction against bad government" (1988: 43). It is a strategy acknowledged in court texts themselves (Milner 1982: 107), and we have seen how mobile ordinary people were in the Archipelago. Given the general desire for subjects on the part of rulers, it was unlikely to have been difficult to find homes elsewhere: recall again the welcome given to Patani people in Kedah. The capacity to migrate, though it could be devastating for an individual ruler, was also a mechanism that would have helped maintain the *kerajaan* as a system. Apart from its curbing effect on an individual ruler's behaviour, the fact that there was a multiplicity of polities allowed a discontented subject to take advantage of a range of options – and while still holding the position of 'a subject (*rakyat*) of a sultan'.

In the nineteenth century, however, the *kerajaan* system itself faced condemnation – and we will see that this came both from liberal critics, whose views reflected new attitudes to race and political economy developing in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and as a result of influential trends emerging in the international Islamic community.

In the next chapter I will examine the Islamic critique, and also the way new concepts of race could challenge both the hierarchies of the sultanates and the position of the ruler as the focus of community and identity. The condemnation from a political economy perspective – the rejection of '*kerajaan* economics' – arose first from the manner in which the royal courts viewed wealth not as an end itself, but as a means of acquiring followers or *rakyat*. A ruler certainly used material wealth to attract and support followers, and there was always the fear that others within the polity would do so, and thus become political rivals. The moment one of the ruler's subjects possessed a little money he would, in John Anderson's words, obtain 'as many attendants as he [could]', and thus become a possible threat. In the *kerajaan* it was considered essential that every subject 'know his place', and it was thus thought critical that the royal regime ensure that throughout the community material wealth (like everything else) was aligned with status in the hierarchy. When we learn that in Borneo "entrepreneurs" who were successfully engaged in the collection of jungle produce were given "titles and offices" and "strengthened the sultans' power base" (Rousseau 1990: 286), this would appear to have been one royal strategy for achieving such alignment. The wealthy subject was immediately incorporated in the hierarchy. Another royal strategy simply entailed depriving the wealthy of their property; this was likely to be viewed as an act of tyranny by Europeans, especially in the early 1800s when some colonial officials were vocal in wishing to promote an entrepreneurial spirit among commoners – an entrepreneurialism grounded in notions of the security of property. If the people "cultivate a lot of ground", complained one nineteenth-century Singapore newspaper, "as soon as it becomes productive it is sure to be claimed by some retainer of the native chiefs" (Milner 1982: 22; Keith 1980: 19). By *kerajaan* logic, however, even such aggressive methods to maintain the hierarchy could easily be justified (Milner 1982: Ch. 2).

The attitude to commerce on the part of the royal courts needs to be appreciated in order to understand the ideological contest that came later – but it also throws light on the *kerajaan* system in general. I have stressed the critical importance of trade, going back in time to written and archaeological evidence of two thousand years ago. The conclusion has sometimes been drawn (for instance, in a classic work by Syed Hussein Alatas) that "the Malays" had "a strong trading class" (1977: 189). The question must

be asked, however, whether this was an independent class. This is a difficult issue. It has been observed by Jaya Kathirithamby-Wells – in my view with good reason – that the polities of this 'golden age' were certainly "characterized by a prosperity based on commerce, but without the development of indigenous merchant capitalism" (Kathirithamby-Wells 1993; Meilink-Roelofsz 1962: 9). (We have already noted similar comments in our discussion of the occupations of commoners.) This is not to say that the rulers were opposed to commerce; quite the opposite, they often played a strong role in trade themselves – were called "the greatest merchants in their state" (Low 1848: 136) – and certainly welcomed foreign merchants to their ports. But the fact that they did not foster indigenous entrepreneurs is a theme in many reports on their polities (Milner 1982: Ch. 2). Kathirithamby-Wells adds that there is a contrast here with the situation on the Subcontinent – in Surat, Bengal and Coromandel – where such a local class did emerge; in Southeast Asia, she says, it was the "foreign entrepreneur" who had a "distinct advantage".

One reason for this "distinct advantage" was perhaps the particular commercial talents of Chinese and other foreigners; but it may have been precisely their foreignness that was most responsible for their success. The Chinese in particular, though in some instances seeming to integrate with local communities (Reid 2000: 7, 14), are generally portrayed as operating outside the system; in descriptions of *kerajaan* cities going back many centuries they are often represented as living in areas set apart – in a separate quarter. According to Governor Raffles, writing in the early 1800s, they formed "a kind of separate society in every place where they settle" (Raffles 1992; 73; Milner 2003: 16–17). In Trengganu, for instance, the part of the town "inhabited by Chinese" was said to possess an "appearance of regularity, the houses and shops forming a separate street"; in the "Malay" area the "habitations (were) all detached from each other" (Earl 1971: 184; Milner 2003: 16–17). In Patani the Chinese kept to "their Chinese laws and customs" (Nicholl 1975: 85). Similar comments were made about the Chinese as a separate community in Pontianak (Leyden 1968: 105–106). If they could keep physically and culturally outside the hierarchical logic of the *kerajaan*, it might be suggested, Chinese had relative freedom to accumulate wealth.

The insider (the *rakyat*), whose accumulation of wealth was immediately conceptualized as a political move, and a threat, could have no such freedom. Any engagement in substantial commerce on his part had to be on behalf of the ruler, or at least within the hierarchical structure of the polity – or so it would seem from reports on Trengganu, Kelantan, Kutei (in Borneo) and numerous other places (Dunmore 1973; Kassim Ahmad 1964: 45;

Magenda 1989: 114–115; Raffles 1992: 77). Visiting eighteenth-century Trengganu, a French officer noted that the sultan was "his kingdom's only merchant" (Dunmore 1973: 153). As Robert Pringle has explained in the case of the *kerajaan* elite in Brunei and Sarawak, "there was no clear-cut distinction in the traditional value system between political and commercial functions" (1970: 62). The nobility's control of trade "was a part of their control of territorial administration" (Brown 1970: 63; Walker 2002: 8–9). James Brooke had observed in the early nineteenth century that the "right of sailing a prahu (boat, ship, vessel) was formerly entirely in the hands of the Sultan" (Brown 1970: 26), and it has been explained that the word for ship's captain (*nakhoda*) tended to be used as a noble title (26). This lack of an independent merchant class – this differential treatment of local and foreigner – had a long-term impact. It can be seen to be a pre-colonial – a specifically *kerajaan* – contribution to the making of the 'plural society' of modern Malaysia, in which Chinese have tended to control the economy, and 'Malays' the political management (Milner 2003).

The consequences of '*kerajaan* economics' for future generations of 'Malay' communities have been profound. When Europeans saw people in these polities as possessing "no rights either of person or of property" (Clifford 1927: xi), this was in an important sense quite true. Equally, when Munshi Abdullah said that it was "useless to be energetic when it is certain that any profits will be grabbed by those higher up" (Kassim Ahmad 1964: 44–45), he was simply providing an utterly negative perspective on the same *kerajaan* ideology that was enunciated and celebrated in court texts – the maintenance by 'those higher up' of a hierarchy that they are likely to have believed offered benefits to all. But Abdullah was also pointing to a local heritage of ideas that would continue to exercise influence over the next two centuries, when attempts were being made in Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia and other places as well as Malaysia to create a 'Malay' capitalist class. The problem of this heritage was not that the sultanates were static, and promoted the habits of a 'lazy native', to quote from the title of Syed Hussein Alatas's book on this Orientalist distortion, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. The quest for status and reputation (*nama*) in the *kerajaan* was in its way a generator of action – but, together with a hierarchical system that stifled indigenous entrepreneurialism, it contributed to a heritage that still helps to determine the style of 'Malay' political and economic endeavour.

Criticism of the *kerajaan* assists in drawing attention to both its character and significance. In reviewing the seeming extreme fluidity of the Muslim Archipelago – with its many competing and often small polities, and mobile populations – I have suggested that the institution of the sultan or raja provided a type of stability. It was the lynchpin in a system or structure.

Exploring the social and religious logic of this *kerajaan* system, seeking to understand how and why it ordered society, and how it might be understood as a local formulation of Islamic community, we inevitably begin to think of a civilization, and one transcending individual sultanates. There are also indications, as I have suggested, that although the political structure of the region was highly fragmented, the many and often small polities operated within a broad code of inter-raja relations. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the *kerajaan* system certainly possessed prestige in the wider Southeast Asian region, and it proved attractive as well to many different pagan peoples who lived around the periphery of the Muslim sultanates. But the question that will most concern us is whether we should consider these sultanates to be exponents of a specifically 'Malay' civilization: to what extent in particular, to return to Ismail Hussein's description, do we encounter there a 'Malay consciousness'?

4

A 'Malay' or
Kerajaan World?

The issue of how to describe the Muslim polities we have been discussing
is important not only for its own sake, but also if we are to appreciate the
magnitude of what occurred during the era of colonial rule. That period,
beginning for most parts of the region in the early nineteenth century, was
in my view the critical time in 'the making of the Malays'. With respect to
the pre-colonial era, however, it will already be clear that the task of defin-
ing the communities or polities that operated then is not easy.

    First, the whole of the Muslim period, and even the centuries in which the
'empire of the Maharaja' was paramount, have been covered by a veil of
'Malayness'. Some of my own previous work – for instance, a book on *Malay
Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Milner 1982) – has contributed
to this problem. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a growing body
of scholarship in 'Malay studies' has not just focused on communities that
call themselves 'Malay': in many cases, peoples who only in relatively recent
times have identified as 'Malay' have also been drawn retrospectively into
the sphere of 'Malay history'. Patani, for instance, a sultanate that was
explicit in not calling itself 'Malay', has been presented as a 'Malay kingdom'
(Ibrahim Syukri 2005; Teeuw and Wyatt 1970; Annandale 1903). Treng-
ganu, Kelantan, Deli, Jambi, Brunei, Pontianak, Bulungan and numerous
other polities, as well as Palembang-Srivijaya and Melaka, have all been cast
as 'Malay'. Even such places as Aceh in north Sumatra – undoubtedly an
illustrious sultanate in the 1500s and 1600s – have sometimes been drawn
into the 'Malay' narrative, although they have not defined themselves in this
manner up to the present day. In Chapter 1 of this book I have questioned
the way in which the idea of 'Malay', or 'Melayu', has sometimes been por-
trayed as potent in human affairs in the centuries before colonial rule, at least
in the western Archipelago – sultanates being described as struggling with
one another to lead the 'Melayu', or to claim a 'Melayu' heritage.

Scholars have been influenced, in particular by early European writing about the region, in their use of 'Malay'. Considering – as I discussed in Chapter 1 – that the *lingua franca* and 'language of the learned' of these societies was often (though not always) called 'Malay', it is perhaps not surprising that 'Malay' was chosen as a general cover term for the polities and peoples. There were other commonalities as well that might have called for some collective descriptor, especially when Europeans were seeking to map a part of the world that was relatively new to them. Where a risk occurs, particularly from the perspective of writing today a book on 'the Malays', is in making assumptions about what 'Malay' meant to the people described. I think we must be careful not to take for granted that the category 'Malay' was as critically important in these earlier periods as it became later. At a later point I will focus on the very deliberate manner in which local, so-called 'nationalist writers' have sometimes deployed the term 'Malay' when writing of early kingdoms: in the case of Patani, the writing of a *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani* (Ibrahim Syukri 2005) in the late 1940s ought probably to be understood in the context of Patani's struggle to escape Thai domination, seeking support from 'Malays' across the border with Malaya. For the present, however, my concern is not with such explicitly ideological deploying of 'Malay'.

There have been warnings against making assumptions about what 'Malay' meant in the past as a concept of community and identity, and I for one wish I had listened more carefully. Ismail Hussein – presumably writing here as an historian rather than the distinguished ideologue – has suggested that "Malay awareness . . . perhaps never existed" in the "pre-colonial period"; and adds that "the term 'Melayu' was seldom used" (1990: 58). Geoffrey Benjamin has raised the issue of when it becomes possible to speak of "self-consciously 'Malay' states" (2002: 43). Also, in Robert Pringle's study of Sarawak there is the speculation that the term 'Malay' is "widely used in Sarawak today only because in 1841 James Brooke (the future 'Rajah' of the territory) brought it with him from Singapore" (1970: xviii–xix).

A Unified World?

Outsiders to the Archipelago would definitely have felt the need for a collective term to describe the communities that were eventually to assume a 'Malay' consciousness. We have already noted certain common features that these communities shared. What I have termed the '*kerajaan* system' appears to have been characteristic of this fluid region, where polities competed with

one another for subjects, trade and prestige. There are the Indian inheritances – the key vocabulary and concepts, the literature, the titles, the cosmological administrative structure and so forth – as well as the Islamic tradition, with its Sufi doctrines, royal titles and epithets, and wooden mosques with layered roofing. In terms of the structure of society, we have considered the bilateral kinship system, with its lack of stress on descent and the relative prominence which it gave to women. An indication of that prominence can perhaps be seen in sixteenth-century Brunei, in the way women "go in boats through the settlement selling articles necessary to maintain life" (Nicholl 1975: 10); and perhaps also in the defiance toward the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya on the part of a seventeenth-century Patani 'queen' (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 70) – and, as well, in the comment of an English official (who was not known for distributing praise) on "the powers of intelligent conversation, quickness in repartee, and a strong sense of humour" of 'Malay' women, especially "those of gentle birth" (Swettenham 1903: 8).

We have encountered variation and change across the 'Malay' Archipelago, and across time: large polities, small ones; some rising, others falling; the intervention of outsiders from both West and East; the often creative encounters with new spiritual or social doctrines. The differences should not be played down. In Borneo, for instance, there is the absence of the relatively substantial, rural, subject class that was characteristic of the Peninsular sultanates, and rulers in Borneo had to deal with the relatively large, up-river, non-Muslim population. Royal texts from around the Archipelago admitted that moving from one polity to another one encountered different customs (*adat*) (Milner 1982: 75; Drakard 1990: 120). In some cases contrasts between communities were expressed in mocking stereotypes. Pahang people tended to be called arrogant; Kelantan people were liable to be thieves (Clifford 1903: 16). The women of Kelantan were believed by people in other sultanates to behave with special freedom, engaging vigorously in public conversation and generally not veiled (Clifford 1903: 27; Annandale 1900: 521). With respect to language – at least spoken language – there were strongly contrasting Malay dialects: people from the west coast of the Peninsula even today find trouble communicating with those of Kelantan (and even more, of Patani) (Brown 1956; Fraser 1960: 15–16). Various Malay dialects in Borneo – for example, in Kutei and Banjar – bore the "imprint of the tongues of neighbouring speech communities" (Sellato 2006: 108). There are also well-established dialects on the east coast of Sumatra – that of Deli being not quite the same as that of Asahan, a little further to the south (Roolvink 1953). The Malay language of Barus, even in written texts, shows Minangkabau and some Batak influence (Drakard 1990: 61).

In these and other ways, variation was undeniably present among the sultanates – but it is the level of homogeneity that is truly striking and was generally commented upon by outsiders. The fifteenth-century report on the region by the Muslim Chinese, Ma Huan, observes that in Semudra in north Sumatra the "speech, writing, marriages, funerals, the dress which they wear, and other such things" were the same as those of Melaka (Mills 1970: 119). Adherence to Islam was always apparent: in Deli (East Sumatra), John Anderson remarked that at "each of the villages there is a place of worship", though often "of rude construction" (1971: 278). Such descriptions are found in the case of a multitude of sultanates across the Archipelago. The villages and towns themselves also displayed a certain consistency. A visitor to Trengganu in the 1830s concluded that "a description of the town and its inhabitants would with a few topographical alterations answer equally well for all the independent 'Malay' states on the Peninsula" (Earl 1971: 184). Similar comments were made about the 'Malays' of Pontianak (Leyden 1968: 105). In East Sumatra again, Anderson noted that "the dresses of all Malays are so much alike in almost all countries . . . that it is unnecessary to enter more at length on the subject" (Anderson 1965: 265–266).

Even when we go back to fifteenth-century Chinese reports there is mention of the sarong, the "short jacket of coloured cloth", and the "square kerchief" wrapped around the head (Mills 1970: 110). In sixteenth-century Brunei as well there are sarongs and a "turban" (Nicholl 1975: 87) – and so on over the next few centuries. Changes in fashion certainly occur – in the fourteenth century there were "black cotton sarongs" (Wheatley 1966: 79); in fifteenth-century Melaka people wore "a length of white cotton around their loins" (322); and in the nineteenth century tartan patterns were common (Marsden 1966: 50; Anderson 1971: 115; McNair 1972: 145; Maznah 1996: 88). Modest distinctions were present in one polity or another: in nineteenth-century Kelantan, the sarongs were shorter than those of Pahang (Annandale 1900: 521). Nevertheless, when one looks across vast distances and a span of centuries, what impresses most is that the same fundamental clothing structure seems to be described. Similar observations, as we have seen, can be made about housing styles. In Kelantan the houses tended to have steeply sloped and high roofs; carved wood panels were especially common in Patani, and fine wicker work in the walls of the houses of Perak (Lim 1987: 27, 33; Hilton 1956; McNair 1972: 168). But what we consistently encounter is houses built on pillars, well ventilated, often close to rivers, and arranged apart from one another so each had "plenty of room" (Clifford 1961: 89).

Other common cultural elements included the percussion-based *gamelan* music, the oboe-like *serunai* instrument, shadow play performances,

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Figure 6   Residence of a princess of Perak in the 1870s, at the time of British intervention, from J. F. A. McNair, *Perak and the Malays* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972; orig. pub. 1878).

pantun contests, the wavy-bladed *keris* and cock-fighting: one 1830s account of such an event remarks on the "animated looks and gestures" of spectators ready to gamble "everything they possess in the world" on the outcome (Newbold 1971, vol. 2: 181; Mohd. Ghouse Nasuruddin 1992). Performances of oral tales by *penglipor lara* (storytellers) were common – and these "minstrels" were likely to wander from one village to another "as Homer did among the Greek cities" (Maxwell 1886: 88), agents perhaps of a civilization that could transcend individual sultanates. There was also the reading aloud of *hikayat*, prose narratives which might often have had an educational function as well as possessing the capacity through the beauty of the language to sooth souls (Sweeney 1987: 76, 82; Koster 1997; Braginsky 2004). A 'Malay' audience considered a good story was one that was pleasing to both ear and intellect – composed "in a language that was indah-indah, sensitive to the musical sounds of the language" (Muhammad Haji Salleh 2006: 398; Matheson 1983). One nineteenth-century European account from Sumatra described a young man sitting "crossleg upon a mat, with a manuscript in his hand from

which he read aloud with a drawling monotone", pitching his voice "as
he read of love or war" and rocking his body – "as men and women,
youths and coolies, slid off their mats, and drawing near with swaying
heads, and moving hands, kept pace with limb and sympathetic look"
(Milner 1982: 4). Among the texts commonly read to audiences in this
manner were the legend of Alexander the Great (the *Hikayat Iskandar*);
the Melaka epic, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*; and the great Indian tale of the
Ramayana, the *Hikayat Seri Rama* (Sweeney 1987: 82; Milner 1982: 4–5,
38; Braginsky 2004: 332). In listening to such tales, people from Borneo
to Sumatra were participating in a culture, or civilization, which extended
well beyond their villages and small kingdoms.

The extent to which language itself was common to the future 'Malay'
polities should not be underestimated. Despite the existence of dialect dif-
ferences, the written language was remarkably uniform. In the words of
William Marsden, who received letters from all over the Archipelago as a
British official in west Sumatra in the eighteenth century, there was "a strik-
ing consistency in the style of writing, not only of books in prose and verse,
but also of epistolary correspondence" (1930: iii). Given his official duties,
Marsden took a particular interest in the standardized form of letter writing,
but there was also the commonality in literary works. Apart from the
prevalence of the tales of Alexander, Hang Tuah and Rama (and others),
one royal court after another – Melaka/Johor, Pasai, Kedah, Brunei, Patani,
Siak, Pahang, Deli, Kutei and many more – produced chronicles. Such
works were often written with both literary and ideological skill, and
addressed issues of governance and allegiance as well as genealogical claims
– and they have tended to be updated (or strategically revised) from time
to time, even over the last century. Some chronicles were first written down
only in the late 1800s. Apart from displaying similar purposes, and often
comparable strategies, certain of these texts present similar myths of origin
(for instance, founding princes or princesses emerging magically as babies
from bamboo). As we have observed, many of these court chronicles carried
components of the *kerajaan* system – an ideology which (as I have summed
it up) was structured around such key terms as *rakyat*, *nama*, *adat* and
kerajaan itself.

Prestige and Expansion

Although this ideology was to be condemned by Europeans and local
reformers, especially by the nineteenth century, it must be stressed that the
civilization of the sultanates was considered by many contemporaries to be

attractive. First, there were the important Muslim regional polities, Aceh and Minangkabau, that in later years tended not to identify as 'Malay' but possessed concepts of government (including royal and chiefly titles) and Malay-language writings comparable in many ways with that to be found, for instance, in Melaka and Johor (Andaya 2001a; Drakard 1999). In the eastern Archipelago, in south Sulawesi, literature was produced in Malay as well as the Makassar and Bugis languages (Vickers 1997: 196). More surprisingly, in seventeenth-century Cambodia – a polity renowned for its Buddhism – one king converted to Islam, took the name Ibrahim, married a Muslim, had his courtiers wear krisses and used the Malay language in correspondence (Collins n.d.: 18–20; Reid 1993: 189–190). During the same century, in Champa – a once powerful Indianized polity but by that time retreating before the advancing Vietnamese – the rulers held the title (so common in the *kerajaan* polities) of 'Paduka Seri Sultan' ('His Highness the Sultan'). These rulers were in close contact with the Peninsula, in particular Kelantan. French missionaries reported the presence in Champa of scribes and religious scholars from Kelantan right into the nineteenth century – Kelantanese who eventually helped to give the Cham struggle against the Vietnamese the character of a religious crusade (Wong 2004, 2006; Collins n.d.). Language was one aspect of the prestige of the sultanates – as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century comment about Malay (or Jawi) being a 'language of the learned' in Southeast Asia suggests. In the eighteenth century, the Dutch scholar François Valentijn's great survey of the Archipelago includes the observation that the Malay language was like "French and Latin in Europe", and "if you don't understand this language you are not considered a very broadly educated man in the east" (Milner 1982: 3).

Such observations on the influence of the Malay language and *kerajaan* concepts relate to the international – or, more precisely, inter-monarchical – context. At the local level, individual sultanates all over the Archipelago (usually based on rivers and often close to the coast) exercised sufficient attractiveness, or suasion, to foster a process of assimilation. This was not merely a matter of one ruler's number of subjects expanding at the expense of another – although this often occurred. These polities were also operating on a range of frontiers (in Sumatra, Borneo and the Peninsula) where non-Muslim peoples – in many cases up-country people – were gradually being brought into *kerajaan*: learning to speak the Malay language, adopting Islam, changing their customs and style of dress and assuming roles of one type or another within the expanding sultanates. The process would often have been a gradual one.

In an early example from eastern Sumatra, the fifteenth-century sultan of Aru is described in the Melaka-Johor chronicle as being of Batak origin –

and the way he is treated in that text suggests that, despite his military power, he was perceived to be lacking in sophistication. Also a Portuguese report noted that he was accused of being "not a true believer in Mohammed" (Milner, McKinnon and Tengku Luckman 1978). European observations on the same region from the nineteenth century suggest that people further upstream on the rivers of Deli – people who had long had a trading relationship with the coast, and were later called Karo Batak – were being incorporated into the Deli sultanate. Both European and Malay writings show them being tutored in the new culture, receiving *kerajaan* titles such as 'Orang Kaya Sri di Raja' as part of the process of 'conversion' (Milner 1982: 88). Similar developments were underway in Asahan, to the south, and on the Barus frontier in the northwest of Sumatra (Drakard 1990: 8–9) – entry to the new sphere entailing of course not only a change in manners and clothing styles, but also the adoption of the Islamic religion and the Malay language.

On the Peninsula the population of Patani, for instance, has been described as partly Aboriginal in origin (Ibrahim Syukri 2005: 18). In the case of Johor, we know that Aboriginal people who were reported in the nineteenth century to be speaking Aslian languages (of the Mon-Khmer division of the Austroasiatic language family, and not related to Malay) were called 'Malay' a century later. Benjamin has suggested that these people would probably have joined the Jakun (Austronesian-speaking Aborigines) before 'becoming Malay'. The Jakuns are described as being similar to 'Malays' in their kinship arrangements, but resistant to aspects of social structure as well as the Islamic religion of the 'Malays' (Benjamin 2006: 4–6, 26–27). Leonard Andaya has reminded us that change might also move in the opposite direction. He draws attention to a report from the beginning of the twentieth century of 'Malays' in the Kuala Lumpur area sometimes going into the jungle and becoming "members of the Sakai (Orang Asli) (or Aboriginal) group" (2002: 42). The apparent ease of such transitions is illustrated in a *kerajaan* text (the *Hikayat Deli*) from East Sumatra. In an account of the eventual conquest of Portuguese Melaka, the Portuguese are described as fleeing to the jungle. There they change their "customs, language and clothes" and become Jakun (Milner 1982: 89).

In the Brunei *kerajaan* in northern Borneo, many of the Muslim *rakyat* of the sultan were converts from local Dayak groups (Brown 1970: 53; Leake 1990: 97). In Sarawak and northern Borneo (today called Sabah) – where the Brunei sultanate and (by the eighteenth century) the Sulu sultanate were collecting products for China and other markets, and establishing

a fairly loose, river-based governmental presence – acculturation had also taken place. Dayak chiefs were incorporated into the Brunei hierarchy, being given *kerajaan* titles such as *datuk* and *orang kaya*. What had once been independent villages were gradually built into wider units, and their leaders co-opted into the hierarchy of the polity. In writing about Sarawak, Tom Harrisson observed that many 'non-Malays' would be amazed to learn the "degree to which the present Malay population derives from the local native sources", and among the latter he stressed "Sea and Land Dayak" (1970: 156, 159). In the Sabah region of Borneo – where the Sulu sultanate operated an even looser control than Brunei tended to impose – there was considerable intermarriage between pagans and Suluk or Bajau (also Muslim), with eventual conversion to Islam (Ranjit Singh 2003: Chs 3 and 4). In eastern Borneo, the 'Bulungan Malays' appear to be of Kayan (Dayak) origin (Rousseau 1990: 283); also, the Kutei sultanate, which had long traded with Dayak people – for instance, exchanging salt for forest products – was bestowing such *kerajaan* titles as 'Temenggong' on Dayak chiefs in the nineteenth century, and eventually converting Dayaks to Islam, drawing them further into the sultanate (Magenda 1989: 128). Further down the coast, the Pasir polity had extended its influence into the Barito-speaking Dayak, and some of these people became Muslim and were eventually referred to as 'Pasir Malays' (King 1993: 54). In southern Borneo the Banjarmasin sultanate had been pushing inland since the seventeenth century, bringing Dayaks into its Muslim culture (King 1993: 121, 125; Miles 1976: Ch. 8). In the west, the development of such sultanates as Sambas, Sukadana and Landak tells a similar tale of recruitment among Dayak people.

In surveying such cases of cultural or what some would call ethnic transition, Victor King has warned that we must not assume that coercion played the key role: some Dayaks, he says, "placed themselves voluntarily" under the rulers, perhaps "hoping to ensure protection against other hostile Dayaks" (1993: 130). He indicates the often slow pace of incorporation – one Dayak group or another beginning to speak Malay, sometimes converting to Islam, changing from a longhouse mode of living to a 'Malay' single-family dwelling, and adopting 'Malay dress' (130–132; also Rousseau 1990: Ch. 12). In the case of Dayaks in the Upper Kapuas region of west Kalimantan, conversion to Islam might not "result in an individual immediately becoming Malay", and even in later generations "certain Dayak cultural traits may be retained" (King 1979: 41). In discussing the attractiveness of the new civilization to the Iban in Sarawak, Robert Pringle has warned not to underestimate the degree of sophistication Muslim aristocrats might have projected. Among other things, these aristocrats "basked

in the reflected mystique of a literate culture" (1970: 62). As I have sug-
gested above, however, the *kerajaan* political culture or civilization also
possessed a form or a logic that could be communicated – something that
must be an essential element in any process of acculturation, including what
is often termed 'Malayization'.

An examination of the spread of the *kerajaan* culture should not neglect
the Philippines – where things may have developed differently only because
of the Spanish conquest. There is no doubt about the influence of the Brunei
sultanate in the Luzon region before Spanish rule. In 1521 the ruler there
was a grandson of a former ruler of Brunei (Nicholl 1975: 10, 13); and
"Borneans" were described as introducing Islam to "the natives of Balayan,
Manila, Mindoro, (and) Bonbon" (44); a further account declared that the
"Borneans" and the people of Luzon had become "almost one people"
(Cortesao 1990: 134), and their clothing styles and "ceremonies and
customs" were certainly similar (Salazar 1998: 112). When the Magellan
expedition visited the Philippines islands, the Malay language was used for
communication, and linguistic research has revealed the extent to which
Malay had become a "prestige language". This is partly evidenced by the
fact that key terms from the *kerajaan* system entered local languages. These
include titles such as *datu* and *laksamana*, and the words for 'rank' (*pangkat*),
'sitting legs crossed' (*bersila*) (recall this term being used in an early Arabic
account of Srivijaya), 'treason' (*derhaka*), 'magical formula' (*mantra*) and
'story' (*hikayat*) (Wolff 1976).

'Malay'?

Such a process of civilizational expansion – drawing a wide range of indig-
enous peoples into the Muslim, Malay-speaking polities of the Archipelago,
and even influencing sections of the elites of mainland Southeast Asian
polities usually noted for their Buddhist credentials – would seem to con-
stitute a development of historic significance. Some historians – and I am
one of them – have described this absorption of previously non-Muslim
peoples as 'Malayization', as 'becoming Malay' (Milner 1982; King 1993;
Harrisson 1970; Drakard 1990; and many more). From the nineteenth
century, some Malay writings (including *kerajaan* texts) also use language
of this type. But apart from the problem of whether we are talking here
about a change in ethnicity or a change in culture or civilization – a problem
to which we will return in a later chapter – it is not clear at what point the
people concerned actually employed the concept 'Malay'. It may be true
today, as Jerome Rousseau puts it, that "in Borneo, a Malay is a Muslim

who speaks a Malay dialect" (1990: 13), and that the process of religious conversion among Dayaks is commonly referred to as *masuk Melayu* ('to become Malay') (King 1993: 31). But for how long has this been the case? In Kutei, Dayak who became Muslims (often after trading with and sometimes marrying Muslims) were said to "become Kutei" (Bullinger 2006: 12, 38). In what is now the Sabah region of northern Borneo – in areas where Brunei and Sulu influence was spreading in pre-colonial times – the word 'Malay' was not employed. People who were originally of Kadazan or Dusun descent, and who entered the Brunei or Sulu spheres and became Muslim, called themselves not 'Malay' but 'Bisaya', 'Kadayan' or 'Orang Sungai' (Ranjit Singh 2003: 13). As Pringle has explained, the term 'Malay' does tend to be used in Sarawak, but this is because it was a classification introduced there by the nineteenth-century Brooke administration – in contrast to the practice of the British North Borneo Company, which governed the Sabah region. If a 'Brunei' from Sabah moves to Sarawak, says Pringle, "he would instantly be a 'Malay' in Sarawak terminology" (1970: xix). The Dayak peoples themselves, it should be added, did not use the term 'Malay'. According to Pringle, "the common Iban word for a Malay person has been '*Laut*', from the Malay word for 'sea'" (45–46). In central Borneo Rousseau has reported that the term 'Halo' "refers to non-Dayak in general", but "in practice it applies primarily to Malays" (1990: 282). On the Peninsula, as Leonard Andaya has pointed out, Orang Asli tales used the word 'Gop' when referring to the 'Malays' (2002: 39). Among the Karo Bataks of eastern Sumatra, 'becoming Malay' was actually referred to as 'Jawiken' – presumably 'becoming Jawi' (Kipp 1996: 29).

Such conflict in terminology brings us back to the larger question of how to describe the 'golden age'. Although there was a degree of civilizational homogeneity across much of the Archipelago – Islamic, Malay-speaking and structured around *kerajaan* polities – how appropriate is it in fact to use the term 'Malay'? The problem is made more complex when we consider the sources we rely on to draw conclusions. The writings of outsiders to the region – Europeans, Chinese and others – can certainly be helpful, especially when they report statements and perceptions from the region itself. But in many instances what one encounters are the categories or classifications which such outsiders develop for their own convenience, and these may or may not represent local perspectives. The fact that the word 'Malay' was employed in so many different ways by outsiders ought immediately to arouse suspicion.

We have seen how 'Malayu' was used in the seventh century initially with reference to the Jambi region in Sumatra – where there is a small river called 'Melayu' – and how the Javanese in the fourteenth century referred to

Sumatra in general as 'Malayu', just as they called the Peninsula 'Pahang'. I asked whether this usage might simply have reflected the dominance of 'Malayu' (which by then appears to have been centred further inland) in Sumatra, following the decline of Srivijaya. The most detailed sixteenth-century Portuguese account (by Tome Pires) – supposedly written soon after the conquest of Melaka – is relatively specific in the way it applies the term 'Malay'. It still uses 'Malay' in reference to regions of East Sumatra – Jambi, Siak, Kampar and areas near Palembang – which seems to reflect the pre-Melaka history (and to some extent fourteenth-century Javanese perceptions). With respect to the Peninsula, the Pires account speaks only of Melaka and polities close by (such as Perak) as 'Malay'; it does not use the word when dealing with Pahang or Kedah, or with Pasai or Aru on Sumatra. In discussing the traders at the port of Melaka, Pires separates out 'men of Pahang', 'men of Kedah', 'men of Brunei', 'Siak', 'Aru' and 'Pase' (along with 'Cambodia', 'Siamese' and 'Moors from Cairo'): he does not gather them together as 'Malays' (Cortesao 1990: 106–107, 142–154, 260–263, 268). The explicit Melaka/Melayu link is demonstrated very clearly in another European source of the early sixteenth century – the Magellan expedition word-list which, as has been pointed out already in Chapter 2, defines *cara Melayu* (the 'ways of Melayu') as the 'ways of Melaka'. Because the expedition only visited the eastern Archipelago, we can assume that its definition of *cara Melayu* reflected perceptions there. 'Melayu' had a quite specific, western Archipelago meaning.

During the sixteenth century the Portuguese increasingly associated 'Malay' with the Peninsula rather than East Sumatra, just as might be expected if we assume a special connection between 'Malays' and that dynasty which migrated across the Straits (Mills 1997: 31; Milner 2003: 5). The topic would benefit from detailed archival research, but my impression on the basis of published sources is that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'Malay' was used far more liberally in European writings. In the early 1600s Dutch traders and officials were applying 'Malay' as a general category, along with 'Javanese' and 'Makassarese' (Coolhaas 1953) – and later that century the Dutch conquerors of the port state of Makassar (in Sulawesi) seem to have included people of 'Banjarmasin', 'Bugis', 'Minangkabau', 'Sumbawa' and 'Javanese' background when writing of 'Malays'. One suggestion of this loose terminology is a reference made to "that untrustworthy Malay rabble" (Sutherland 2001: 402, 399, 401). Both Dutch and English accounts included all of the Peninsular polities as 'Malay' (Valentijn 1724: 317–318; Bowrey 1903: 266), and in the first years of the eighteenth century the ship's captain, Alexander Hamilton, said the "Natives

Figure 7   The remote port of Tanjong Tiram, on the east coast of Sumatra, in the 1990s. Photograph: Claire Milner.

of the Island" of Sumatra were also "Malayas" (Hamilton 1930). At the opening of the nineteenth century John Leyden referred to Pontianak and other Muslim polities in Borneo as "Malay states", but then went on to point out that "in the town and bounds of Pontiana" the population included only 3,000 "Malays", along with "1,000 Bugis, 100 Arabs, and about 10,000 Chinese". The father of the man who founded this "Malay sultanate" in 1770 was "a native of Arabia" (1968: 101, 105). The French over a long period used 'Malais' in Indochina to refer not only to people from Archipelago backgrounds but also to the Cham (admittedly part of the Austronesian language family) of Vietnam and Cambodia (Collins n.d.: 44; Ner 1937). It is in the eighteenth century as well that Chinese texts apply 'Malay' in a broad way, certainly for people right up the Peninsula to Ligor and Songkhla (Cushman and Milner 1979: 8).

An indication of the freedom with which 'Malay' was used by the British is to be encountered at the end of the eighteenth century in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). When the British took over the administration of Ceylon from the Dutch in 1795, they chose 'Malay' to describe the varied community there

with origins in the Archipelago. The community was diverse, but the Tamils of the island used the phrase 'people from Java', just as the late eighteenth-century Dutch generally referred to its members as 'Javaans'. People from Java do appear to have been the dominant element among them (Hussainmiya 1986: 131–132; 1987: 53–61, 80; Saldin 1996: 6; Vickers 1997: 189). The 'Cape Malays' were an even more diverse group. One account of the 1860s explained that "the term 'Malay' is . . . locally applied to all Mahometans. These include Arabs, Mozambique prize-negroes, Hottentots and Christian perverts" (Mayson 1861: 15). A later report stressed the Javanese, Arab, Indian and Ceylonese elements in the community (du Plessis 1946: 1; Lyon 1983).

Presumably, one reason the British used the name 'Malay' for the people of the Ceylon and Cape communities would have been their common use of Malay, at least as a second language – although people from the Archipelago found the Sri Lanka Malay hard to understand, and the language began not to be employed at all in the South African case during the nineteenth century (Hussainmiya 1987: 56; Saldin 1996: 55–56; Lyon 1983: 21–23). The point that needs stressing – as Hussainmiya has done in the Sri Lanka case – is that 'Malay' was not used with respect to the people's "ethnic or racial origins" (58). The very small 'Malay' community of the Cocos-Keeling Islands (located in the Indian Ocean and incorporated in Australia in 1984) provides a third case of this broad British use of 'Malay': it is said to consist of people from diverse Archipelago backgrounds, including Bali, Bima, Madura, the Moluccas and Banjarmasin. These people also speak a dialect of Malay that is hard for many other 'Malays' to follow (Bunce 1988: 43).

Drawing conclusions from this liberal use of the word 'Malay' is difficult. How much does it tell us about self-definition among the people described? Can we see here evidence of a rising trans-sultanate ethnic consciousness – what Heather Sutherland has described as a "supra-local or transcendent identity" (2001: 419)? Understandably, there is debate among scholars over these matters. Anthony Reid has suggested that an important development had taken place following the Melaka conquest of 1511. A diaspora of merchants of "wonderfully mixed ethnic origins" left Melaka after that time and spread throughout Southeast Asia in "their quest for entrepots sympathetic to their trade": this diaspora ("at least its Muslim majority") then "became simply Malays" (Reid 2001: 300). The idea that such a change occurred in the structure of commerce in the region makes good sense; and, as we have seen, 'Malay' was certainly employed by Europeans in many situations, including in the recording of trade movements. But I cannot help being cautious in drawing conclusions about the development of

trans-Archipelago 'Malayness' at this time. Just because Europeans made use of 'Malay' as a classifier does not mean that their vocabulary reflected the consciousness of the people themselves. Even if people called 'Malay' by Europeans began to use the word themselves, what would this tell us? At what stage can we begin to speak of a changing consciousness rather than the pragmatic acceptance of the categories of the powerful – perhaps a European port official in Melaka or Batavia?

We know so little about many of the people who were categorized as 'Malay'. In shipping records from late eighteenth-century Javanese ports, for instance, all that is given is "names, ethnicity and place of residence" (Knaap 1996: 62). Anxiety about the degree to which European classifications represent 'Malay' self-perceptions must also be strengthened by the fact that there is such imprecision in the way Europeans applied 'Malay'. As Anthony Reid has pointed out, sometimes "all the Malay-speaking Muslims" from "Sumatra, Borneo and the Peninsula" were called "Malay"; in other situations more care seems to have been taken to distinguish between 'Malays', on the one hand, and 'Javanese', 'Bugis-Makassar', 'Balinese', 'Madurese' and 'Arabs', on the other (Reid 2001: 301–302; Knaap 1996: 209). The Dutch scholar H. C. Klinkert, even in the nineteenth century, felt relaxed about writing of buying a manuscript from "that Malay Christian" (Putten 1997: 722). The casualness here in bandying about the category 'Malay' is evoked, as I have said, by the Dutch condemnation of 'that untrustworthy Malay rabble', and the British use of the 'Malay' label in Ceylon.

In regard to the precision or otherwise of the language in these European sources, a specialist on Dutch archival materials (Peter Borschberg) has warned that it is imperative to make a distinction between relatively formal and relatively informal documents. In more formal documents – relating, for instance, to treaties, legal disputes and hostage taking – Borschberg considers care would have been taken about language, particularly about the precise terminology that was preferred by the 'Malay' principals concerned. His impression is that in these formal documents the word 'Malay' was not used (Milner 2003: 6–7). Where we might also expect to find more precision in the application of 'Malay' is in scholarly writings beginning in the late eighteenth century – a period in which much thought was given to classification in general. The concept-building taking place then was critical in the 'making of the Malay race'. But certain comments from that period on the attitudes of 'the Malays' themselves add to the reasons for caution. I have already cited (in Chapter 1) William Marsden's comment from west Sumatra in the eighteenth century, that in the many Malay letters he received people very rarely called themselves 'Malay'. He also made an

observation on European informal classification practices. The name 'Malay', he said, was "bestowed by Europeans upon all who resemble them in features and complexion" (Marsden 1811: 325). His own use of the term was certainly more precise. In the dictionary of the Malay language he compiled, Marsden stressed the Johor focus of 'Melayu', defining the word not just as 'Malay' but as 'people of Johor' (Marsden 1812: 330).

A further reason for being careful about how much we read into European classifications arises, of course, from what we know of the terms other peoples used to describe 'the Malays'. I have noted already the use of 'Laut', 'Halo', 'Gop' and 'Jawi'. The last, 'Jawi', is encountered not just in East Sumatra but in many regions. In Cambodia, for instance, a part of the Muslim community has long been referred to as 'Chvea', which would seem to come from the word 'Jawah': these people tend to stress their connection with Patani, where the people over a long period have often been referred to as 'Jawah' or 'Jawi' (rather than 'Malay') (Collins n.d.: 57; Hamilton 2000: 11). In Cambodia, it has been observed, the term 'Chvea' can "encompass the entire Malay community regardless of place of origin, whether the island of Jawa, the various islands of the Malay Archipelago, or the different states on the Peninsula" (Mohamad Zain 2001: 2). In Sri Lanka the co-called 'Malays' were referred to as 'Ja Minissu' by the Sinhalese (Saldin 1996: 6).

'Malay' in Malay Writings

Do indigenous writings tell us more about how the people of the Muslim 'Malay' polities defined themselves in the period before the imposition of colonial rule in the nineteenth century? Local sources, as noted in Chapter 1, also have problems – especially because they tend to survive only in quite recent form. Even when we assume a Malay-language text was first written down in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, it tends to be available today only in nineteenth-century manuscripts. The problem here is that copyists of such manuscripts are well known to have made changes of various types as they worked (Voorhoeve 1964; Milner 1982: 65). It has been said of the Melaka-Johor chronicle (the *Malay Annals*), for instance, that it is "probably the work of many hands, which kept improving, revising and fine tuning it" (Cheah 1998: 121). Even in preparing the text in 1829 for printing, a Christian missionary commenting on the process noted that "what was superficial has been expunged and that which was deficient has been supplied" (Milner 1980: 113). We cannot be sure, therefore, whether the concept of 'Malay' was introduced or enhanced in later recensions of

a text, giving a false impression of its role in the period supposedly being portrayed. To take just one example, there is a possibly significant difference in wording between two manuscripts of the *Malay Annals*. When a critical agreement between the founder of the dynasty and a local chief in Palembang is described, the earlier manuscript has the chief referring to "my descendants"; the later manuscript calls the same people 'Malay subjects' (*hamba Melayu*) (Winstedt 1938: 57; A. Samad Ahmad 1983: 24). What might have occurred here is that the later copyist – working in a new context – sought to highlight the 'Malayness' of the situation. In time (as has already been pointed out), the whole text was given a powerful 'Malay' flavour when the title was changed (through European influence) from *Genealogy of the Rajas* to the *Malay Annals* or *Sejarah Melayu*. In similar fashion, a text focused on the monarchy of eighteenth-century Perak, and originally bearing the title 'Hikayat ('story') of the late Sultan Iskandar', acquired in the nineteenth century the title *Misa Melayu* (Matheson 1979: 354).

There are many other instances in which we could ask similarly searching questions about court writings. Consider a narrative about the sultanate of Deli – a narrative contained in an early twentieth-century manuscript – that speaks confidently about Sambas (Borneo) and Kelantan as 'Malay' polities, and does so with reference to the seventeenth century. Can we draw conclusions from this narrative about the scope of a 'Malay world' that existed in that century? Might an earlier copy or edition of this Deli text have used different concepts (Milner 1982)? When a text from Barus – copied in 1872 – speaks crisply of 'Malays' and 'Bataks' in recounting the earlier history of Barus rulers, can we assume these categories were equally sharp a century and more earlier, or may identities have been more 'fuzzy', to use a word Dipesh Chakrabarty favours in writing of communities in pre-British India (2002)? Could this particular manuscript be a recasting of an earlier narrative (Drakard 1990: 53, 92, 155)?

With these cautionary comments in mind, what can we learn from Malay-language sources about the significance of 'Melayu' to the people themselves? Virginia Matheson Hooker has written helpfully on this subject. She suggests that in the Melaka-Johor chronicle (the *Malay Annals*), the term 'Melayu' was "reserved exclusively for those descended from Sumatran-Palembang forebears, and thus were close to the siGuntang-Melayu dynasty" (Matheson 1979: 360). This is the dynasty I have referred to as Srivijaya/Melaka/Johor, and the people she mentions would be subjects of these rulers, who travelled with them from Sumatra to the Peninsula. The other great Melaka text, the epic *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, seems to adopt a view consistent with the *Malay Annals* in that those places called 'Malay' in the text are associated with the Melaka court, at least in the sense that they

send tribute to the Melaka ruler. Brunei, for instance, is clearly not considered 'Malay' (Matheson 1979: 361, 369). If we turn to texts outside the Melaka/Johor sphere – texts which have strong claims to authorship well before the nineteenth century – there is some corroboration of the identification of 'Malay' with Melaka/Johor. The *Hikayat Patani* does not refer to Patani or Brunei as 'Malay': it uses the word 'Melayu' only once, and then in reference to Johor (Matheson 1979: 369). The Kedah chronicle also does not refer to Kedah as 'Malay' (Matheson 1979: 362). The Acehnese text the *Hikayat Aceh* – which is rare in being available in an early (seventeenth-century) manuscript – makes a clear link between 'Johor' and 'Malay' – but does not refer to Aceh itself, or Deli, as 'Malay' (Teuku Iskandar 1958: 153). In general, as Henk Maier has commented, "the word 'Malay' rarely occurs in manuscripts" – a fact he describes as "telling" (1997: 676).

It is in the Malay writings that appear to be actually composed in the nineteenth century that we find 'Malay' employed far more liberally – in a manner much closer to the generalized usage that is encountered in many European commentaries over the previous two or three centuries. This is the case with *kerajaan* texts – for example, in the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* from Riau (Matheson 1979: 369), the chronicles from Deli and Barus (mentioned above) and the Pahang royal narrative, the *Hikayat Pahang* (Milner 1982). The 'Melayu' are certainly presented as a trans-*kerajaan* community in Munshi Abdullah's radical writings of the first half of the nineteenth century. In all these texts we see an expansion of the use of 'Melayu' – and this does provide good grounds for concluding that it is an expansion going on in the minds of the people themselves. Here I think we do encounter episodes in the making of the 'Malay race' – but we will come to this in due course.

In concluding that before the nineteenth century Malay writings tend to present 'Malay' as a category associated (though sometimes rather loosely) with the Melaka/Johor sultanates, one further and important observation needs to be made. If it was the case (as I suppose) that in Sumatra the term 'Melayu' originally just referred to 'the people of the river Melayu' – just as *orang Pahang* or *orang Sarapat* were expressions used to identify people from those rivers – then my impression is that 'Melayu' seems to have begun to acquire added meanings, at least in Melaka times. The court writings of Melaka/Johor definitely give the impression of a developing 'Malay' style – mentioning 'Malay customs and ceremonial', 'Malay music', 'Malay dress' and 'Malay dance'. There is a suggestion in this Melaka-Johor writing of a 'Malay' civilizational pattern – a manner of behaviour and a body of custom which was capable of being communicated to others. The potential for transferability of such 'Malayness' is also conveyed, particularly in an anecdote related in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. When the courtier and warrior

Hang Tuah goes to Inderapura – the location of which is uncertain but appears to be not far from Melaka (Md. Salleh Yaapar 2005) – he is told that the people of the place are only 'hybrid', not 'real' Malays, and that the 'real Malays' were in Melaka. He replies that the Melaka people themselves are 'hybrid Malays' because they are 'mixed with the Javanese of Majapahit'. Later, one of the Inderapura group refers to 'playing relatives' (*bermain adik-beradik*) with Hang Tuah (Maier 1997). What I think is being made clear here is that 'Malayness' is not grounded in descent – not something restricted to real kin, or to 'unmixed' groups of people. Whatever it may have meant in earlier times, it was now something like a civilization – something which can be seen to have at least the potential to be acquired by others.

At what stage the term 'Melayu' gained such a 'cultural' meaning is difficult to determine. Recall that the Melaka texts exist only in relatively recent manuscripts, which may incorporate considerable 'upgrading'. But the early sixteenth-century Magellan word-list does provide a hint that 'Malay' already possessed 'civilizational' or 'cultural' connotations. The phrase *cara Melayu* – the 'ways of the Malays' or the 'ways of Melaka' – not only locates 'Malay' firmly in Melaka, it also confirms that in Melaka by this time 'Malay' had begun to mean a style and not merely a people, and that this style was known about even in the western Archipelago. A second question is whether the Melaka/Johor situation was unique or unusual: it was, after all, a common feature of *kerajaan* to engage in a form of cultural absorption. We have seen that all over the Archipelago different *kerajaan* had shown a capacity for incorporating people on the periphery – drawing Dayaks, Bataks, Orang Asli and others into their hierarchical structures, spreading the Malay language among them and (at least since the fourteenth century) converting them to Islam. Had there been many different civilizational styles: Patani, Brunei, Deli, Kutei . . .? When a fourteenth-century Javanese account referred to the whole Peninsula as 'Pahang', could this suggest that many centres around the Peninsula at that time were being drawn into 'the ways of Pahang'? The novelty in the Melaka/Johor case would in this case lie most of all in the breadth of influence it eventually achieved – something due to many factors, including (one supposes) the ideological and rhetorical skill with which it was communicated.

What we are able to conclude from the Malay writings (at least in my view) is therefore: firstly, that the idea of 'Malay' possessed a strong Melaka/Johor focus up to the nineteenth century; secondly, that to be a 'Malay' was not something ultimately defined by a claim to common descent; thirdly, that 'Malay' had begun to refer to a civilizational style as well as a people; and fourthly, that this style was something that had the potential

to be communicated to outsiders, who might as a result be incorporated in the 'Malay' community. In retrospect, 'Malay' was already a concept that could, when the Europeans began to revolutionize people-gathering concepts across the Archipelago and the world in general, be the basis of a new, trans-*kerajaan* 'Malay' consciousness.

Ethnicity? Other Concepts of Community and Identity?

One consequence of insisting on such rigorous caution regarding the use of 'Malay' is that the pre-colonial setting in which a new consciousness developed remains elusive. Writing about the period before colonial rule, scholars have for some time recognized the problem of thinking at all in terms of ethnicity. The word is persistently qualified. Running through the academic literature we find reference to 'permeable', 'flexible', 'problematic', 'adjustable', 'accommodating', 'blurred', 'shifting', 'expansive' and 'fluid' ethnicity (Milner 2004: 249). Geoffrey Benjamin has suggested that ethnicity was not "usually an issue in pre- modern circumstances" (2005: 280); Richard O'Connor (1995), Oliver Wolters (1999: 158) and others have "downplay[ed] the importance of ethnicity", particularly in early mainland Southeast Asia. Such qualification underlines the extent to which 'ethnicity' has been considered unsatisfactory, and yet it is equally obvious that most scholars today find it hard to do without the concept. It is like the problem of the veil of 'Malayness' which I discussed at the opening of this chapter. It is a component which appears not to be applicable in earlier periods, and which we researchers still tend to use. Almost inevitably, we find ourselves configuring the pre-colonial Archipelago world with the aid of some type of ethnic categories, however qualified. The challenge, it would seem to me, is to attempt to imagine what a world without ethnicity might have looked like.

What types of community (or association, or attachment), then, do we encounter in the five centuries preceding colonial rule? At the local level, there was the village and the family. We know much more about the family in modern times, when families have been the subject of anthropological research, and have been described as being loose and flexible – particularly by the standards of the "definite, fixed-group" Japanese family with its inheritance of family property through the male line (Maeda 1975). Without a patrilineal descent system (at least among commoners), there is said to be no built-in "institutional framework for leadership" for 'Malay' villages (Raymond Firth 1966: 11). There is also the strong pioneering character of

agriculture – discussed in the last chapter – which is seen to militate against the type of stability associated, for instance, with the Japanese family. John Gullick's research on the Peninsula of the nineteenth century does suggest, however, that in the prevailing "frontier conditions", the founder of a village often "brought with him some of his kindred, by blood or affinity", and "groups of kinsfolk" might "live together in a cluster of houses closer to each other than to other groups of houses in the village" (1988: 32). Sometimes, Gullick says, the family of the founder of a village would provide a headman. But in other cases members of other families – perhaps because of acquiring wealth or some form of patronage or prestige – would obtain leadership. In Perak in 1875, he notes, "there were many villages with no acknowledged headmen" (35). Barbara Andaya (writing in particular of southeast Sumatra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) has drawn attention to the use of kin-infused language, especially in discussing relations within the elite. She stresses "imagined family" relations as well as real ones (1993: 7, 248). Is this what is alluded to as 'playing relatives' in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*?

Beyond the family and village, people were certainly identified with regional place names, especially rivers. In traditional texts (and in European documents as well; Cortesao 1990: 268) we read such expressions as *orang Johor* ('people of Johor'), *orang Patani* ('people of Patani') and *orang Sarapat* ('people of Sarapat'). All are references to places but – as in the case of Sarapat – not all of these toponyms are places of substance. (Sarapat is near Banjarmasin in Kalimantan; Ras 1968: 382, 408.) In certain instances, as I have explained, the places concerned are called *negeri*, and these might be 'settlements' of some size (*negeri Patani*) or quite small (*negeri Tioman*). (Tioman is a small island off the east coast of the Peninsula.) Over time, at least in the case of some localities, one gets the impression of a particular cultural identity becoming associated with a specific locality. We have seen negative examples of this, in the way Pahang became associated with arrogance, and Kelantan theft. There are also indications of ties of loyalty between people from the same *negeri* – people from one *negeri* are described as having associated particularly with one another when they were immigrants in another place (Gullick 1988: Ch. 2). In Sarawak, Pringle has pointed to an example of such an overriding loyalty to place. People whom outsiders over the last century would probably have divided into 'Malay' and 'Iban' groups might have in fact "identified themselves primarily by geographic community" – for instance, as 'men of Saribas' (referring to the river of that name). Furthermore, the 'men' of one river (including both so-called 'Malays' and 'Iban') might well go to war against the 'men' of another river (again a combination of 'Malay' and 'Iban') (Pringle 1970:

59, 62; Brown 1970: 3). This identity with a particular place, as Tim Babcock explained some decades ago, should not be confused with a sense of 'racial identity': indigenous conceptions of identity were "characterized by impermanence", with "frequent change of group membership and assimilation of one group into another" (1974: 196).

Partly because of this "impermanence", I have the impression that attachment to place was not in general a powerful sentiment – even when the place is termed a *negeri*. As we have seen, *negeri* – which covered so many different types and sizes of 'settlement' – does not in itself convey a strong emotive value. The phrase *isi negeri* (the 'contents of a *negeri*') simply refers to 'the people of the *negeri*' – to a settlement or community of people unformed, as it were, and perhaps waiting to be incorporated in such a meaningful structure as the sultanate or *kerajaan*.

Accepting the danger of assuming some type of pan-Archipelago 'Malay' ethnicity, we need to ask whether other forms of perceived collectivity (or consciousness) transcended individual sultanates. The opening pages of this chapter do provide evidence of a civilizational homogeneity that might call for such a perception. In the late 1700s Marsden reported that although 'Malay' was not used in Malay-language letters, they did "familiarly employ" the phrase *orang de-bawah angin* ('the people beneath the wind'). Earlier in the century, the Dutch scholar Valentijn had also noted that these words were "commonly" used (1884: 52). The chronicle of Pasai (north Sumatra), which is thought to be one of the earliest Malay-language texts, refers to that polity as a "land beneath the wind" (Hill 1960: 46), and we see the phrase again in the Melaka-Johor chronicle and in writings from Aceh, Minangkabau, the Moluccas (in the eastern Archipelago) and numerous other places (Laffan 2003: 11, 21; Putten 2001: 238; Drakard 1999: 167; Winstedt 1938: 93, 126). In the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, when Hang Tuah is travelling in the Middle East, he is said to have been questioned about the government of the rajas "beneath the wind" (Milner 1982: 38). The problem with the 'beneath the wind' formula as a self-description, however, is that it was used to cover such a broad range of communities. Marsden said that it referred to Javanese, Acehnese, Bugis and many other groups as well as 'Malays'; it was also applied to parts of mainland Southeast Asia (O'Kane 1972).

The other collective term conveying the sense of a broad Archipelago community – 'Jawah', or 'Jawi' – has already been introduced. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Dutch scholar-official Snouck Hurgronje reported that in Arabia the term 'Jawah' was applied to "all people of Malay race, in the fullest meaning of the term; the geographical boundary is perhaps from Siam and Malacca to New Guinea". He indicated as well

that this might include non-Muslims in addition to Muslims (1970: 215). This seems almost to be the degree of inclusiveness that is carried by references to 'beneath the wind', though the 'Cape Malays' of South Africa appear to be included as "a class of Jawah" despite living "outside the geographical boundaries" (215). Reading Snouck, there was apparently no specific term in Arabia equivalent to 'Malay', or even just to indicate speakers of the Malay language. People he described as "genuine Javanese", for instance, were called "Jawah Meriki" (232). Snouck himself uses the term 'Malay' but it is interesting that when he relates an anecdote involving such a 'Malay', the dialogue which he records actually has this person being addressed as 'Thou accursed Jawah' (224–225).

How did the concept of 'Jawah' develop? The issue is complex – and currently being given careful consideration by the Japanese scholar Toru Aoyama. It is true that 'Yavadvipa' is used in the Indian text, the *Ramayana*, written in part in the third or fourth century BC – and it has been suggested that the word might be used there as "a regional toponym" for both Java and Sumatra, and perhaps Borneo as well (Wheatley 1966: 179). Marco Polo called Sumatra 'Java Minora' (Coedes 1968: 203); and in the mid-sixteenth century the Portuguese official historian Barros – whose work was based on interviews with Portuguese travellers as well as the official archives – said that "most of the people" of Sumatra "call themselves Iauijs" (Dion 1970: 144). At the end of that century the English seaman Ralph Fitch called the whole Archipelago 'The Javas' (Laffan 2003: 15), and Chinese junk captains were reported in Japan as referring, for example, to Melaka and Patani as "belonging to Jawa" (Reid 2000: 8). Were the Arabs, Italians, Portuguese and English drawing upon the ancient Indian concept of 'Yavadvipa'?

'Jawah' and 'Jawi' are certainly encountered in a range of situations in the Archipelago itself. In East Sumatra we sometimes find 'Jawi' in traditional writings (for instance, the *Riwayat Hamperan Perak* from the Medan region) in situations where 'Malay' would later be used. The term 'Jawiken', as I have noted, was used instead of 'masuk Melayu' ('to become Malay') to describe 'Batak' conversion to Islam. The Arabic-based script used in writing Malay is today commonly called 'Jawi', but in the past the language itself was often given that name. The eighteenth-century scholar Werndly wrote about the 'Jawi language' and an English essay published in 1807 has the title 'Rudiments of the Juhwee or Jahwee Language, vulgarly called the Malay Language' (Raffles 1818: 126). 'Jawi', as observed already, has an interesting association with Patani, and also with Cambodia. Although 'Malay' became a potent term in southern Thailand in the twentieth century, it has been noted that in the '*kerajaan*' period it was not used in reference

to Patani. In the English translation of the chronicle of Patani, it is true that one protagonist is described as a "Malay from Patani", but the Malay text itself uses the term 'Jawi': the person is in fact described as a 'Jawi from Patani' (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970: 131, 200). (Here is perhaps a specific case of the 'veil of Malayness' problem.) Many 'Malays' in Patani still "refer to themselves as 'Jawi'" (Collins n.d.: 57; Hamilton 2000: 11, 32; Fraser 1960: 160) – a usage that helps to explain the term 'Chvea' used in Cambodia. Unlike the 'Cham' Muslim community in Cambodia, the 'Chvea' tend to speak Khmer rather than 'Cham', and they sometimes trace their origins to Kelantan and Minangkabau as well as Patani (Collins n.d.: 56–57). They are certainly a group of people who would have been classified as 'Malay' in most European writings, as they were by French scholars during the colonial period.

'Jawi' is a term that clearly requires more investigation – something which Michael Laffan has been undertaking with profit (2003: Ch. 1). It does seem to be the case that it covered many different peoples who were not later to be called 'Malay'. Also, again like 'the people beneath the wind', I have so far seen little to suggest that it was a term carrying emotive power. There appears to be no indication that loyalty to the 'Jawi' was a rallying cry the way *Hidup Melayu* ('Long Live the Malays') became in later years.

The broad Islamic community, on the other hand, certainly had a capacity to inspire enthusiasm. There is plenty of evidence at many social levels of people in the sultanates expressing interest in the doctrines and beliefs, the symbolism, the art and architecture, the religious and royal language and the literature coming from the wider Islamic world. There was also a concern for the fortunes of people of the Muslim faith who were living in the lands to the west – 'above the wind'. Melaka/Johor texts speak with awe of the mighty Ottoman empire (Matheson and Milner 1984). As Leonard Andaya has explained: "Ample evidence exists to show that Southeast Asian rulers . . . were eager to hear about the fabled Muslim courts of the Ottomans, the Safavis, and the Mughal Timuris from Muslim traders, envoys, and religious teachers" (2001a: 89). These Archipelago rulers, as we saw in Chapter 2, were undoubtedly interested in the titles used by the monarchs of the Arab, Persian and Indian polities, but they also expressed concern about events underway in Islamic polities. In 1827, when royal officials from Kedah learnt that the Turkish and Egyptian fleet had been beaten by European forces in the battle of Navarino, a European observer said they "appeared as though some general calamity had befallen them". They took the news to their royal master, saying as they went "Baniak Susah", "Baniak Susah", "Great Trouble – great trouble" (Milner 1979/1980: 6). The interest in Muslim west Asia was cultural as well as religious

and political. Robyn Maxwell has drawn attention to the influence of Ottoman, Persian and Mughal textile design in Southeast Asia – including that of "lavish metallic thread embroidery" (1990: 309–310, 316).

Evidence also exists of the Islamic faith being invoked to promote cross-regional cooperation. Andaya has suggested how Aceh's expanding authority in the western Archipelago in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries entailed the presentation of the sultanate as an exemplary Islamic polity "identified with the latest in Islamic learning" (2001a: 102). In the 1680s, when a Raja Sakti wrote to various rulers in Sumatra, the Peninsula and the eastern Archipelago, calling for support against the Dutch, he did so not only on the basis of his claims to royal descent – like the Melaka/Johor rulers, he said he was a descendant of Alexander the Great – but also because he wished to restore and purify the Islamic faith. What Jane Drakard calls "his 'networking' activities" around the region certainly caused concern among the Dutch (Drakard 1999: 188–192).

Just how potent adherence to Islam might have been as a unifying force in the Archipelago, however, is unclear. Membership of the Islamic world did help to establish the wider sympathies and horizons of the Archipelago *kerajaan* – giving them a degree of global reach that was not merely a matter of participating in commerce. What is less certain is whether religious attachments constituted anything comparable with the 'Malay' or Islamic consciousness of the twentieth century – an attachment and an identity that undoubtedly reached across individual sultanates.

The *Kerajaan* Community

The sources we have – both Malay-language and foreign – do give the impression that in the few centuries before the colonial period (including the 'golden age'), the most meaningful large community in the Archipelago was the hierarchical sultanate or *kerajaan*. It is understandable of course that Europeans focused on the political units with which they did business of one kind or another – and we have admittedly been concerned with *kerajaan* texts rather than, for instance, material written by religious scholars. But as one reads through Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, British and Malay accounts, it is difficult to deny the centrality of the sultanate as an institution. With respect to Malay writings, even in the texts from Melaka/Johor – writings that are often cited for their contribution to developing the idea of 'Malay' as a civilization – the central concern tends to be 'subjecthood'. This does not necessarily mean that their message is an insistence on blind loyalty, and texts do criticize individual rulers. But the fact that

the problematics of subjecthood are the main theme of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, for instance, is evident from its opening lines: they announce that the text is the "account of Hang Tuah, who was extremely loyal to his lord, and gave devoted service to his lord" (Kassim Ahmad 1968: 1). The *hikayat* then describes the operations of a "heavenly kingdom", before proceeding to examine the complexities of its protagonist's life as a royal subject.

In academic and other writing about the world of the sultanates in these centuries, as I have suggested, there has been much deploying of the category 'Malay' – speaking of processes of 'Malay political culture', of 'Malayization', of struggles over the heritage of 'Melayu', or of the right to 'leadership of the Malay world'. My strengthening impression is that what the historical sources are really concerned about – even the Melaka-Johor writings, where there is undoubtedly reference to 'Malay' in civilizational terms – is kings and kingdoms. In the Melaka-Johor sphere (which also includes the close-by sultanate of Perak), there is definitely a concern about Palembang origins – and this is sometimes constructed as a 'Malay' theme, because subjects of the Palembang ruler are sometimes called 'Malay'. But the Melaka-Johor texts cannot be said to focus specifically on 'the Malays' or 'Malayness', or even on Palembang (or Srivijaya) as a state. What these texts focus on is kingship, including the genealogical claims to a relationship with the founder of the Palembang-Melaka dynasty – who is said to be a descendant of Alexander the Great (Iskandar Zulkarnain). 'Palembang' is important primarily because it was here that descendants of Alexander appeared on the golden-crested hill, Bukit Seguntang.

In thinking about genealogical claims, materials presented in a study of Sumatra by Jane Drakard are helpful. The letters she cites suggest that the proud rulers in the royal capital of Pagaruyung (Minangkabau, west Sumatra) – later to be incorporated in the narrative of the 'Minangkabau' people – were also not concerned about ethnicity but about their own ancestral ties to Alexander the Great (Drakard 1999: 168). It is the refrain of royal letters from Pagaruyung, for instance, that they come not only from the illustrious sultan (or 'Yang Depertuan') but also from the "descendant of Alexander the Great" (Drakard 1999: 166–169, xvii, 74, 124, 278). The Minangkabau or Pagaruyung dynasty traced its origins to Alexander the Great through the brother of the Melaka-Johor ancestor, who also appeared magically on the hill called Bukit Seguntang, near Palembang. The claim to descent from Alexander is made once again for the rulers of Aceh – another polity that remained outside the 'Malay' story. It is spelt out in the *Hikayat Aceh* – a text focused on the illustrious, early seventeenth-century reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (Teuku Iskandar 1958).

A chronicle of Perak (the text named *Misa Melayu* in the nineteenth century) might be cited here as well. The ruling family of Perak was closely linked to the Melaka/Johor line, and has been consistently portrayed as 'Malay' in modern times. In its opening lines the Perak chronicle declares: the "origin of the raja whose story is now to be told . . . is from Alexander the Great who came down from the sun" (Andaya 1979: 161).

The term 'race' is sometimes introduced in this context, at least by trans-lators. A ruler of Perak in 1818 is reported to have declared: "I am a king of the ancient race", and then referred to his links with "Bukit Si Guntang" (Andaya 1979: 21). But 'race' here is simply a concern for a 'race of kings' (as another Perak text expresses it) (21). It refers to descent in a ruling family. In fact the term *bangsa* – which eventually became a powerful Malay word for 'race' or 'ethnicity' or 'people' – is generally used in earlier writ-ings to mean 'descent', or perhaps 'caste' (Matheson 1979: 366; Skinner 1982: 158): apart from references to royal descent, one reads of *bangsa syed* (the 'caste' of syeds or descendants of the Prophet), or of being a person of *bangsa kechil* (of 'low birth') (Milner 2002: 51). Where *bangsa* becomes an issue in the world of the sultanates – a cause for struggle – it refers (as I understand it) not to a contest about claims to 'Malay' heritage but to rival genealogical claims between royal protagonists. Thus, when the Perak ruler declared his Bukit Si Guntang credentials in 1818, he added, "I am the oldest of all the kings in these parts, such as the kings of Siak, Selangor, Riau, Kedah, and Trengganu". Similarly, when the *Malay Annals* describes a ruler of Melaka making war on Siak, the explanation is given that the Siak raja was "descended from Raja Pagaruyung" (of course a descendant of Alexander the Great), and that this raja "would not submit to Melaka" (Drakard 1999: 26). Equally, I am not inclined to understand the rulers of Pagaruyung as asserting "their claims to Melayu" in the seventeenth century (Andaya 2001: 328), but rather (as in the letters cited above) to see them as demonstrating their genealogical legitimacy. The focus is on monarchy and descent, not race, and the inter-raja system extended beyond what tended eventually to be defined as the 'Malay world'.

The Minangkabau and Aceh monarchies, and many others which were not usually encompassed in later narratives of the 'Malay people', were active as both competitors and allies in the *kerajaan* world of the Muslim Archipelago – asserting genealogical claims, jockeying for precedence, recruiting subjects and seeking trade. We have noted how even rulers in mainland Southeast Asia at times engaged vigorously in this regional system. Texts like the Melaka-Johor chronicle tell of attempts to construct relations with Siam in the 'inter-monarchical' language of the Archipelago. The

importance of the actual Malay (or Jawi) language in the diplomacy and
general interaction in the region is attested to time and again, including by
Europeans travelling there. As Amin Sweeney has stressed, however, the
assumption that literature and language were products of a 'particular
ethnic group' was a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
The particular experience of eighteenth-century scholars of Malay made
them more comfortable than later scholars with the notion of a 'learned
language' through which peoples of many backgrounds might communicate
(Sweeney 1987: 46–53). To portray the Malay language as a critical ingredi-
ent in the *kerajaan* world, therefore, does not imply an assertion of a spe-
cifically 'Malay' unity – ethnic or cultural. To be a participant in that world
did not require adopting some form of 'Malay' identity: nor, as we shall
learn, was the speaking of Malay generally considered a sufficient qualifica-
tion for inclusion in the community of 'Malay people' that was to be
developed in the colonial era.

   The observations here would seem to apply not only to 'Malayness', but
also to other so-called ethnicities – such as that claimed for the 'Minangk-
abau', the subjects of the ruler of Pagaruyung. Although events concerning
the sultan at Pagaruyung would in later years be related as part of the
history of the 'Minangkabau people' of central Sumatra, Drakard has
pointed out that "Dutchmen in the mid-seventeenth century did not impose
Minangkabau identity on the inhabitants of West Sumatra" (1999: 260).
Research in recent years has in fact shown ways in which later – from the
nineteenth century – 'Minangkabau culture' was constituted under the influ-
ence of Dutch colonial rule (Kahn 1993; Drakard 1999: 260). This develop-
ment, like the crystallizing of the concept of 'the Malays' – and, in a similar
period, the developing characterization of the Javanese as a 'nation' or
'people', to which Adrian Vickers (1997) and Ann Kumar (1997) have
drawn attention – was part of the making of a new era. In this era – where
we also encounter the emergence of the territorial state, and numerous other
modern concepts and categories – there does at last seem to be a strong
argument for speaking of 'races' and 'ethnicities'. A world that had been
organized around monarchies – and, in certain contexts, regional, religious
and family attachments – was now being at least partially reconfigured as
a world of ethnicities. Predictably enough, it was a transition which tended
not to be welcomed by royal courts. From the point of view of writing a
book on 'the Malays', this reconfiguration was the most significant develop-
ment to take place in the colonial period.

5

Experiencing Colonialism, and the Making of the *Bangsa Melayu*

Positioning oneself in a royal court beside a river on the Peninsula (or on Sumatra or Borneo) in, say, 1800, the developments that were to take place across the length of the colonial period would have appeared immense. The establishing of the British and Dutch empires in the Archipelago did not merely entail the building of new cities, road and rail networks and other communications systems, the vast expansion of population (including large immigrant numbers from other parts of the Asian region) and new concepts of government and economic organization. There was also a far-reaching transformation of consciousness. It is no wonder that the sultan of Perak in the opening years of the twentieth century reflected that his ancestors had been like "frogs beneath an inverted cocoa-nut shell who dreamed not that there was any world beyond the narrow limits in which they were pent" (Clifford 1929: 218). As I have anticipated, one aspect of the incoming consciousness was the establishing of new categories – including the 'territorially defined state' and 'race' – into which humankind (whether in Europe or Asia) might be ordered.

   The change was dramatic when viewed across the entire colonial period – but it did not always occur rapidly and violently. In most regions that were eventually to be constituted as 'Malay', with the partial exception of the polities in the Siamese/Thai sphere, there was nothing as obviously brutal as the abolition by the British of the monarchy and the monarchical system in Burma, which took place in the 1880s. In fact, as the British and Dutch extended their power across the Archipelago in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they retained many of the sultanates, or *kerajaan*. In addition, they often declared – misleadingly as it turned out – the intention of protecting 'Malay' peoples against radical transformation.
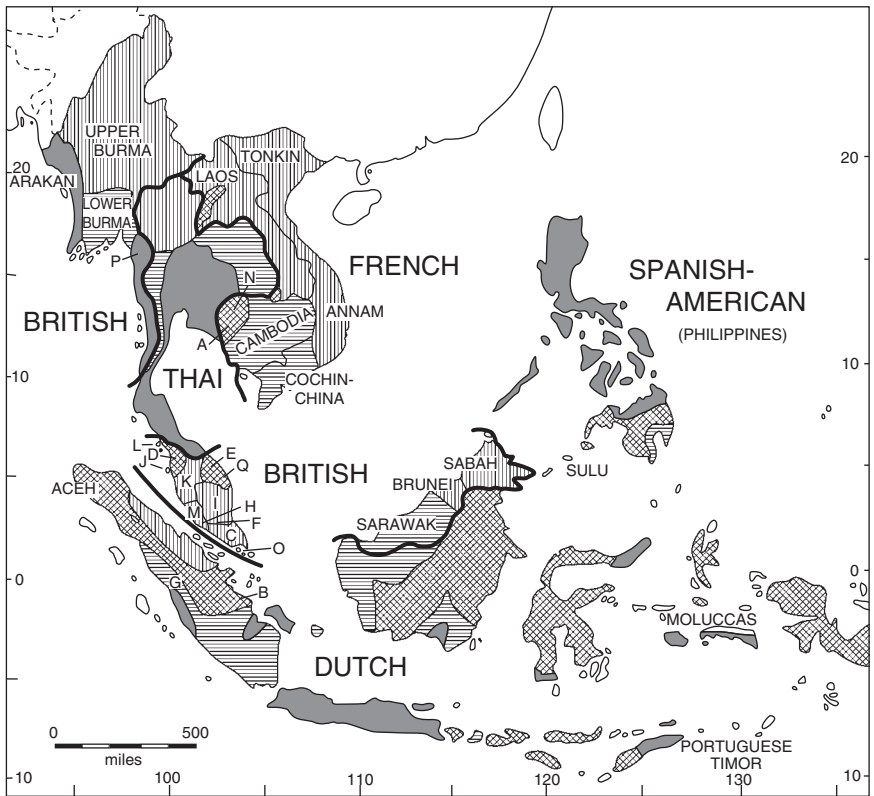
	HELD IN 1830	F	MELAKA
	1831–1870	G	MINANGKABAU
	1871–1900	H	NEGRI SEMBILAN
	1901–1940	I	PAHANG
		J	PENANG
		K	PERAK
A	BATTAMBANG	L	PERLIS
B	JAMBI	M	SELANGOR
C	JOHOR	N	SIEM REAP
D	KEDAH	O	SINGAPORE
E	KELANTAN	P	TENASSERIM
		Q	TRENGGANU

Map 4 Colonial Southeast Asia.
Source: Adapted from D. J. Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

Creating Colonial Empires

Europeans had of course been operating in the region for centuries, conquering Melaka in 1511, and establishing other bases in such places as Batavia (modern Jakarta) and Bencoolen (in west Sumatra), and later, Penang and Singapore. When they did move out from these enclaves – centres for ideas as well as colonial power – to take control of 'Malay' polities across the Archipelago, they divided the region largely along the lines of an agreement between the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824. By the early years of the twentieth century the majority of sultanates on the Peninsula had British 'Residents' who were in charge of new bureaucracies, and fostered tin mining, rubber growing and other forms of industry. In the area they called the 'East Coast of Sumatra', the Dutch were administering an internationally renowned tobacco-producing region (which lay across Deli, Serdang, Langkat and other small *kerajaan*), and they had established control over most of the other sultanates on Sumatra. Only Aceh in the very north – which was never to identify as 'Malay' – continued to resist Dutch expansion. The Johor sultanate, which had once extended across much of the southern Peninsula as well as the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, had been divided between the British and Dutch: Singapore came under direct British rule; the Peninsular provinces became individual sultanates (Johor and Pahang), and eventually accepted British-led administrations; and the Riau-Lingga Archipelago became a separate sultanate in the Dutch sphere, with the sultan being replaced by direct colonial government in 1913. On Borneo most of the territory of the sultan of Brunei in the northwest was appropriated by the English Brooke family, who virtually created their own *kerajaan* there (Walker 2002); in the northeast the British North Borneo Company had taken control of regions claimed either by the Brunei or the Sulu sultanate, the latter based in the southern Philippines. Brunei itself accepted a British Resident in 1906. In the rest of Borneo (today known as 'Kalimantan'), the Dutch had concluded treaties with the different polities, setting up a Western division with headquarters in Pontianak, and a South and Eastern Division governed from Banjarmasin.

On the Peninsula again, Siam – which had established tributary relationships with many of the Peninsular sultanates over the centuries (even Melaka and Perak at certain times) – had been consolidating its control over the more northern sultanates during the 1800s, partly in response to the British advance. Siam broke Patani up into seven provinces in 1816, and after a long period of struggle the Patani leadership lost all sovereignty in 1901, when Thai bureaucrats were appointed in place of the old *kerajaan* officials,

and the people became subjects of the kingdom of Siam. The 'tributary system' was replaced by incorporation in the Siamese state (Kobkua 1988). After a period of dispute, Siam surrendered its claims over Kedah, Perlis, Trengganu and Kelantan to Britain in an agreement of 1909.

In contrast to Siam, the British not only acknowledged the sovereignty of the sultans in their sphere, but also allowed them to continue to exercise control over 'religion and custom' and often other areas (Kessler 1978: 56–57). Under the Dutch system – centralized in Batavia – rulers formally acknowledged Dutch sovereignty, but in many cases were left with considerable administrative and legal authority (except in the area of external relations). Some rulers enjoyed unprecedented prosperity, benefiting from plantation and other industries that were established in their provinces: the sultan of Langkat in Sumatra was said to own thirteen limousines in 1933 (Reid 1979: 46). In certain cases – Kutei in east Borneo and Deli in East Sumatra – the rulers gained a significant measure of Dutch support for their efforts to consolidate or extend *kerajaan* rule, especially over non-Muslim peoples (Dayaks, Bataks). In Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah) as well, the colonial governments gave support to Muslim aristocratic groups (which in Sarawak began to be called 'Malay') (Pringle 1970: 127, 338). On the west coast of Sabah, Pengiran Mohamad Abbas had been an administrator on behalf of the Brunei sultanate when the North Borneo Company arrived, and then became a senior and apparently loyal member of the colonial administration. Another chief declined the opportunity to assume new authority in non-Muslim areas in the interior, explaining that "I am not a native of this district tuan (sir)" (Ranjit Singh 2003: 256, 266).

Declarations of conservative intentions on the part of these colonial governments include Governor Sir Hugh Clifford's promise in 1927 that the Peninsular polities would continue to be "Muhammadan Monarchies", and that the British had received "no mandate" from the "Rajas, Chiefs or people to vary the system of Government which has existed in these territories from time immemorial" (Roff 1994: 11). In education the British were especially cautious – emphasizing (in the words of one governor) not the desire to transform the people but rather the limited aim of inculcating the "habits of industry, punctuality and obedience" (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 236). In Sarawak the Brooke rulers made an administrative ideology out of what the second rajah (Charles Brooke) called respect for "native customs" and the need to "gain the consent of the people" (Pringle 1970: 137; Walker 2002: 48) – and this was one reason that they were reluctant to allow large-scale European planting industries to come to the country. In the Dutch East Indies there was a strong tradition of ruling as much as possible through local institutions and local officials ("like over like is

welcome") and "with a due regard to native customary law" (Furnivall 1939: 296, 258–259).

In the case of Siam – the change of name to Thailand in the twentieth century illustrates well the growing international focus on 'race' – we find a distinct contrast to these European approaches. Apart from replacing 'Malay' with 'Thai' officials, government measures over the first half of the twentieth century included promoting the Thai language (changing the names of towns too), encouraging the immigration of large numbers of Buddhist Thais, compelling Muslims to attend Thai schools, disallowing the circulation of Malay newspapers, and demanding that Western clothes be worn. There was even a Thai tendency to use the terms 'visitor' or 'guest' to refer to the 'Jawi' (or 'Malays', as they increasingly preferred to be called), implying that they were newcomers to the region. Under the nationalist leadership of Phibun Songkhram in the 1930s and 1940s, Buddha statues were set up in public schools and all students (including Muslims) were forced to bow to them. The "expression of non-Thai identity was not only unpatriotic in the eyes of the authorities but in itself a security threat" (ICG 2005: 1–3; Fraser 1966: 50; Wan Kadir 1990: 41–42). The Thai government extended certain of these policies to Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Kedah when the Japanese transferred these states to Thailand in 1943 (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 257–258).

Social Change

The conservative promises of the British and Dutch regimes in many cases disguised (at least in the short term) but did not prevent profound change. Although there was much talk about the promotion of a stable peasantry (Kratoska 1985: 29; Andaya and Andaya 2001: Ch. 6), there was almost inevitably a freeing up of economic life. The rulers were no longer able to enforce structures that were essential to what I have termed '*kerajaan* economics'. Ordinary people were less inclined to squat on the ground when a ruler passed (Gullick 1987: 79, 92). Debt bondage was abolished and the rulers lost powers with respect to corvee labour. Sumptuary laws (as discussed in Chapter 3) had been critical in the ordering of society – yet when royal officials now enforced laws that determined the level of a person's material welfare, this could easily be interpreted by colonial administrators as mere arbitrary plunder. In Sarawak, although the Brookes tended to reinforce the prestige of 'Malay' chiefs (particularly with respect to the Iban), they also wanted to end these chiefs' control over commerce. The Brookes were well aware that there was "no clear-cut distinction in the traditional

value system between political and commercial functions" (Pringle 1970: 285–286, 62; Ooi 1990). One consequence of their strategy, however, was to open up new opportunities for Chinese immigrants who rapidly achieved a dominant position in the economy (Pringle 1970: 323–324).

All around the Archipelago (as King has commented in the case of Borneo), there was the introduction of "the concept of individual private property" and the "surveying, registration and titling of land" (King 1993: 158; Wong 1975; Lim 1977). Such colonial 'reforms' (as they would have been described by their implementers) could be liberating in unanticipated ways, having also the capacity to undermine many aspects of the established order. In establishing the idea of land as a "valuable and saleable form of property", rather than as a seemingly endless frontier open to new cultivation, the reforms promoted the notion of individual property, and individualism. As John Gullick has explained, the possibility of using land as security also tended to encourage a "gradual stratification of village society into wealthy land-owners, middle-category tenants or sharecroppers and landless labourers" (1987: 214). 'Commoners' were presented with new opportunities to accumulate and spend money – for instance, through growing commercial rice, coffee, coconut and especially rubber (Kahn 2006: Ch. 2) – and in ways that might actually threaten the interests of large foreign plantations. Legislation was introduced in the early decades of the twentieth century in British Malaya against smallholder planting, but the peasants were difficult to control (Shamsul 1986: Ch. 2).

Successful rubber producers joined a growing middle class, also including school teachers and clerks. One report described such people as wearing "stiff shirt collar and polished black shoes", and "blue-tinted goggles". Their houses might have "crocheted antimacassars and bentwood Austrian chairs", and a photo of Queen Victoria or the sultan of Turkey (Gullick 1987: 185, 193). In Borneo, in Banjarmasin, successful rubber planters in the 1920s purchased "thousands of bicycles and hundreds of motor cars", and joined the pilgrimage to Mecca in large numbers (Lindblad in King 1993: 153). In southwest Sarawak 'Malays' were reported as pioneering a "whole huge tract of land out of jungle into permanent cultivation"; they "stripped the hillsides and flats" until there was not "one pole, rod or perch of the vegetation which was there when James Brooke first looked into the heart of the island" (in the first half of the nineteenth century) (Harrisson 1970: 395–397). In the East Sumatran *kerajaan*, royal subjects increased their wealth without having to develop entrepreneurial skills. They were now able to their grow rice on the rich, fallow land that the foreign estates regularly made available as a result of the rhythm of tobacco planting. Enjoying such a windfall, there was no need to experiment with new forms

of cash cropping – "dependence" made it unnecessary to develop the "habits and talents" that would have prepared them to enter "the new commercial economy of the region" (Reid 1979: 47).

Where new prosperity and opportunity emerged – and this was by no means a generalized phenomenon – there was often disorientation, including a sense that established customs and identities were threatened. Early Malay-language newspapers from Singapore commented on this (Milner 2002: 100). In Sarawak some 'Malays' caused anxiety by wearing "gaudy neckties, blazers and bell bottom trousers" (Sanib 1985; 26), just as the wearers of "blue-tinted goggles" must have done on the Peninsula. From the point of view of the royal courts, the most troubling thing about the emergence of such middle-class groups would have been the new ideas about political and social organization that their members began to express. These ideas included the concept of 'race'.

Before examining the clash of concepts (or ideologies) that occurred during the colonial period, one further observation ought to be made about context. To the extent that colonialism brought economic windfalls, the perception of most people who were being constituted as 'the Malays' was that the outsider was the main beneficiary. In the view of one commentator on British Malaya, there was on the one hand a "bustling commercial outfit" and, on the other, a "Malay museum" (Stockwell 1979: 31). The colonial economies were focused on large export industries such as tin mining and on the rubber, tobacco and other plantation industries. The immigration of foreign labour to serve these industries was so extensive that between 1881 and 1900 some 2 million 'Chinese' came to Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. That meant that the 'Chinese' population – many of whom were only beginning to conceive of themselves as members of a generalized 'Chinese' category – became almost equal in size to the 'Malay' (Ooi 1964: 110–111). In the east coast of Sumatra, by 1939, only some 18 per cent of the population of the sultanate of Langkat was listed as 'Malay'; in Deli and Serdang it was only 14 per cent (Reid 1979: 46). In the case of the plantation economy in this region, the foreign labour was predominantly from the relatively overcrowded Java: by the 1930s, 43 per cent of the population was 'Javanese' (Kipp 1996: 46). In Sarawak, as I have noted, the Brookes allowed the 'Chinese' to take over the commerce of the state, calling them "the capitalists that we most have to depend on" (Pringle 1970: 324, 287). In North Borneo (Sabah), 'Chinese' numbers rose from 7,000 to 37,000 between 1891 and 1921, and in 1937 a government official declared that over twenty-five years all the native land he knew of had been sold or leased to them (Ranjit Singh 2003: 243–245). Large numbers of 'Chinese' also moved into Pontianak, Samarinda, Banjarmasin

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Figure 8   This cartoon, by Salleh b. Ally, first appeared in the newspaper *Utusan Zaman* on 10 February 1938, p. 10. The elephant represents foreigners (*bangsa asing* is written on the elephant). The man in the middle is represented as 'marching to the tune' of the foreigners, and is dressed in a manner suggesting the royalty of the time. The elephant is saying 'give me what I want now', and the compliant figure in the centre replies: 'OK! OK! Don't get angry, we'll give it to you; we won't delay'. On the left, the chicken – labelled 'the Malays' (*orang Melayu*) – calls out 'What about my needs?', and is told 'You just keep quiet!' Deborah Johnson drew my attention to this cartoon, and discussed with me the interpretation. © British Library, London.

and other coastal centres in Dutch Borneo, assuming as well a dominant role in the trade of the interior (King 1993: 154).

A prominent theme in 'Malay' comment during the colonial era was the sense of being 'left behind' (Hooker 2000: xv). Munshi Abdullah portrayed some peoples, or 'races' (and we will return to that word), as being "on the move" (Datoek Besar and Roolvink 1953: 426), and thus threatening. At the opening of the twentieth century, Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, a journalist who would have been well acquainted with Abdullah's writings, wrote of the way 'Malays' were being "driven away from their own states by other races" (*Utusan Melayu*, 5 December 1907). A school teacher from Medan explained in 1939 that the "sons of East Sumatra" had been "left behind in everything, but especially in education and the economy" (Reid 1979: 68). In British Malaya in 1941, the journalist and political leader Ibrahim Yaacob said his people felt "jostled" or "pressured" by the invasion of

foreign capital, foreign goods and foreign labour. The number of Malays with no work seemed to be increasing year by year (Milner 2002: 263). For decades, in fact, there had been fear of what one journalist called "the yellow danger" – of foreigners with "great energy" and a "lack of manners", who would "seize peoples' property by means of trickery" (Milner 2002: 119).

A perception of being overwhelmed – captured to some extent in the sultan of Perak's reference to emerging from under a coconut shell – would have been promoted by witnessing the way the many small Archipelago sultanates, or *kerajaan*, were being built into 'British Malaya' or the 'Dutch East Indies'. These great colonial states were given physical as well as conceptual substance by the establishing of communications, bureaucratic and policing frameworks. There were large cities such as Penang, Singapore and Medan, as well as Batavia – not in itself a new phenomenon in the Archipelago, but now accompanied by new styles of building (including monumental building) and urban design. The colonial period introduced as well innovation in the approach to government and commercial (including labour) organization, the revolutionary (in *kerajaan* terms) idea of active citizenship, and forms of literature (for instance, the novel) and entertainment that had never been encountered before. It is for such reasons that by the early decades of the twentieth century many parts of the Archipelago – the western Peninsula polities and the east coast of Sumatra in particular – would have become almost unrecognizable to the royal subjects who had lived there a century earlier.

Accompanying transformation in the appearance of things, the colonial period brought relentless challenges to the underlying conceptual structure – the logic – of the Muslim *kerajaan*. Despite the seeming endorsement of the sultanates by the British and Dutch – certainly a contrast to the British behaviour in Burma or, for that matter, the French approach to the *ancien régime* in Vietnam – these *kerajaan* came under sustained ideological assault. The assault, it should be stressed, was a critical component in endeavours to constitute the 'Malay race'.

The *Kerajaan* under Attack

In this book I have sought to understand the *kerajaan* – to give a sense of how at least some royal subjects may have experienced the sultanate 'from the inside'. I have suggested that these monarchies were key components in a Muslim and Malay-speaking (or, more accurately, Malay-writing) civilization that attained a genuine regional and 'international' prestige,

possessing as well the capacity to enlist new recruits, new subjects. Even Portuguese, Dutch and British at times wrote respectfully of the sultanates – though by the nineteenth century condemnation of their political and social systems was more common. I noted the early nineteenth-century Dutch comment on the sultan of Lingga's preoccupation with 'outward pomp' and his failure to deal with 'real issues'. In 1848 the Dutch Liberal Baron van Hoevell called the Malays "an evil and shiftless people . . . lazy, morally and physically corrupt, slaves to idleness and gambling, intolerant and fanatical" (Irwin 1967: 161). Charles Brooke in Sarawak concluded in 1896 that "a just government" from "Malay Rajahs" was simply "an impossibility" (Harrisson 1970: 165). In Governor Swettenham's view, the sultanates possessed "no political institutions" (1901: 70). Hugh Clifford, who spent many years in British Malaya (and became a successful fiction writer as well as a remarkable imperial governor), gave perhaps the most vivid picture of a degenerate 'otherness' unsuitable for the modern world. In one semi-fictional account, he portrayed the "long string of ramshackle buildings" that made up the "king's compound" and then described the living quarters of the ruler's consort: "stifling hot and reeked with the stale fumes of opium". In the "dimly lit inner apartments" of the palace, the talk was always of "deeds of daring and violence" and of "love intrigues". Business, such as it was, tended to be transacted at night: "no one of standing . . . thought of going to bed before eight o'clock in the morning" (1984).

Such European commentary conveyed a sense of the crushing distance that by then seemed to separate 'modern' Europeans from the people they administered. A far greater contrast than had existed in earlier centuries, it underpinned harsh colonial judgements. It was in the context of the ideological attack waged by Europeans that criticism of the *kerajaan* developed within the Archipelago communities themselves.

In the early nineteenth century, from the security of the British enclaves of Melaka and Singapore – secure in terms of being beyond the reach of royal courts – the teacher and translator Munshi Abdullah (who, as I have noted, was well acquainted with Raffles and other local representatives of the rising Europe) was unqualified in his dismissal of the *kerajaan*. Influenced partly by European liberal ideas, but also frustrated by the Malays' acceptance of their subordination to other peoples, Abdullah wrote for what he called a "new generation" of Malays (Datoek Besar and Roolvink 1953: 417). This would appear to have been a small group – probably including younger members of the Johor elite attending a Western school in Singapore – but his writings were over the next decades published by the colonial government and widely distributed. Some were used as textbooks in the

colonial education system (Milner 2002: 95). In Abdullah's two principal works – an autobiography (of a type) and an account of a journey up the east coast of the Peninsula – he focused specifically on 'the Malays' as a people, not on individual sultanates or communities. He wrote of the "tyranny and injustice" of the sultans, complained of what he saw as their "foolish" obsession with sumptuary laws, and warned that living close to a ruler was like "making friends with a poisonous snake". He considered that these rajas despised their subjects, thinking of them as animals. As we have noted earlier, he also expressed disdain for the reluctance of royal subjects to overthrow their inherited 'customs'. It is not surprising that the British endorsed Abdullah. He identified the British colony as a model of egalitarianism – a place where ordinary people could become important and wealthy: "we can sit with rajas, and if we are rich, we can build houses and wear clothes just like rajas" (Kassim Ahmad 1964: 104). The British did not, it might be observed, appreciate the extent to which Abdullah was also issuing an anti-colonial message – hoping to inspire Malays to take charge of their own futures. From the point of view of the royal elite, however, the revolutionary elements in Abdullah's thinking would have been obvious.

Anti-sultanate sentiments continued to be expressed in Malay-language writings from the British settlements. In the opening years of the twentieth century, a Singapore paper which circulated in many parts of the region carried a report from Langkat in Sumatra describing the ruler there as so oppressive that the people "cry out for help" (*Al Imam*, 12 July 1907). Other articles referred to "our rajas in this region" having surrendered their states "to other races" (*Al Imam*, 4 February 1908), and to the way some seemed to be concerned only about their names (or reputation, *nama*) (*Utusan Melayu*, 17 December 1907). Not long before the Pacific war, a prominent activist in the Malay community accused people of "high rank" of tending to be absorbed "in finding ways to secure and increase their rank", and forgetting "about the ordinary people" (Milner 2002: 258). In general, however, the ideological subversion of the sultanates was less blunt – an indication either of restraints on free speech or of the continued influence of habits of diplomacy and indirectness. The subversion was achieved most of all through a critical shift in language: a discursive contest, in a sense, between key terms.

During the colonial period the profoundly raja-centred sultanate, with its concern for the enhancement of *nama* (status) in a raja–*rakyat* (ruler–subject) dynamic – and its defining and ordering of social life (and to some extent the afterlife) in a structure of 'custom' (*adat*) – was confronted by a set of new ideas about the 'individual person', 'government', the role of 'development' in 'history', 'economics' and 'race'. It was a challenge

encapsulated in the need for a new vocabulary. As an article of 1941 (by a prominent Malay intellectual, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad or Za'ba) pointed out, the Malay language had possessed no exact equivalents for such words as 'personal', 'personality', 'financial' and 'economic' (1941: 249).

A New Discourse

The building of a new world – a new discourse – was in a sense at the nub of Munshi Abdullah's project in the early nineteenth century. He recognized that he lived in a time of great change, and explicitly condemned the sultans from a vantage point located outside the *kerajaan* system. The priority he gave to the individual person – writing in the first person, and even composing a 'story of himself' (the *Hikayat Abdullah*) – was a new departure in Malay literature. Humans are like trees, he said: the education they receive in life can "bear much fruit". They also have the right to advance materially, to live "like a raja" if they can and to "make themselves important" (Milner 2002: 44). Abdullah thought that some peoples, or 'races', were 'on the move', and the whole idea of 'being on the move' – of 'progress' or 'development' – in fact became highly potent later in the colonial period. It was linked to the notion of achieving 'modernity' (*moden*). Another aspect of this sense of movement was the introduction of a dynamic vision of 'history' – a seemingly empirical approach to history that challenged the authority of court (*kerajaan*) literature, while underpinning the ideology of progress. It was said that with the publication in 1918 of the *History of the Malays*, co-authored by the senior scholar-official Richard Winstedt, the "average Malay" was able to see at last the "distinction . . . between fact and fiction" (Zainal Abidin 1940: 151). In fact, modern history (and the general call for an empirically based knowledge) had been around for some decades. One strong influence on Islamic intellectuals (including some based in Malaya) was the Arabic translation of François Guizot's great *History of Civilization in Europe* (1877), which conveyed well the impression of peoples "pressing forward . . . to change . . . their condition" (Milner 2002: 173).

In the emerging new discourse, 'government' was another key term, and one that was distinguished from the *kerajaan* preoccupation with ceremony. The idea that a raja's 'work' might be considered his participation in ceremony – the ordering of his subjects according to rank (including the sumptuary law system) – was a fundamental element in an old system. In the colonial period new types of skill and action were required. It was necessary now to have active government, focused on practical issues: newspaper

articles drew attention to the need to address the problems facing the people, to help them (in the words of one article) to be "industrious and free" (*Utusan Melayu*, 17 December 1907). Even documents issued by the royal courts themselves now began to present rulers as engaged in practical administration – praising an incoming sultan of Perak, for instance, for his capacity to "modernize education" and to "improve the lives of his subjects" (Milner 2002: 242).

The ordinary people of the sultanates could themselves no longer be conceptualized as largely passive *rakyat* – "obligated to sit on the ground in the mud and filth" when a raja passed by (as Munshi Abdullah had put it) (Datoek Besar and Roolvink 1953: 419). Commoners had to take part in the organization of their own lives according to the new doctrines – which were in important ways endorsed by the colonial state. The phrase 'training in citizenship' was used by the British in the early twentieth century, and Malay-language newspapers tried to give 'citizenship' substance by inviting readers to participate in public discussion. "Give your correct name", declared the editor of one paper, "and the letter will be published with any editing for brevity" (Milner 2002: 126–131). The royal courts, it is clear, were uncomfortable about the transition from 'subject' to 'citizen' – but they could not stop such developments. A word for 'politics' now had to be decided on: an Arabic term, *siasat*, really implied 'policy' or 'organization', and eventually *politik* was chosen, indicating well the novelty of the idea. An article of 1926 underlined this novelty when it referred to someone learning about the "custom" (*adat*) of politics (Milner 2002: 265).

Coming to understand, and engaging in the use of, this new language must have added to the sensation of "frogs" coming out from under the "cocoa-nut shell". A word often used by the heralds of the new era was *sedar*, 'aware'. Like most revolutionaries, they would not see the changes underway in terms of the attempt to substitute one world view for another, but as the triumph of truth – of 'awareness' – over mythology.

With respect to 'economics', we have noted in Chapter 3 how Abdullah blamed the *kerajaan* for suffocating individual initiative. Reading Abdullah, one recalls the growing influence at that time of Adam Smith: Governor Raffles himself was much impressed by Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Abdullah seems to have had little comprehension of (or perhaps just little sympathy for) the rationale behind *kerajaan* economics – the concept of an ordered society, embedding economic activity in the polity structure, regulating wealth in a manner consistent with the *kerajaan* hierarchy. To Abdullah (like many Europeans), the rulers were simply oppressive. Another dimension of the new economics was the insistence not merely on the right

of the individual to work hard and accumulate wealth, but also on the moral need to exploit the environment for man's benefit. In the mid-nineteenth century a Malay-language, European-style 'geography' – one Abdullah himself may have translated or helped to edit – described the physical environment in terms of the soil and its products, and chastised or praised those who lived in this environment on the basis of whether they had succeeded in exploiting it effectively or not. The text lauds Europeans (in a manner that makes one wince today) for their success in harnessing natural resources. In the case of the island of Borneo, it predicts that because of Malay laziness it would probably have to be Europeans who would turn the island "into a garden" (Milner 2002: Ch. 3).

The new 'economics', 'government', 'development', 'citizenship' (and eventually 'politics') (Milner 2002) could not be expected to be contained within the old *kerajaan* sphere. They needed a new setting. The colonial states – large by any previous Archipelago standards, quite tightly controlled, and defined territorially – provided obvious foundations. The conceptualizing of a political unit in territorial terms, with its own bureaucratic and political substance – a unit possessing its own integrity, separate from the monarch – was certainly novel. But it was an idea that soon began to influence even the self-description of royal officials. One official from the Johor sultanate, writing a memoir at the end of the nineteenth century, described the way the territory of Johor had been surveyed and its boundaries determined. After three years, "the map of Johor was complete", and was then "pronounced correct by the head surveyor in London" (Sweeney 1980: 89). This man's writing conveys a sense of pride in his service to 'Johor' and not merely to the ruler – something which is a direct contrast to the ethic of the Melaka court where Hang Tuah's loyalty and service (as the *Hang Tuah* epic insists) were directed to 'his lord'. Apart from the Johor memoir, it is striking as well that in a *Hikayat Johor* written in the early 1900s – at first glance just the type of *kerajaan* text that royal courts had produced for centuries – the state of Johor was described in geographical and demographic terms as an entity in itself, something conceptually distinct from the raja. The ruler is praised in this text, but partly for his active government and being dedicated to serving the state and its people – a far cry from earlier *kerajaan* literature, in which both 'state' and 'people' are portrayed virtually as parts or portions of the raja. Despite the laudatory tone, therefore, the text in fact represents surrender to a reversal of priorities. In this *Hikayat Johor* – in contrast to *kerajaan* literature of the past – the state and 'the people' are at centre stage (Milner 2002: Ch. 8).

In the early years of the twentieth century, two of the Peninsular sultanates – Johor and Trengganu – produced written constitutions. The word

for constitution (*undang undang tuboh kerajaan*) is of interest in tracing the emergence of a post-*kerajaan* world. *Undang undang* means 'laws', and *tuboh* is defined as 'body in the anatomical sense'. In a literal way, therefore, the constitution (and not the raja) was now the 'body' or the 'substance' of the *kerajaan* (Milner 2002: 215–216). A distinction would seem to have been drawn here between raja and *kerajaan*. In fact the term *kerajaan* did begin to be used more narrowly for 'government', while the old word *negeri*, once tending to mean just a settlement of people, was now often employed for 'state'. Perhaps nothing expresses so well the decline of the word *kerajaan* as the phrase one newspaper (in 1908) used for 'republic'. The phrase is *kerajaan ramai*: the people (*ramai*) – once defined with reference to kingship, as portions of kingship – were now in charge. The focus, again, had moved from *raja* to people (Milner 2002: 204). 'Republic' could be described as the 'people's *kerajaan*', confirming that the word *kerajaan* had been freed up to mean just 'government'. Redefining or replacing the old vocabulary of the *kerajaan* era, these are no mere word games: they are examples of the skilful ideological "moves" which can assist in introducing a new discourse (Pocock 1985: 14–15). Along with concepts relating to government, the economy and other areas, the concept of 'race' or 'ethnicity' was also fundamental in this new order.

Other aspects of the governmental and social context in which these new terms and ideas were being introduced include the colonial education systems. Despite their declared conservative aspirations at a general level, they could not help but promote change. In British Malaya, government education reports admitted to the spread of a "new learning" and a "scientific" knowledge (Milner 2002: 250), and the Sultan Idris Training College in Perak – an institution for training teachers – aspired to be "a Vernacular University in embryo" (Roff 1994: 143). Modern schooling in Medan also played a role in promoting a new consciousness (Reid 1979: 68). The emergence, especially from the 1870s, of a range of lively newspapers – interacting in various ways with government – was critical to the development of the public sphere in the colonial states. Singapore and Penang were major centres, as was Padang in Sumatra; the *Pewarta Deli* paper of Medan was written in Malay but run by outsiders, especially of Batak background (Ahmat 1995: Ch. 7). Associations were formed to discuss and confront emerging social and economic issues. One established in Cairo in the 1920s involved people from both British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. A Singapore Malay Union was set up in 1926, a Brotherhood of Malay Pen-friends (with members from Borneo as well as across the Peninsula) in 1934, and other 'Malay' associations in many of the sultanates. An East Sumatra Association was begun by Malay commoners from Medan in 1938; an All

Ceylon Malay Association was initiated in that country in 1922 (Hussain-miya 1987: 21). There were also numerous sports clubs and other social organizations – all, in their different ways, offering experience in a type of citizenship and opportunities for people to converse together about the problems faced by their communities (Roff 1994: Ch. 7; Hooker 2000: 67–68; Reid 1979: 68).

Much of this activity was carried on with the sympathy of colonial regimes. In some cases these established advisory councils in which 'native' representatives gained experience of government and active citizenship. In Singapore, Penang, Medan and other directly administered centres – and increasingly in formally sovereign sultanates – the European-led bureaucracies also set models of procedure and organization, and the actual language used in government pronouncements was of course peppered with the new vocabulary. The everyday discourse in the colonial state helped to make the old lifeworld of the *kerajaan* seem increasingly archaic and irrelevant. Another element in the colonial transformation was the way traditional prose (*hikayat*) literature waned in popularity (Putten 2001: 210, 234–235). Malay communities became embarrassed about their *kerajaan* heritage. Shadow plays and other old cultural forms "were gradually pushed back to the countryside in the remote corners of the Peninsula"; in Henk Maier's words, the "remnants of the ancient stories were presented more and more as beliefs and superstitions rather than as knowledge" (1988: 128). Colonial education "defamiliarized traditional Malay literature" for the people (Sweeney 1987: 274), and the language itself changed radically. Apart from the introduction of new vocabulary, the language underwent a structural transformation "from the formula, parataxis, and copia toward the abstract, the analytical, and subordination" (105). In the old paratactic style, ideas were linked by juxtaposition rather than by conjunctions: words such as 'because' and 'as a result of' were not essential. In the Malay-language newspapers of the colonial period, however, one clause tended to be subordinated to another, conveying an analytic rather than formulaic style of thought (Mohd. Taib Osman 1966; Milner 2002: 122–123).

Although it is true, therefore, that many of the sultanates were retained in the colonial state structure – and, as we have seen, some prospered materially – the 'traditional culture', including *kerajaan* values and style, encountered undeniable pressure. This pressure was not only direct – coming in part from new elites within (or living close to) their polities – but was also felt on a day-to-day basis as a result of the operations and discourse of the colonial societies. What is more, we will see that the *kerajaan* elites had to face a second form of critique, arising from important changes underway in the religious life of the Archipelago. If royal courts wished to

defend the old *kerajaan* system – and some in fact no longer seemed to want to do so, hoping for benefits from the world that was being ushered in – they had to work with a much-weakened ideological rationale, and also with an authority (including in the area of censorship) clipped by the colonial governments.

Making a 'Malay Race'

The idea of 'race' (or 'ethnicity'), as I have anticipated, was one key element in the new discourse which the rajas attempted to resist. In thinking about the Archipelago on the eve of this development, we have noted on the one hand the loose manner in which many Europeans had employed the word 'Malay' and, on the other, how a specific idea of 'Malay' had been developed in the Melaka/Johor context. I have been cautious about how far the European use of 'Malay' may have begun to influence self-perceptions among the people they described, creating a broader concept of 'Malay' that extended well beyond the Melaka/Johor sphere. What we will examine now is the way – beginning at the opening of the nineteenth century – the idea of 'Malay' began to be formulated more precisely by Europeans, and (especially important in the long term) how this formulation stimulated ideological experimentation among the 'Malays' themselves.

Classification was in general a preoccupation of this period in Europe. The category 'race' was employed as part of the attempt to discover "the whole 'map of mankind'" (Bayly 2004: 110; Hannaford 1996; Dumont 1992; Gould 1997) and it began to be discussed in biological and hierarchical terms. Some of the Europeans who founded 'Malay studies' – for instance, Governor Raffles – were closely in touch with these intellectual developments. When Raffles in the early 1800s declared that "I cannot but consider the Malayu nation as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, and preserving their character and customs" (1818: 103), it seems to me that this statement is not to be read as mere description. He was proposing a formulation, a category – contributing to a developing academic structure of knowledge (Reid 2001: 303; Milner 2002: 52). In the same spirit his close collaborator, John Leyden, applied the label 'Malay' to a wide range of Muslim-led polities in Borneo, and declared that the "character of the Malays" was virtually the same in all "eastern towns, phlegmatic, indolent, and proud" (Leyden 1968: 105). Another prominent scholar-official of the time, John Crawfurd, proposed to divide this "Malay race" into three classes, and then tried to determine the "parent country" (1967: 372; 1856: 250). It was in these years too that

Raffles gave the name *Malay Annals* to Leyden's English translation of the Melaka/Johor chronicle – which had called itself the *Genealogy of the Rajas* – and so appropriated a *kerajaan* composition on behalf of a race.

At a more mundane, practical level, the mid-nineteenth-century Malay-language geography (mentioned above) divides the world up into races rather than kingdoms, praising some and denigrating others, but always foregrounding the idea of 'race'. Assuming Munshi Abdullah's association with this text – and the Europeans who sponsored it – it may well have increased his familiarity with racial categorization. The text also makes clear that lifting the reputation (the word *nama* is used) of a race (*bangsa*) was a noble aspiration – just as *kerajaan* literature stressed the objective of enhancing the *nama* of both raja and subject (Milner 2002: 68). The colonial government census process (which began in British Malaya in 1871) was another initiative important in inculcating the new structure of classification. 'Race' was the key category – and, as Charles Hirschman has commented, this "particular construction of European taste" has continued "to haunt contemporary Malaysia" (1987: 570). The change in consciousness did not come quickly. The census-taker of 1931 expressed his frustration at "achieving anything like a scientific or logically consistent classification", especially because of "the fact that most Oriental peoples have themselves no clear conception of race" (564–565). Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people found it difficult to locate themselves within the colonially administered categories (Iskander Mydin 2006: 121–122).

The senior Malaysian scholar Shamsul A. B. has added to this narrative of 'race', pointing out how at the everyday level, through administrative policies such as the introduction of the Malay Reservation Act (1913), the development of separate 'Malay', 'Chinese' and 'Indian' schooling, and the setting up of a Department of Chinese Affairs and of special government-approved toddy shops for Indians, the colonial government "drove home the point" that racial categories mattered. They mattered in particular if one wished to "take advantage of what the colonial bureaucracy offered or . . . avoid its wrath" (Shamsul 1996a: 14; Shamsul 1999a). A recent essay by Dipesh Chakrabarty on the way the British in India – through censuses and other means – imposed discrete ethnic identities on top of previously "fuzzy" community boundaries reinforces Shamsul's observations. Chakrabarty suggests the reconstitution of categories – which did not, in fact, fully replace the earlier "fuzziness" in everyday lives – delivered the message that communities could be enumerated, had common interests and problems, and might act as a unit politically to further their objectives (2002: Ch. 6).

The 'plural society' that was consolidated within British Malaya – the phenomenon of different communities living "side by side yet without mingling" (Siddique 2001: 167), which I have suggested had its ultimate origins in the pre-colonial period – of course began to develop its own momentum in stimulating a sense of ethnic identity and separateness. The increased number of immigrants from outside the Archipelago, especially of 'Chinese' who seemed so successful in material ways, must have assisted the sharpening of a sense of common experience among the local community – of an 'us' and 'them' attitude. I have noted the fear of competition from these immigrants – seen as people 'on the move'. Such anxiety was all the greater when some immigrant leaders began to criticize the attitudes and culture of 'Malays', pointing especially to a lack of enterprise, and when people on all sides talked and wrote in terms of a 'Chinese/Malay' dichotomy (Khoo 1981). The fact that the 'Chinese' community itself was undergoing a similar process – moving from dialect-group and clan identities to a "cultural and political identity" as "Chinese" (Yen 2000: 12; Lee 1978: 46) – can only have reinforced the 'Malayization' of the 'Malays'.

In Borneo we have already noted that while James Brooke introduced the category 'Malay' to Sarawak, in Sabah the British North Borneo Company used a different "administrative vocabulary". Muslims there continued to be called 'Brunei', 'Bajau' and so forth. We see an illustration of the continuation of European agency in creating new categories in the comment of a British official in Sarawak in 1938. He asked his colleagues about the Muslim Melanau group: "Should they be encouraged to retain their individuality, or should they be absorbed by the Malay Race?" (Pringle 1970: 327). In Brooke-ruled Sarawak (to quote one magistrate), you had to "do one thing or the other". It was possible to change from being 'Malay' to being 'Iban' ('Dayak'), or vice versa, but it was not possible just for a Malay to live with Ibans. Fines were imposed for doing so. As a result, what had once appeared to be 'mixed Iban -Malay villages' – frequently located in the middle reaches of rivers – simply disappeared (Pringle 1970: 296–298). At the end of Brooke rule, the anthropologist Edmund Leach – who came to Sarawak to write a report on 'social science research' – continued the tradition of colonial, top-down human classification. He proposed a classification based on the "type of basic social organization" and was glad to report that using his definitions he had been able to "almost entirely dispense with all the 200 odd minor 'tribal' names which clutter up the earlier literature" (1950: 52–53).

In central Borneo similarities have been noted between Dutch practices and those of the Brookes. Both placed emphasis on 'Malay' and 'Dayak' as key categories in the classification of the people, and such formulations

changed "the very definition of ethnicity". Identity began to be "based less on geographical factors than on ethnicity in the Western sense" (Rousseau 1990: 74). In the last chapter I referred to Tim Babcock's comments on the distinction between 'racial identity' and identity by place. In the colonial period, people who were once identified with a particular place name (for instance, 'the Bintulu') or with a region ('Muruts' or 'inland people') – identities that were "characterized by impermanence" – were now subject to a European attempt to impose "bounded, permanent and stable ethnic identity". Babcock points out that apart from the census process, new identities were "created or stabilized" through "the role of vernacular radio broadcasting" and "vernacular publishing activity" – and he portrays well the confusion that could arise when the attempt was made to reorder local concepts in European ethnic categories (Babcock 1974).

On the Peninsula in particular, practical governmental measures were underpinned by the development of 'Malay studies', an endeavour in which both Europeans and 'Malays' engaged. Although at times driven by a genuine desire to understand, students of language, law, custom and history (as I have suggested in Chapter 1) tended to generate a series of stereotypes, giving the impression of adding substance to the concept of the 'race'. Raffles referred to the 'Malays' as "indolent" and "alive to insult", Swettenham to their "great endurance" and "disinclination to work". In the mid-nineteenth century Alfred Russel Wallace's scholarly *The Malay Archipelago* observed the "general taciturnity and reserve of the Malay", and added that "[he] is slow and deliberate in his speech, and circuitous in introducing the subject he has come expressly to discuss". We have already noted his comment that members of the elite were "exceedingly polite" (1962: 326, 448). In the development of the Malay language, the colonial powers also played a critical role. As James Collins and Zaharani Ahmad have explained, Dutch and British "language officers" went in search of the "ideal variant" of Malay. They "made enquiries, they ordered up 'authentic' texts, they wrote dictionaries, they inspired Malays to write dictionaries and grammars and texts, always texts" (1999: 139). They determined that the Malay of the old sultanate of Johor – now divided between the British and Dutch spheres – would become the model.

The Colonial Contribution

Three features need to be stressed about the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial contribution to the development of the 'Malay race'. First, in the formulation of Raffles and some others – a formulation that was

especially influential – the demographic scope envisaged for 'Malay' was relatively narrow. Raffles considered the "Malay states on the peninsula" to be the "least adulterated in their character, usages and manners" (1818: 107). He made it clear that he meant Kedah, Patani, Trengganu and Pahang as well as Johor; nevertheless, he seemed to invoke the old Melaka/Johor history when he said that the Malays "affirm without hesitation, that they all come originally from Pulo Percha (Sumatra)" (Raffles 1992: 10). Beyond the Peninsula and Minangkabau in Sumatra, he wrote of the Malays living "on the shores" of the Archipelago (1818: 103). In Borneo he said a mere "handful of Malays" had "in many places reduced many thousands of (Dayaks) to the condition of peaceful cultivators of the ground" (1992: 61). In the case of Borneo, Raffles's colleague, John Leyden, as I have noted, certainly labelled the Muslim polities on Borneo (such as Brunei, Pontianak, Kutei and Sambas) as 'Malay', even though (as Pringle suggests) there seems to be no evidence that the people concerned defined themselves in that way. Both Leyden and Raffles made a clear distinction between Malays, on the one hand, and Javanese, Bugis and Sulu on the other (Raffles 1818: 102).

This Raffles formulation of the scope of 'Malay' was probably influenced by what Sweeney calls "the custom in Romanticist Europe" that was influential at that time of "language-based 'nations'" or 'races' (see also Reid 2001: 302). The people whom Raffles appears to have thought of as 'Malay' spoke the Malay language – and as a first, everyday language; for them, Malay was not merely a 'learned language', a diplomatic language, a *lingua franca*. Raffles's formulation was also not far distant from the concept of 'Malayness' that we saw being developed in *kerajaan* texts: certainly much closer than that of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans, who at times employed the word to cover peoples right across the Archipelago (that 'untrustworthy Malay rabble'). It was an understanding of 'Malay' that was relatively well tailored for the 'British Malaya' that would gradually develop following the division of the Archipelago into British and Dutch spheres in 1824 – a better construction, for instance, than one that would immediately include the millions of Java living under Dutch control. With its Melaka/Johor history – and a degree of blindness toward the separate narratives of such places as Kelantan, Kedah and Patani – the idea of the 'Peninsular Malays' began to carry some sense of organic unity. The profiling of Melaka and its court texts in the British Malaya school system (numerous editions of the *Malay Annals* and the *Hang Tuah* epic were published) and the writing of books on the 'Peninsular Malays' (Wilkinson 1924) and 'British Malaya' (Swettenham 1907; Milner 2005) – together with the establishing of 'Johor Malay' as 'standard Malay' – can all be seen to have assisted the creation of a specific 'Malay heritage' that would be useful in the building

of a Peninsular rather than pan-Archipelago state. As I have already antici-
pated, this work of 'Malay studies' by no means came to a halt at the end
of the colonial period.

The second feature to highlight in the colonial formulation is that along-
side the relatively narrow Raffles definition of 'Malay', and an expressed
interest in determining racial origins, other more relaxed formulations
continued to operate, though sometimes informally. The loose application
of 'Malay' over the previous couple of centuries may help explain this.
Certainly, the Raffles perspective was different from that employed in
Ceylon where the strongly Javanese community was labelled 'Malay'; or
that used for the Cape or Cocos-Keeling 'Malays'. Wallace wrote of the
"Malays proper" who "inhabit the Malay Peninsula, and almost all the
coastal regions of Borneo and Sumatra" (1962: 446), but in looking across
the Archipelago he wrote in far broader terms of "two very strongly con-
trasted races" – "the Malays" and "the Papuans"; and in this formulation
of 'the Malays' he included Javanese, Bugis and "savage-Malays" (such as
the Dayak of Borneo, the Batak of Sumatra and the Jakun of the Peninsula).
The members of this large 'Malay' race, he said, were "light reddish brown"
in complexion with black straight hair and prominent cheek bones (446–
448). In the nineteenth century we often encounter such broad definitions
of 'Malay' as this: thus Swettenham, who had been so keen to pin down
the essence of the 'real Malay', would also write loosely of "two Malays,
natives of Java" (Swettenham 1912: 297), and Joseph Conrad's stories
certainly treat Bugis and Balinese as 'Malays'.

Even in government legislation there continued sometimes to be a relaxed
approach to deciding exactly who might be included in the category 'Malay',
and this proved significant. 'Malay Reservations' legislation (introduced by
the British to stabilize Malay land tenure) provides an example. In the leg-
islation (introduced in 1913) for what were called the 'Federated Malay
States' (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang), a 'Malay' was defined
as a person "belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks the
Malay language or any Malayan language and professes the Muslim reli-
gion". This could certainly include Javanese-speaking people. The legisla-
tion introduced in Kelantan did not mention the Malay language at all; and
the Perlis and Kedah Enactments include people "of Arab descent" (Wong
1975: 512–513). It was presumably sufficient to be Thai-speaking for the
census-taker, as the census of 1921 included thousands of Thai-speaking
Muslims from Kedah – previously referred to as 'Sam-Sam' – as 'Malays'
(Andaya and Andaya 2001: 183).

In the case of the Dutch colonial administration, my impression is that
despite the extraordinary freedom with which 'Malay' was used in the past

– and perhaps continued to be used in informal ways – it began to acquire far narrower connotations in the administrative lexicon. Having promoted the Malay language, the Dutch might have promoted 'Malay' as the inclusive term for the people of the 'Indies' – but they did not do so. The word 'Inlanders' ('natives') was often used, and sometimes 'Indier' ('Indian'). In the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsche-Indie* (Paulus 1917) – a vast compendium of ethnographic, historical, geographical and other knowledge about the region – 'Indonesian' was used as the term for 'Malayo-Polynesian' (Kato 1994; Reid 2001: 310), just as it had been used by Dutch, German and British ethnographers in the late nineteenth century (Hitchcock and King 1997: 1; Salazar 1998: 114). 'Malay' tended to be employed by the Dutch not in a general manner but as one of many specific categories, and the colonial government took pride in its ability to discriminate. In the *Encyclopaedie*, in the article dealing with the Riau-Lingga territories (the part of the Johor empire which had been brought within the Dutch sphere), a careful distinction is made between 'Malays proper', who are said to have come originally from the Peninsula, and the Bugis, Minangabau, Javanese, 'Palembangers' and 'Bankaneezen'. In Dutch Borneo, many Muslim immigrants retained their identity – for instance, as Bugis – whereas such peoples were more likely to be redefined as 'Malay' in Sarawak or on the Peninsula (King 1993: 33).

There was a crystallizing of ethnic categories in Dutch administrative practice in the nineteenth century, as in that of the British. We see this in East Sumatra where non-Muslim people who had interacted closely with the 'Malay' subjects of the sultans began to be categorized in ethnic terms. The word 'Karo', for instance, seems to have been used first as an ethnic label (by William Marsden) in 1811; and was employed "more and more during the late colonial era". The anthropologist Rita Kipp has speculated about the confusion that may have occurred when a British official in the 1820s (John Anderson) was trying to classify the people he encountered. Some people he spoke with may have used 'Karo-karo' with reference to a particular clan in the region; Anderson perhaps mistook this for an "ethnic label" and assumed it referred to all the people in the region (and not merely one clan). Having mistaken "clan labels" for "ethnic labels", he contributed to the creation of a specific 'Karo' ethnicity in East Sumatra (Kipp 1996: 42–46). Members of the 'Karo' – which appeared increasingly as an ethnicity in later Dutch discourse – have been cited misleadingly (including in my own work) as examples of people who have 'changed ethnicity' and 'become Malay'! Attempting to reconstruct Anderson's encounter with 'Karo' reminds one of the confusion of concepts of community which Babcock pointed to when European administrators arrived

in Sarawak – carrying assumptions about "bounded, permanent and stable" ethnicity.

The significant difference in Dutch classification measures – with respect to the concept of 'Malay' – is the way they continued to separate out 'Malays' from other peoples of the Archipelago. Although the British stressed the 'Peninsular Malays', they seemed far readier to acknowledge that outsiders might be admitted into that category. In the spirit of the *Encyclopaedie* article, the 1930 Dutch census for East Sumatra lists 'Malays' alongside 'Minangkabau', 'Acehnese', 'Karo Batak', 'Simalungan Batak' and 'Sundanese' – as well as the very large groupings of 'Javanese' and 'Chinese' (Reid 1979: 43). The census classified the people of Kuantan (further to the south) as Minangkabau – though in this case the people themselves saw advantages in later years in reclassifying themselves as 'Malay' (Kato 1997: 760). By contrast, in British Malaya (commencing in 1891), a general category of 'Malays' or 'Malaysians' was employed, and 'Javanese', 'Minangkabau', 'Bugis' and others were then listed under that heading (Hirschman 1987). The detail here can be confusing, but the dominance of the concept 'Malay' is nevertheless evident in the British case in a way that it is not in the Dutch classification system.

Stressing the continuing vagueness and sometimes contradiction in the way colonial authorities handled the idea of 'Malay' is important: to do so reminds us of the context in which 'Malays' themselves operated as they made their own contribution to constructing the new 'Malay' ethnicity. To the extent to which the colonial authorities endorsed the new stress on 'race' – and they certainly did so – it might be said that they left 'Malays' a number of options for manoeuvre when they set about the task of adding content to the concept of the 'Malay race'.

The third feature to note in the colonial influence on the construction of 'the Malays' is of particular importance when we come to the problems arising in the propagation of Malayness in the 'Malay' community itself: it is that the idea of 'race' carried an egalitarian ethic. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the early nineteenth century, there was a complementarity about race and democracy. 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" (Dumont 1972: 52–53). Prioritizing race is egalitarian in the sense that all levels of society partake in the racial heritage – perhaps, the racial blood – and it is not the monopoly of the aristocrats at the top. The concept of 'race' could be perceived by the *kerajaan* elite as threatening for this reason, as well as on the ground that a 'racial' or 'ethnic' community constituted a potential rival focus of identity and loyalty.

To sum up, therefore, in injecting the new concept of 'race' into the *kerajaan* communities, the Europeans gave priority to a narrower definition of 'Malay', but other formulations also remained influential. Like a number of concepts relating to society and government that were being propagated during the colonial period, however, 'race' was equipped with subversive potential. How, then, did the 'Malays' themselves respond to the new racial thinking?

Local Ideological Work

Again it is helpful to go back to Munshi Abdullah. As we have noted, his concern was the fortunes of 'the Malays' (*orang Melayu*), not of any specific sultanate or state, and he addressed himself at times specifically to a 'new generation'. His persistent focus on 'the Malays' was in itself a contribution to a recasting of categories and priorities in the Archipelago. Furthermore, he began to use the word *bangsa* in a way that conveyed the sense of 'race'. At several points he wrote (hesitantly, one feels) of the *bangsa Inggeris* ('the English race') and the *bangsa Arab* ('the Arab race'), as well as 'the Malay race'. To appreciate the context in which he experimented with *bangsa*, I have referred to the geography book with which he was bound to have been acquainted. Its use of *bangsa* – organizing the world in terms of races – must have appeared strikingly novel. In *kerajaan* texts, as has been noted, *bangsa* tended to convey 'caste' or royal descent (for example, from Alexander the Great). The geography text and Abdullah himself were therefore not merely foregrounding 'the Malays', but also helping to develop a concept: a notion of *bangsa* ('race') as a form of community or attachment that might compete, for instance, with *rakyat* ('subject'), or with the idea of being a 'Pahang person' (*orang Pahang*) or a 'Brunei person' (*orang Brunei*).

In defining 'Malay', Abdullah would seem to have thought very much as Raffles did. He had a notion, I think, of a core 'Malay' type: travelling up the east coast of the Peninsula, for instance, he calls the Malay language of Pahang (which would have been closest to that of Johor) "elegant and correct" (Kassim Ahmad 1964: 36); he also claims to have studied the Malay language and literature with elders in Melaka (Datoek Besar and Roolvink 1953: 41). But though he wrote of the 'the Malays' and the 'Malay race', he plainly saw this as an inclusive category – one that was capable of absorbing outsiders. This is evident in particular in the way he identified himself: he was described by a contemporary as a "Tamilian of Southern Hindustan", and although he tended sometimes to write of 'the Malays' as an outsider, in his later work he used the phrase 'we Malays'

(Milner 2002: 12). Again, the colonial thinking was sufficiently vague, even with the growing stress on scientific classification, not to have discouraged such a formulation. We should keep in mind, however, that Abdullah was experimenting with a new concept – and the Archipelago heritage, which was of course a part of the context in which he wrote, included other types of community (including the *kerajaan* as well as the Melaka-Johor concept of 'Malay') that possessed a strong ability to assimilate outsiders.

Critical to the building of 'the Malays' was to give the concept emotive content – but this was a task in which Abdullah engaged only indirectly. When he implied that 'Malays' were threatened by races "on the move" (and that they could be "trodden underfoot"), or spoke of the stupidity of the royal courts, one has the sense that he was trying to inspire the people – or at least the small elite in the 'new generation' (Milner 2002: 81–83, 79). The anxiety about competition from foreigners, as already observed, became a well-established theme in the colonial period – with Mohd. Eunos Abdullah referring to 'Malays' being "driven away" by "other races". He urged 'Malays' "to try to unite themselves, especially when all of the Malay *bangsa* is governed by other races" (26 November 1907). Although not perceived today as a nationalist hero (though he was the first leader of the Singapore Malay Union in the 1920s), Eunos played a creative part in the ideological building of the 'Malay people': he praised "love of race", called upon Malays to lift the "rank" of their race, and stressed the "courteous behaviour", royal rituals and other customs (*adat*) that helped to define 'the Malays' (Milner 2002: Chs 4 and 5). The theme of devotion to *bangsa*, or 'race', was certainly echoed time and again over the next decades. It was present in *Warta Malaya*, a 1930s newspaper edited by the future post-war Malay leader Dato Onn bin Jaafar (Zulkipli 1979); and in a celebrated novel of 1930, "love for the race and homeland is depicted as being greater than romantic love" (Hooker 2000: 96). Later ideologues followed Eunos in drawing upon the rhetoric of the *kerajaan* era to inject emotion into the *bangsa Melayu* – calling for the *bangsa* to be lifted "onto a throne" and describing service to the *bangsa* in language similar to that once used to describe service to the raja (Milner 2002: 98, 272–273).

Was this just a matter of rhetorical strategies or a fusion of foreign and local thinking? We do get a sense of one form of communitarian concept being replaced by another. The concept of individualism was clearly muted in the *kerajaan* system, and there are plenty of indications that during the colonial period people were uncomfortable with the type of focus on the individual that accompanied liberal economic theories – what Munshi Abdullah had talked about as the individual being able to do "something important" and live "like a raja". One writer of the 1930s rejected strongly

the idea of individuals "caring only for themselves", and as modern litera-
ture developed it was a characteristic of many 'Malay' writers to be troubled
by the 'I' perspective. They wanted to "go down into society" and immerse
themselves in the "very being" of the people (Thani 1981: 25; Hooker 2000:
185–186, 95). To describe commitment to the *bangsa* in the way commit-
ment to the *kerajaan* had once been expressed, suggests the possibility that
the *bangsa* was being perceived as fulfilling a comparable communitarian
function. Devotion to the 'Malay race', no less than devotion to the sultan,
was capable of being understood to offer the individual meaning and defini-
tion. We know there was an aspiration to lift the rank of the *bangsa*, but
was there a sense that the individual's own rank, or *nama*, was secured and
perhaps strengthened through service to 'the Malays'? A 'Malay' historian
and social critic of the 1920s certainly confirmed the continuing significance
of *nama* in the community: "Malays", he said, were even then "preoccupied
with the search for nama", while Chinese, on the other hand, devoted
themselves to "industry" (Abdul Hadi 1929: 6; see also Karim 1990:
16–17).

One key issue for Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, and numerous ideological
workers of later years, was the concern about just which people could be
considered 'Malay'. Eunos insisted that the Ceylon 'Malays', although they
were not resident in the Archipelago, were in fact members of the Malay
bangsa, and that Peninsula people "should . . . seek ways to bring about a
unity with them" (26 November 1907): in fact, members of the Ceylon
community were themselves displaying a keenness to develop a stronger
'Malay' consciousness in the early years of the century (Hussainmiya 1991;
Saldin 1996: 23–25). In the next decades there would be much debate about
how inclusive the *bangsa* could be. Some emphasized a broad vision of
'Malayness': an influential *History of the Malay World*, written by Abdul
Hadi in the 1920s, portrays Java as part of the scope of 'Melayu'. Other
works (including certain books of Harun Aminurashid) stressed the Melaka
heritage. Others again were determined to exclude people who were not
indigenous to the Archipelago: the prominent journalist Abdul Rahim Kajai,
for instance, referred sarcastically to 'Malays' possessing Arab or Indian
"blood", and suggested that just being Muslim certainly did not make one
a member of the 'Malay race'. Islam was "not a bangsa", he said dismis-
sively (Abdul Latiff 1984: 373; Roff 1994: 220; Zahairin 2006). It has been
pointed out that some who held such views were ready to ignore the Islamic
qualification for 'Malayness' altogether, being willing to call Balinese
'Malay' even though they were not Muslim (Mohamed Aris Othman 1977:
218). Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was to become the first prime minister
of the independent state of Malaya, suggested in 1940 that it was enough

to have a 'Malay' mother to qualify as a 'Malay', whereas a Malay news-paper (*Utusan Melayu*) insisted that a person's father must be 'Malay' (Zahairin 2006: 257–258). The debate about the scope of 'Malay' would definitely continue. The fluidity and contest here are significant – but we should note the power of the 'race' concept, especially in the 1930s (with Abdul Rahim Kajai and others): it displays some of the characteristics of the 'scientific racism' that had developed in Britain and Europe by that time (Shamsul 1996: 21).

Content and 'Localization'

Respecting the content of 'Malayness', the way Eunos's newspaper editorials gave attention to customs (*adat*) is of interest. He was of course not merely describing a 'Malay *adat*'. We have seen that there were in fact many different *adat*, with different sultanates and even different villages being recognized as having their own particular *adat*. A specifically 'Malay' *adat* was something that needed to be constructed. Eunos's writing suggests that he was ready to appropriate *adat* from one sultanate or another – and this included customs relating to kingship itself, including the elaborate ceremonial detail of a royal wedding. He did not denigrate the rajas in the way Abdullah had done, but presented the sultanates in a new and ideologically innovative context. The dignity of the raja, he explained, needed to be respected in accordance with "the customs (*adat*) of the race (*bangsa*)" (Milner 2002: 101). This was a complete reversal of earlier priorities: custom was once 'in the hands of' the ruler; now Eunos was presenting custom as being essentially 'in the hands of' the race – and it is in that context (and not for his own sake), he conveys, that the ruler deserves respect. This is a line of thought that in future years would lead to the monarchs being reconstructed, eventually in the writings of their own courts as well, as 'symbols' of 'Malayness' (Milner 2003a). In this new situation, they would be presented not merely in the new form of diligent administrators, working for the good of their subjects; they were as well conceptualized as an institution possessing a meaning that was grounded in a *bangsa* that transcended individual sultanates. Thus, when the influential Ibrahim Yaacob wrote enthusiastically (in 1951) of the "civilization" of 'the Malays' and of an historical heritage reaching back to Srivijaya (Ariffin 1993: 20–21), he was certainly acknowledging the achievements of the kingdoms of the past – but incorporating them as elements in a specifically 'Malay' narrative.

The content of 'Malayness' that was often pointed to throughout the colonial period was the Malay language itself. Abdullah, influenced presum-

ably by European thinking of the period, had argued that language was critical for "any great race", and had urged Malays to foster their language, in particular learning how to read and write (Milner 2002: 46–47). When the Brotherhood of Malay Penfriends was established as a pan-British Malaya 'Malay' association in 1935, it adopted the slogan *Hidup Bahasa! Hidup Bangsa*! ('Long live the Language! Long live the Race!') (Hooker 2002: 90). The relation between race, on the one hand, and language and literature, on the other, was perceived to be tight. A writer would dedicate a novel to the race; poetry also evoked pride in the *bangsa Melayu* (Milner 2002: 272). A poem of the early 1940s declared that "through *bahasa* (language) the *bangsa* (race) is successful . . . through *bahasa* the *bangsa* is known" (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 259).

One further feature of the concept of *bangsa Melayu* is the impression it conveys of being in a sense insubstantial. This is a difficult and important matter: it concerns the permanence or otherwise of the 'Malay race' – which has been a theme in reflective 'Malay' writings at least since the nineteenth century. In two of his works, Munshi Abdullah had warned that if 'the Malays' neglected education the "name 'Malay'" might "disappear from this world" (Kassim Ahmad 1964: 29; Datoek Besar and Roolvink 1953: 304). One of Eunos's editorials observes that a people who do not work diligently may not be able to make themselves "permanent in the world". He also warned 'Malays' not to be like those people "who are so confused that they do not know their race" (Milner 2002: 99–100). This sense of anxiety has most commonly been expressed by a reference to Hang Tuah: though the quotation is not to be found in the epic, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, he is said to have denied vehemently that the Malays could "disappear from this world" (Mahathir 1982: 5). Despite the international influence of a biological concept of race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and its impact in certain situations on thinking in the Archipelago, the *bangsa Melayu* did not therefore seem to acquire the 'permanence', or security, one might expect of a community believed to be founded on blood relationships. Virginia Hooker, in analysing a novel of 1941 by the leading 'Malay' author Ishak Haji Muhammad, has helped to develop this observation. In the novel, she explains, it is made clear that 'Malayness' is based on behaviour, dress and language. Such a category is fluid, "able to encompass anyone who adopts these traits". Reading Ishak's novel, Hooker observes his fear that 'Malayness' can be lost – and the fear is realistic. As she explains: if 'Malayness' is "not based on descent and blood" but only on "clothes and manners" – if anyone can 'become Malay' – then 'Malayness' can in fact be "easily lost" (Hooker 2000: 121, 216).

The fact that despite its emotional power the 'Malay *bangsa*' has had this somewhat mercurial character, I would suggest, was influenced by the idea of 'Malayness' that had been developing in Melaka/Johor. Hang Tuah (as discussed in the previous chapter) was portrayed as making clear that Malayness was not essentially a matter of descent: the 'Malays' of Melaka, he said, were in fact mixed with Javanese from Majapahit. The cultural construction of 'the Malays' in the twentieth century, despite the influence of European racial thinking, would seem to reflect such earlier *kerajaan*-era thinking about 'community'. In this respect it is helpful to note again the way the East Sumatran court text, the *Hikayat Deli*, describes Portuguese fleeing to the jungle, changing their "customs, language and clothes", and becoming Jakun (Aborigines). Recall also the apparent ease with which *kerajaan* were able to absorb Orang Asli, Bataks and Dayaks (a process which was later termed 'Malayization') – and how that process could sometimes work in the opposite direction as well. If modern perceptions of 'Malayness' were influenced by this sense of fluidity in conceptualizing 'community', at the beginning of the twentieth century Eunos would understandably be concerned to make the race 'permanent'. The continuing anxiety about 'Malays' "disappearing from this world" is also not surprising. There is of course a further implication arising from such an understanding of 'community' (including 'race'). Such fluidity must offer enormous potential for reconstruction, and even reinvention – for imaginative ideological work.

What, then, did 'Malay' leaders in British Malaya do with the idea of 'race' that was disseminated during the colonial period? They made the *bangsa Melayu* an alternative identity to 'subjecthood', a concept independent of and actually transcending individual sultanates; they sought to transfer loyalty and devotion from raja to race, actually appropriating *kerajaan* ideas to do so. The 'Malay' ideologues argued about exactly who was and who was not 'Malay', and the criteria to be employed. Particularly important, they retained in their construction of the 'Malay race' – in particular in the lack of stress on descent and the *kerajaan*-like emotive commitment – older cultural notions of community. In achieving a fusion of ideas – in what Tony Day has called an "epistemological partnership" between "Western knowledge" and local knowledge (Day 2002: 101–102) – it might be argued that they 'localized' the idea of a 'Malay race', just as Indian ideas and institutions had been appropriated and recast many centuries earlier. Although I have stressed the deliberateness of ideological engineering, localization was of course first an endeavour of understanding. We should not underestimate the amount of confusion, speculation and experimentation that is likely to take place when one structure of meaning

is in the throes of being replaced by another. In the 'localizing' of the particular concept of 'race', it is finally important to keep in mind that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideologues promoted a notion of the *bangsa Melayu* that would always stimulate a sense of anxiety – as well as a sense of imaginative possibilities.

In this discussion I have focused on elites – the journalists, novelists and others who were carrying out what is appropriate to describe as 'ideological work'. As these people knew well, to build the 'Malay race' they had to communicate the concept to the wider community. The task was arduous, as the frustrated British census-takers also understood. Eunos's editorials, for instance, often explained to his readers the importance of 'race' (and 'love of race'), not only in the 'Malay' case but also for other peoples. The idea of 'Malay' needed to be promulgated in all manner of ways. These included the establishing of specifically 'Malay' associations (a Malay Football Association, a Malay Teachers Association, a Malay Trading and Craft Company, a Malay Literary Society and the Young Malay Union were among the initiatives); the use of 'Malay' in the names of newspapers and magazines (*Utusan Melayu*, *Lembaga Melayu*, *Panji panji Melayu*, the *Malay Mail*); the writing of novels with 'Malayness' as a central theme; and the rewriting of the past as a 'Malay' narrative, not a range of *kerajaan* narratives (a project led in different ways by Abdul Hadi Hassan and Harun Aminurashid). When the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper was introduced in 1939 (reviving an old name), the opening issue declared the aim of serving "the bangsa, the Muslim religion and the country". The order of priorities seems significant (Roff 1994: Chs 5 and 6; Hooker 2000; Zahairin 2006: 255). On the eve of the Japanese conquest, the prominent intellectual and political leader Ibrahim Yaacob gave an insight into how difficult the task of promoting the *bangsa* could be. He described his many travels around the country attempting to instil "a feeling of bangsa identity" among the people. He focused too on immigrants from the Archipelago – now largely under Dutch control – explaining, for instance, to Bawean youths that their homeland was only a small island to the north of Java: the important thing to remember was that they were 'Malay' (1941: 11, 60). He took a very inclusive view of 'the Malays', insisting that they included not just 2.5 million people on the Peninsula but the 65 million of Indonesia.

Beyond the Peninsula

The promotion of a 'Malay' consciousness was underway outside the Peninsula as well. In Sarawak – where apart from a few immigrants from the

Peninsula or Sumatra most of the 'Malays' tended to be converts from Iban and other "local native sources" – there was no "homogenous group" and "no one indigenous, basic 'Malay adat'". The Malays, as Tom Harrisson saw the situation, had to "make themselves a people" – and this was a process taking place even when he arrived there at the end of the colonial period (1970: 156, 394–395). There was an issue here too about just what was entailed in being 'Malay'. Did one, for instance, have to be a Malay-language speaker? One report suggests that, despite the influence of the Romanticist fusion of language and ethnicity, there was no need in Sarawak to speak Malay as a native language in order to be 'Malay': a person calling himself 'Malay' might "only be implying that he is a Muslim" (Morris 1991: 6). As to 'custom', Edmund Leach concluded in 1950 that "few Malays can provide satisfactory information about the norms of their customary behaviour" (1950: 80). Tim Babcock also pointed to the manner in which 'Malay' and other ethnicity has been 'localized' in Sarawak. Having explained the difference between the flexible, local concepts of identity – "populations continually 'becoming' something else" – and the colonial concept of a 'stable ethnic identity' – he insists that the second has not simply replaced the first. In certain cases, he says, "becoming a Malay does not necessarily mean ceasing to be a Melanau – we may find a hierarchy of identities determined by the situation a particular individual is in at the moment" (1974). While admitting, however, the possibility that old ideas might well have shaped thinking about a new 'Malay' ethnicity – and also the range of problems in giving content to 'Malayness' – it is nevertheless the case that a growing 'Malay' consciousness is suggested by the establishing of a Sarawak Malay Union in 1937, the publishing of a 'Malay' novel in 1932 and the launching of a Malay-language newspaper in the same decade (Sanib 1985: 26–27). The newspaper, according to Reece, expressed the aim of "inculcating a feeling of Malayness among Malays who were more conscious of their Brunei or Sumatran origins than of belonging to a community distinct from the Chinese and Ibans" (1982: 133).

North Borneo (Sabah), as Ahmat Adam has explained, was also not completely isolated from the promotion of 'Malay' consciousness. The Penfriends Association on the Peninsula recruited members there in the 1930s – particularly school teachers and civil servants – and newspapers edited by Ibrahim Yaacob, Dato' Onn, Harun Aminurashid and other activists circulated in some parts of the territory. A National Malay Association of Tawau was formed straight after the war – initiated by a teacher from Kelantan (Ahmat 2000).

In Brunei, the appointment of the writer Harun Aminurashid as Director of Malay Education (1939–1946) – though intended by the British

bureaucracy to keep him out of Peninsular politics – meant the presence there of one of the leading figures in the promotion of the 'Malay race'. In Brunei he would appear to have continued both to laud the achievements of Melaka and to express sympathy for a pan-Archipelago vision. One of those he is said to have influenced was Sheikh A. M. Azahari, who came from Labuan – the small island located just a few miles from Brunei and administered by the British over the previous century. Azahari eventually set up a political party, and then led an unsuccessful rebellion against the sultan (Hussainmiya 1995: 87–88, 158–159). In Sri Lanka the Colombo Malay Cricket Club was established in 1872, an All Ceylon Malay Association was formed in 1922, and the colony's Legislative Council included a 'Malay' representative from 1924 (Hussainmiya 1987: 21; Saldin 1996: 23). In South Africa – where social boundaries had also begun to "solidify more rigidly along racial lines" in the nineteenth century, a Cape Malay Association was formed in 1923 (Lyon 1983: 49, 61).

One of the problems in propagating the idea of the 'Malay race', as Ibrahim Yaacob explained in his 1941 account of Peninsular developments, was the opposition of many of the royal courts. This was to be expected, because they had plenty to lose. I have mentioned that Ibrahim himself was willing to condemn 'people of high rank': he suggested the traditional leadership was so poor that the Malay people had become "like a boat which had lost its steersman" (1941: 6, 58). In describing *kerajaan* opposition to the 'Malay' movement, he said the courts "still hold firmly to the old feeling and strongly oppose the new desire to unify the Malay people". In Kedah, members of the ruling elite had opposed the formation of a Malay association on the ground that Kedah "possesses a raja"; in Perlis, Ibrahim was frustrated to find the people "did not know how to love their *bangsa*"; they were "loyal only to their raja". In Perak, royal opposition discouraged the use of the term 'Malay' in the name of an association intended to promote unity (Milner 2002: 269–270). The rulers on the Peninsula eventually made an accommodation of sorts with the *bangsa* movement, but an element of struggle has continued up to the present day.

A similar royal attitude also seems to have operated in Brunei. As D. E. Brown's careful study of the sultanate explains the situation, "ethnic distinctions were potentially of minor significance within the indigenous population for all indigenous groups enjoyed the common status of subject of the Sultan". The rulers would not have wanted to encourage "broad-scale ethnic identities", but rather preferred a "classificatory 'fragmentation' of ethnic groups by local identification". They took steps, Brown says, to "hinder coalitions of people under them" (Brown 1970: 4, 9). In Sarawak key figures in the 'Malay' aristocratic establishment who continued to hold

considerable authority under the Brookes (such as the Datuk Patinggi) also opposed a commoner-led promotion of 'Malay' consciousness. The owner of the Malay-language newspaper was in fact an outsider: a man of Minangkabau background who had a close connection with the social movements underway in Singapore at that time (Sanib 1985: 28; Reece 1982: 131).

In East Sumatra it was reported that the *kerajaan* leadership – "the tengkus and datuks" in such sultanates as Deli, Langkat and Asahan – "never cared for the suku Melayu" (the Malay ethnic group); they had no desire to face competition for the loyalty of their subjects from potential 'Malay' associations (Ariffin 1993: 78). In the 1930s, both the Dutch and various political activists in the region were impressed by the sultanates' capacity to control their subjects politically: a 1935 Dutch report noted the effectiveness of their stand against "political expression in general" (Reid 1979: 62). It was in Medan – an enclave like Singapore or Penang – that Dutch-educated commoner 'Malays' took on a leadership role, creating in 1938 an East Sumatra Association to represent the interests of the Malays and other local or autochthonous groups (Reid 1979: 68). Although most members of the association were apparently 'Malay' – and it was said to have promoted a "genuinely pan-Malay identity" (Ariffin 1993: 25) – it seems significant that the word 'Malay' was not in the name. The association was eventually placed under the leadership of a member of the Asahan royal family, Dr Tengku Mansur. In his study of these developments, Ariffin Omar has suggested that the leadership change – drawing in a prominent member of a royal family – was intended to give the association "greater influence and membership" (1993: 27).

Ariffin notes as well that in individual East Sumatra sultanates, like the sultanates on the Peninsula, "associations" were being sponsored by royal family members in the late 1930s. It may well be true, as he suggests, that in both regions these associations were intended to serve the interests of the segment of the population that was increasingly identifying as 'Malay' (23). Nevertheless on the Peninsula, though we have noticed the royal reluctance, they were called the Selangor Malay Association, the Pahang Malay Association and so forth (Roff 1994: 236–237). By contrast, in East Sumatra there were the Association of Native Sons of Deli, the Loyal Langkat Association and other titles – all organizations with royal backing, and avoiding the description 'Malay' (Ariffin 1993: 23–24). The royal elite, it would seem, consistently referred to commoners as *rakyat* (subjects), rather than 'Malays' (71, 77) – though the idea of 'the people' also gathered a radical potency, for instance, with an insistence on the 'people's sovereignty' (see

Chapter 6). Another impression I have is that to the extent the concept of 'Malay' was developed at all in East Sumatra, it did not achieve any real independence from the royal focus, the *kerajaan*. The issue is difficult to analyse, but some of the interviews which Ariffin records convey that custom (*adat*), like religion, had continued to be seen as being 'in the hands of' the rulers (89, 93). Moreover, when the East Sumatran monarchs fell in the revolution of 1946, it was recalled that the 'Malays' were so identified with the royal courts that they "paid for the mistakes of the rajas" (78).

The Medan region was by no means socially and politically static during the 1920s and 1930s – and both the sultans and their 'Malay' subjects were wary of the changes underway. Apart from the vast plantation economy and the flood of Javanese and other immigrants, there was the development of the Indonesian nationalist movement. By the 1920s, its focus was on 'Indonesia' and the 'Indonesian people'. There had been earlier experimentation with the concept 'Boemipoetera' (a translation of the Dutch 'Inlanders', or 'natives') (Kato 1994), and some argued for a specifically Javanese identity and nationalism (Shiraishi 1981). As we have noted, however, the choice of 'Indonesia' was influenced by European and especially Dutch practice. The 'Malays' in East Sumatra do not appear to have engaged in the nationalist activities (Ariffin 1993: 33). By 1930 the Javanese immigrant community of their region numbered more than 40 per cent of the total population (12); and, as Ariffin explains, "Indonesian nationalism was seen [by 'Malays'] as a covert attempt by some Javanese to impose Javanese hegemony on the Malays" (24).

In the next chapter we will examine in more detail what was happening in 'Malay' communities in colonial states – and their nation-state successors – beyond British Malaya. It is already obvious, however, that in East Sumatra and Brunei (and probably numerous other areas in the Archipelago), the construction of a 'Malay race' – as an identity and attachment independent of subjecthood – had not been given the same ideological attention as it had on the Peninsula. A general observation can also be made about the impact of colonial and nation states on the 'Malay' movement. Apart from the opposition that any political activity might meet from colonial governments, the very fact that the British, the Dutch and the Thais engaged in the creating of territorially defined states – which, as it turned out, formed the basis for future nation states – had obvious and far-reaching significance for the way 'Malay' identity and loyalty could develop. This state building placed limits on ethnicity – a phenomenon that the colonial regimes had themselves done much to foster. In examining more closely the relation between the growing 'Malay' consciousness and the colonial and

nationalist states, we will consider the way variation between the policies and approaches of the different colonial states helped to make 'Malay' mean different things in different regions.

The issue that will be considered first, however, concerns another type of challenge for the builders of the *bangsa Melayu* (the 'Malay race') – one arising from changes occurring within the Islamic religion. It was a challenge in the first place, however, for the royal courts of the sultanates.

The Islamic Critique

Religious developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it could be argued, have been as significant for the 'Malay people' as the imposition of colonial administrations. I have noted how one advocate of the *bangsa Melayu*, in attempting to define its membership, insisted that Islam was "not a bangsa", and that people of Indian and Arab background were not necessarily to be considered 'Malay'. In the first half of the twentieth century there were certainly Islamic leaders on the Peninsula – religious teachers and journalists, such as Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi – who on their part called on 'Malays' to consider themselves as, above all, members of the Islamic community, the *umat*. They sought in addition the adoption of a programme of social reform based on Islamic principles, and led by those qualified in terms of their religious knowledge – the *ulama*, or religious scholars. These Islamic leaders criticized both the *kerajaan* and the *bangsa*-minded (race-minded) thinking around them.

At first glance, the opposition to the sultanates is a surprise. During the early centuries of Islamization in Southeast Asia, as I have explained, the religion appeared to have been adopted with relatively little dislocation. Quite radical contradictions, however, emerged in the nineteenth century – something influenced by changes going on in the wider Muslim world. Islamic critics became increasingly direct in their condemnation of the royal courts – as did Ibrahim Yaacob and other *bangsa*-minded critics – for being preoccupied with "titles and ranks and decorating the chest with such and such medals", and for squandering money on useless celebrations. They reminded Muslims who focused on monarchy (or nation, or race) that their greatest obligation was to the larger community – of Islam (Milner 2002: Chs 6 and 7).

Such Islamic spokespeople were heirs to a particular tradition of religious criticism of monarchy – a current of criticism which I noted in Chapter 2 – and it is this tradition that had become far more influential in Muslim communities generally by the early nineteenth century. A comment in the

sixteenth-century writings of the Portuguese Tome Pires provides one indication of a longstanding tension between monarchy in the early Archipelago sultanates: a Melaka sultan is described as being criticized "on account of the arrogance of [his] sin" of announcing that Melaka was to be "made into Mecca" (Cortesao 1990: 253–254). Apart from conveying that there were Islamic scholars in Melaka willing to resist a monarch's claims, such a reported aspiration on the part of the ruler hints at a royal disquiet about Islam. There are also subtle indications of anxiety about the *haj* in certain *kerajaan* writings (Matheson and Milner 1984) – and it would not be surprising if elements in the royal elite were troubled about the pilgrimage's potential to foster an alternative focus of social consciousness and loyalty. Another possible indication of such disquiet is the way the Melaka-Johor chronicle, the *Malay Annals*, refers dismissively to some Islamic matters. Anthony Johns has observed that in the *Malay Annals* "all the references to Islam are superficial in character" and sometimes "light hearted" (1975: 42). But the light-heartedness tends to relate in particular to religious scholars and their activities rather than the Islamic religion in any general sense.

The law texts of the sultanates also convey a degree of tension: although including elements of Islamic law, they tend to stress monarchy rather than the Shari'ah. As we saw in Chapter 2, the texts give the impression of presenting Islamic penalties merely as possible alternatives to customary (*adat*) ones, and the authority of the laws themselves is presented in a way that suggests it is derived as much from the raja as from God. The Melaka laws are said to have been "laid down" by the first Muslim ruler of Melaka (a descendant of Alexander the Great), and the actual list of laws commences with the sumptuary regulations that were so critical to the *kerajaan*. Such texts would have been unlikely to please a religious scholar (*ulama*), especially one already inclined to be suspicious of monarchy. The persistent honouring of the *adat* (and not merely the Holy Law, the Shari'ah) would also have caused irritation, and there were as well the many elements of the Hindu–Buddhist past that had been retained in royal rituals and regalia and in *kerajaan* literature. Anthony Johns has stressed that Islamic scholars maintained "the pulse of religious teaching" (1982: 131) in the Archipelago: it might be suggested that even when there was no obvious disagreement between rulers and *ulama*, the scholars tended to be engaged in the elaboration of what was essentially an alternative template for religious and social life. It was a template which tended to carry the real authority of the Shari'ah. By the nineteenth century, the balance of influence within the broad Islamic world was to some extent moving away from the defenders of monarchy toward Shari'ah-minded scholars of this type (Hodgson 1974,

vol. 1: 318) – a development many Archipelago rulers would have been unlikely to welcome.

The sharpening tension with Shari'ah-minded scholars was especially apparent in Arabia, where the puritanical Wahhabis called for the Islamic community to be governed by the divinely ordained law, and demanded that the Ottoman sultans no longer have the authority to determine Islamic orthodoxy. In Minangkabau in central Sumatra, groups influenced by these Arabian developments demanded an end to cock-fighting and opium-smoking and challenged (often with violence) the authority of the Paga-ruyung monarchy. These revolutionary groups were called 'Padri' because of their association with Pedir in north Sumatra – a departure point for the pilgrimage to Mecca. The influence of the movement went well beyond the Minangkabau region. In 1811, Raffles 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" (Raffles 1992: 80). The sultan of Deli in East Sumatra complained in a letter to the British in Penang that the Islamic reformers were "determined to attack different states and render them tributary . . . to be obedient to all their peculiar laws" (Milner 1981: 59; Dobbin 1983; Proudfoot 2003: 8).

The establishing of British and Dutch enclaves in the Archipelago, and later the extension of European control across the sultanates themselves, offered opportunities as well as obstacles for the religious elites. Although the Dutch fought the Padris in Sumatra, and remained suspicious of Islam through the colonial period, by the end of the nineteenth century they attempted to distinguish between Islam as a religion (when as such it would be allowed freedom) and as a political force (in which case it would be suppressed) (Ricklefs 2001: 213). In the British case, a recent study stresses the antagonism Governor Raffles showed toward Islam – considering it to be in the British interest to "prevent the increase of the Arab influence among the Malay nations" (Raffles 1992: 85; Muhd Khairudin 2004); and in later years it was a British strategy to encourage the use of Romanized Malay rather than Jawi (Arabic-based) writing, partly to frustrate those seeking to foster a more religiously focused community (Milner 2002: 251). Despite these qualifications, however, the British government meddled rela-tively little in religious affairs. Where direct colonial administration oper-ated – for instance, in Singapore – there was probably more opportunity for religious experimentation than under sultanate administration. In the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries had observed that the people took "their religion more lightly" in the *kerajaan* polities: there they were "far less under the influence of Mohomedan bigotry than the Malays in

Singapore itself". Immigrants to Singapore from the sultanates were observed to come under the influence of religious leaders in the colony – often described in terms suggesting they were both rigorously puritanical and powerful (Milner 2002: 155–158).

In Patani too when *kerajaan* control was removed, religious leaders gained in authority. After Siam replaced the royal elite with Thai officials in the early twentieth century there was an "intensifying of religious activity", and "religious leaders" began to be "regarded as leaders in the secular sphere when the traditional nobility was replaced" (Omar Farouk 1984: 236; Matheson and Hooker 1988: 7, 18). In East Sumatra as well it is striking that the Muhammadiah, the modernist Islamic movement influenced by reformist trends in the Middle East, was suppressed in the *kerajaan* polities but able to grow in Medan – outside royal control. This was a city of 76,000 people by 1930, and had much of the cosmopolitanism and other urban dynamics (including a publishing industry) that one might find in places like Singapore and Penang. One prominent Islamic scholar commented on the freedom in outlook of the people of the city, and in 1939 thousands of people were recorded as attending Muhammadiah meetings held there (Reid 1979: 58–59, 63–64; Luckman 2002).

Apart from the current of ideas from the wider Muslim world, the activism of the Shari'ah-minded religious leadership would appear to have been stimulated by the challenge of Christian missionaries: "Mohomedanism", said one of them with obvious disappointment, "had much revived" as a result of the missionary presence (Milner 2002: 153–155). Another likely factor was the actual growth of cities like Singapore. As Clifford Geertz suggested long ago, "a more vigorous, more intense, and purer adherence" to what is regarded as the true spirit of Islamic teaching was likely to occur in a lively commercial setting (1970: 150).

Describing the reaction of the sultanates to the new emphasis in Islam, I have stressed the control the royal courts exercised, and they did display resourcefulness in exercising influence over religious teaching, imposing various forms of censorship on published materials, developing religious bureaucracies and selecting sympathetic *kadis* (judges) and other officials (Milner 2002: 217–219; Iskander Mydin 2006). But another reaction was to make compromises with – or perhaps, to be genuinely influenced by – the more Shari'ah-minded teaching. Making judgements about real motives is not easy. Some colonial-period writings produced by the royal courts made a point of praising the "faith and devotion toward God" of a ruler, reporting the way he urged his people to "study religious knowledge and perform good works and always visit the mosques and religious schools". Other signs of an increase in religiosity in the *kerajaan* include descriptions of

coronations, where I have the impression that Islam and religious officials assumed a greater importance in the twentieth century than earlier (Milner 2002: 216, 245). There was also the ending of the practice of erecting relatively elaborate gravestones (with carving reminiscent of Hindu/Buddhist motifs) that suggested the hierarchy rather than general equality of humankind. Such gravestones, it began to be said, are against the teaching of the Prophet. At most, it was thought, graves should be "simply marked" (Othman 1988: 137; Bougas 1988: 48). Designs on textiles also changed – with human, bird and animal forms being removed, and Islamic exhortations sometimes added (Maxwell 1990: 330–331). From the early twentieth century there were as well less vernacular mosques – those wooden buildings with high-pitched, layered and often pyramidal roofing. The onion-shaped domes that began to appear – for instance, in Deli (1909), Kedah (1912) and Kuala Kangsar in Perak (1913) (Abdul Halim Nasir 2004; Kamaruddin 1997) – suggest a desire to conform to practice in the Islamic homelands in the Middle East. These and numerous other changes helped in 1906 to convince one British official that the "native of the peninsula is becoming less of a Malay and more of a Mussulman" (Wilkinson 1957: 40).

Competing with 'Malayness'

The challenge Islamic reformers posed for the proponents of *bangsa* consciousness is obvious enough – particularly the stress the former placed on membership of the Islamic community (*umat*) and obedience of that community to God's law. Members of this religious elite were sometimes relaxed about their lack of 'Malay' credentials. "We are not of the same direct descent as the locals here", declared one article in the religious journal *Al Imam* (23 July 1906). It was in reply to such statements that *bangsa*-minded people declared that "Islam is not a bangsa", and that religious leaders did not necessarily hold authority with respect to the 'Malay' community. These leaders, however, could not easily be discounted. They were able to portray 'the Malays' – and I am continuing here to draw on writings in the journal *Al Imam*, which was produced in Singapore but distributed quite widely around the Archipelago – as a part of the global Islamic community, and recommend programmes for reform based on the experience of Muslim communities elsewhere. They started with the lesson that the Arabs had once been triumphant and yet "they had nothing in their hands other than knowledge of the Shari'ah and nothing to bind them together other than the rope of religion" (9 September 1907). The stress on Islam as providing

the primary bond for 'community' continued to appear in one form or another over the following decades – despite the antagonism of those (like Abdul Rahim Kajai) who insisted on 'race'. The intellectual and author Za'ba ridiculed the stress on the *bangsa*, and declared himself in favour of a "conception that is vast – that is the dignity of Islam even though a Muslim may be a Benggali, Javanese, Keling, (or) Chinese. Or anyone else" (Ariffin 1993: 16). When Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi (formerly a member of the *Al Imam* leadership) wrote a passionate plea for reform in 1931, he defined the community he addressed as "the Muslims in Malaya" or the "Muslim community on the Malay Peninsula" (Milner 2002: 230).

There was significant common ground between the Shari'ah-minded and the 'race'- or '*bangsa*-minded' (if we can gloss the division in that way): reformers of both streams stressed rationality and a scepticism toward what they saw as the baseless mythologies of the past; they took a dynamic view of history and had a fascination for technological development – and of course they expressed a disdain for the hierarchy and many other aspects of the old *kerajaan*. As competitors, the advocates of a *bangsa* consciousness possessed a prestige in being endorsed by the Western learning of the colonial masters (though not necessarily by the masters themselves). On their part, the religious leaders had the advantage that their programmes of reform drew on a language long familiar to, and respected by, the Muslims of the Archipelago. Time and again they used Arabic terminology, even when expressing ideas (for instance, the 'nation') central to the liberal doctrines being propagated by the West: their vocabulary, imagery and even the syntax was likely to convey to 'Malay' readers a convincing tone of piety. The editor of the early nineteenth-century *bangsa*-minded paper *Utusan Melayu*, by contrast, declared the intention not to communicate in a "high Malay" – a language "full of Arabic words and Malay words which are rarely known by the people" – but in a "correct Malay" (Milner 2002: 115–116).

The element of disagreement between the two sides that needs to be highlighted for our present purposes, however, is the particular form of community they advocated. In an editorial in the *Utusan Melayu* – which, as the name conveyed well, was consistently concerned with 'the Malays' – there is a discussion about people struggling for freedom from foreign control in such places as Egypt. These people are called *ahli ahli bangsa*, literally 'specialists in race'. It is this community of 'race' which Eunos, Abdul Rahim Kajai, Harun Aminurashid (in exile in Brunei), Ibrahim Yaacob (on lecture tours around the Peninsula), Dato Onn (soon to play a dominant role in the decolonization process) and others were promoting – and in 'correct' rather than religious Malay. On the other hand, also in the

early years of the century, the *Al Imam* declared its purpose (in a language that made confident use of key Arabic terms) of calling "upon the Muslim *umat* to perform good works and habits which are directed by God". The journal added that it was the religious scholars who were really "heads of religion" and should "rule over the *umat* (community)". If "examined closely", said *Al Imam*, it is "they who are the rajas in Islam" (Milner 2002: 106, 171, 176).

Looking across the colonial period from the perspective of the royal courts and the raja-focused polity, the emergence of both an *umat*- and a *bangsa*-based concept of community was highly threatening. Once acknowledged as the heads of Islam among their own people, the rulers now faced, on one front, an ambitious religious elite, and on the other, a new leadership whose stress on 'race' enjoyed a degree of intellectual endorsement by the colonial powers – governments that were also capable of frustrating attempts by the sultanates to suppress opposition. Despite the rulers' continued prestige – and efforts of royal ideologues to recast them for a new era – there could be no doubt that the world of the *kerajaan* was being replaced not only by territorially defined states, but also by new (though competing) concepts of community based on both religion and race.

On their part, those building the 'Malay people' not only had to cope with competition from other elites. They were confronted as well by large immigrant communities in British Malaya, and dominant Javanese and Thai populations in Indonesia and Thailand. In certain situations they also came into conflict with the outgoing European colonial powers. These different contests will be our concern in the following chapter.

6

Building 'Malays' into Nation States

As the colonial period drew to a close, a few members of the 'Malay' elite across the Archipelago were optimistic that 'Malayness' might be a basis for the future political organization of the region. Such aspirations were understandable, but not realistic. In fact, with two important exceptions, the people who identified themselves as 'Malays' fared badly in the nation-state configuration that was established following the Japanese destruction of European imperialism. Analysing this process of nation building is important not only because it was a formative time: it also deepens our understanding of what it might mean to be 'Malay', including what were the possible political implications of such an identity.

'Pan-Malay' Aspirations

What grounds were there for a 'pan-Malay' project? In retrospect at least, the influence of decades of colonial state building by the British and Dutch (and the Thais and Americans as well) – and the model of European nation states themselves – on the structuring of the post-independence Archipelago would seem to have been irresistible (Wang 2000). The defining and polic-ing of borders, the web of bureaucracy and communication systems, the building of state education schemes – all assisted the case for new nation states to be created on colonial foundations. Having said this, however, the colonial carve-up of the Archipelago had not prevented population move-ment or a degree of religious and political interaction across the region. As William Roff has pointed out, the "barrier between Dutch- and British-controlled territories was a porous membrane" (1994: 154–155), and such population movement may actually have increased during the colonial period (Harper 1999: 16). With respect to the number of people coming
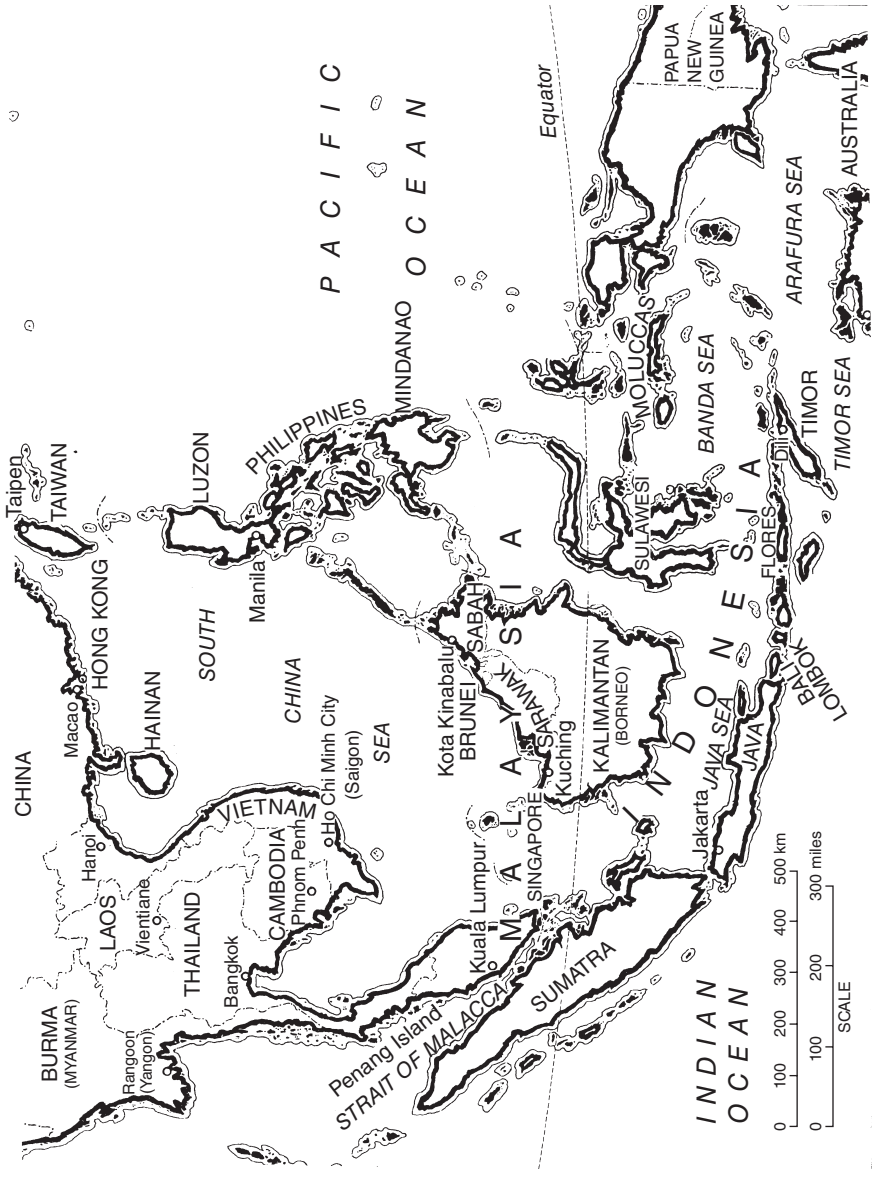
Map 5   Modern Southeast Asia.

Source: Adapted from Milton Osborne, *Southeast Asia* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995).

from the Dutch East Indies to the Malay Peninsula (including Singapore) during the colonial period, one figure puts the first-generation arrivals combined with descendants of 'Indonesian' immigrants at about 40 per cent of the total Peninsular 'Malay' population (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 184). Exact figures are hard to determine: the census-taking had to depend on how people identified themselves. It has been suggested, for instance, that although the official Singapore census of 1980 indicates that people of Javanese ancestry amounted to only 6 per cent of the total 'Malay' population, "personal data gathered in Singapore" indicates the true figure should be 50 to 60 per cent (Li 1990: 94). Numerous accounts of the colonial period testify to the continued flow to the Peninsula of immigrants from Sumatra, Borneo, Java, Bawean and other areas settling in both cities and rural regions (Nonini 1992; Kahn 2006). There was also movement back and forth – for instance, to visit kin. Bookshops and newspapers based in Singapore had agents in various centres in the Dutch Archipelago (Roff 1994: 52; Proudfoot 1987: 6). Right into the independence era (at least until conflict occurred between Indonesia and Malaysia in the early 1960s), people on the Peninsula still listened to radio broadcasts from Indonesia, and often admired the nationalist leadership of their neighbour (Wilson 1967: 33–34).

During the colonial period, intellectual and political developments in the Dutch East Indies were influential on the Peninsula, and there was interaction between the elites from both sides. At the Sultan Idris Training College in Perak, in the 1920s and 1930s, novels and other literature from the Dutch East Indies were well known, and there was admiration for the political activism of the growing 'Indonesian' elite. In Cairo students from both the British and Dutch spheres joined together to publish a magazine in the 1920s, and spoke of "Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula as one community, one people, with one adat (custom), and what is more, one religion" (Firdaus 1989/1990: 133; Roff 1994: 89). There was also an Association of Indonesian and Malayan Youths in Iraq. On the Peninsula, at the end of the 1930s, one of the purposes of forming the ambitious and radical Young Malay Union (Kesatuan Melayu Muda, KMM) was to promote a closer association with 'Indonesia'. Ibrahim Yaacob (whom we have already discussed as one of the key builders of the *bangsa Melayu*) saw the organization as working for a 'Melayu Raya' or an 'Indonesia Raya' – a 'Greater Malaydom' or a 'Greater Indonesia' (Roff 1994: 232–233). Arguing that the aims of 'Melayu Raya' and of 'Indonesia Raya' were the same, he said the "bangsa Melayu" would "unite again in one great country . . . [and] revive again the heritage of Sri Vijaya, which is a common unity of the bangsa" (Ariffin 1993: 21). Immediately after the Japanese occupation,

members of the KMM were leaders in setting up a new nationalist organi-
zation – the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) – aimed at both uniting the
'Malays' and making British Malaya a part of the Republic of Indonesia.
As Ariffin has remarked, the Malay-language name of the party conveyed
the message: 'Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya' implies that there were
'Malay' parties in numerous places, and that this party happened to be the
specifically 'Malaya'-based one (1993: 38, 192).

In fact, of course, 'Melayu Raya' and 'Indonesia Raya' did not amount
to the same thing, and huge practical problems confronted such a vision.
Ibrahim may well have been buoyed by the success the *bangsa Melayu*
concept had been having as an inclusive category on the Peninsula. The
British method of population classification, as we have seen, was critical in
this – foregrounding 'Malay' – and so was the fact of decades of ideological
activism of leaders like Mohd. Eunos Abdullah and Ibrahim himself (who
had toured the Peninsula explaining to Bawean youths and others that they
should see themselves as 'Malay'). One sign of success of the promotion of
bangsa was that even in the 1931 census process in British Malaya, many
immigrants had begun to refer to themselves as 'Malay' – though some,
such as the 'Javanese', tended to change more slowly (Andaya and Andaya
2001: 184). An anthropological study of the highly diverse Singapore
'Malay' community, carried out in 1949/1950, reported a "considerable
in-group solidarity" – expressed, for instance, in the phrase *kita orang
Melayu* ('we Malay people'), which "they used to refer to themselves as a
discrete section of the Island's population" (Djamour 1959: 22).

In Brunei, despite discouragement by the royal court, there had been
Malay *bangsa* influences from the Peninsula. A Brunei Malay Teachers
Association was formed just before the Pacific war, Brunei people had been
studying at the *bangsa*-promoting Sultan Idris Training College throughout
the 1930s, and the renowned nationalist author Harun Aminurashid (as
Director of Education in Brunei) was both a nationalist inspiration and a
link to activists on the Peninsula. Sheikh Azahari, who had come under his
sway, delivered a pan-Malay message in some ways reminiscent of Ibrahim
Yaacob's aspirations (Hussainmiya 1995: 158–159). In Sarawak, the
Sarawak Malay Association had been formed before the Pacific war. On
the island of Labuan, a Malay Nationalist Party of Labuan began in 1946
– inspired by the MNP on the Peninsula – and recruited members in Sabah
(Ahmat 2000: 217). The situation in Indonesia, of course, was rather less
promising. 'Malay' as well as 'Melayu Raya' ('Greater Malay') aspirations
were less developed. Nevertheless, in 1938 there had at least been the cre-
ation of the 'Malay'-promoting East Sumatra Association (the 'Persatoean
Soematera Timoer'). Even in Sri Lanka, the Malay community's campaign

for a seat on the colony's Legislative Council invoked the grand claim of being "members of the great Malay community spread over the Far East and counting some fifty million souls" (Hussainmiya 1987: 16).

If promoters of the Malay *bangsa* could feel optimism by the eve of the Pacific war, in certain ways the 'Malay' or 'pan-Malay' movement gained added momentum during the Japanese occupation (1942–1945). The humiliating defeat of European imperialism carried its own exhilarating message for some 'Malays', and there were aspects of the Japanese administrative system that gave specific encouragement to the *bangsa* leadership. Following the Japanese victory, *bangsa* activists were reported to have "swaggered about in the villages and in government offices, throwing their weight around as if they were the government" (Kratoska 1998: 110). One account suggests that on the Peninsula the occupation brought an unprecedented number of 'Malay' music and song competitions, with wide public participation (Thio 1991: 106). 'Malays' were also encouraged to participate in paramilitary forces. Ibrahim Yaacob himself was made the commander of a Japanese-sponsored Volunteer Force and held one of the most senior ranks ever given to a non-Japanese. He was able to assist other members of the radical Young Malay Union – including the prominent novelist Ishak Haji Muhammad (who had written so sensitively on the concept of 'Malayness') – to engage in propaganda intended to help the 'Malay' cause, as well as that of the Japanese (Cheah 1987: 35, 107). In Brunei, Azahari and the future governor of Sarawak, Tun Ahmad Zaidi, discovered, as did many on the Peninsula, that under Japanese rule it was possible to move around the Archipelago gaining experience and contacts in former Dutch-ruled areas (Sanib 1985: 72; Reece 1982: 148). Some people were sent from one part of the region to another (across former colonial borders) specifically for training purposes, and there were religious and other meetings arranged with participation from both territories (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 259; Reid 1979: 114; Kratoska 1998: 111–112; Abu Talib 1995).

In East Sumatra as well, non-royal leaderships gained opportunities under the Japanese – for instance, positions as government advisers or the chance to write in government-sponsored publications – but those benefiting here tended to be the proponents not of the Malay *bangsa* but of the Indonesian nationalist cause. Anthony Reid has drawn attention to a debate over language issues that illustrates well the developing contest in Sumatra. The Japanese ban on the Dutch language offered new possibilities for indigenous languages, and a meeting was held in Medan to decide exactly what language would be used in schools and government. People whom Reid calls "the Malay intellectuals" – including Dr Tengku Mansur (the Asahan royal who had led the East Sumatra Association) – were keen to stress a 'pure'

Malay style; the 'non-Malay', Indonesian nationalists advocated the developing national (though certainly Malay-based) language, 'Bahasa Indonesia'. The 'Malays' had to surrender to the majority (Reid 1979: 109). Over the next few years, specifically 'Malay' interests would often be suppressed on behalf of the pan-Indonesia nationalist cause – a cause that the royal courts and many 'Malays' tended to see as essentially aimed at Javanese domination.

From a 'Malay' point of view, a discouraging aspect of the Japanese period was the transfer to Thailand of some of the northern Peninsular sultanates (Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu) (Abu Talib 1995: 21–22); another was the insensitivity the Japanese displayed toward religious obligations (25–32). Also, from the perspective of a commoner 'Malay' leadership (which had clearly developed much further on the Peninsula than elsewhere), there was the fact that the Japanese maintained much of the earlier European policy of working through the royal courts. The rulers were no longer held to be sovereign, and at times had to display respect for Japanese authority in a way that was demeaning – the Johor ruler was "reprimanded for leaning on his stick before Japanese officers" (Stockwell 1979: 11) – but in some situations (including in Sarawak) aristocrats were actually given experience in higher bureaucratic positions that once tended to be held only by Europeans (Sanib 1985: 30). In East Sumatra the sultans lost powers with respect to policing and land regulation while keeping authority in religious affairs (Reid 1979: 107). What is clear is that the Japanese were faced with practical tasks of administration – and whether distasteful to them or not, it was easiest to make use of established administrative machinery. The anti-*kerajaan* activists may therefore have enjoyed certain ideological opportunities, and some capacity to build up support in the wider community, but they did not gain the experience of a real transfer of power away from the *kerajaan* elite.

For the advocates of a pan-Malay ('Greater Malaydom') vision, a decisive turning point occurred in the days leading up to the end of Japanese rule. With Japanese encouragement, negotiations were held between leaders from both Indonesia and the Peninsula, and the possibility of declaring independence for a single, combined state was discussed. In a meeting in Perak on the Peninsula, the Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno was thought by some to have been convinced by Ibrahim Yaacob's case for including 'Malaya' (excluding Singapore) with Indonesia. Sukarno declared himself in favour of "one motherland for those of Indonesian stock" – though the word significantly was 'Indonesian', not 'Malay'. In any case, within a few days Sukarno saw the practical difficulties of a joint bid for independence: he told Ibrahim (now in Jakarta) that "the union idea" was "not

convenient": "we would have to fight both the British and Dutch at the same time" (Cheah 1987: 118, 123). This was the moment when a different course might have been followed – though it is hardly surprising that it was rejected. As it turned out, over the next decades the building of the new nation states in the Archipelago would take place on the foundations of the territorial and demographic units established by the colonial powers. The concept of the *bangsa Melayu* was to be critical in developments within two of those nation states, but it was unable to compete with the established Dutch and British colonial architecture as a foundation for a broad Archipelago-wide nation. This said, it still remains the case that the dream of a broader 'Malay world' continued to be fostered and, in some quarters, still has a measure of influence.

Building Nations

The impact of 'pan-Malay' ideals on the nation-state organization in the region, therefore, was quite limited. But how did 'Malay' aspirations fare in the making of the specific colony-based nation states? In the case of British Malaya, the answer is relatively positive. In the Dutch East Indies/ Indonesia case, 'the Malays' had become a minority (or become constituted as a minority) – not only in the would-be nation, but even in regions that had once been dominated by *kerajaan*. At both the local and national levels, 'Malay' interests were not easily reconciled with 'Indonesian' imperatives. In southern Thailand there was a strong 'Malay' movement – though it sought incorporation not in Thailand, but rather in the nation-state building taking place across the border to the south.

Although Malaya (and its expanded form, Malaysia) has in many ways been the 'Malay' success story – an experiment in nation building founded (at least in large part) on 'Malay' ethnic sentiment – this outcome was not inevitable. From time to time the country faced other types of future. For a start, those classified as 'Malay' numbered just under a half (some 3 million) of the total population of the country in the 1950s, when the independent state was being planned (Ooi 1964: 124), and relations between the different communities were fraught. That 'Malays' were perceived to have established relatively favourable relations with the Japanese during the Japanese occupation had implications after the Japanese surrender. 'Chinese' groups which engaged in the anti-Japanese resistance movement took revenge on 'Malays' whom they believed had been informers, or had just cooperated with the Japanese. It was a "world gone mad", remembered one former police sergeant: "There was a lot of anger and hatred about";

eventually "our Malay kinsmen" came to help when they could not "bear some of the things done to the Malay policemen, such as their bodies were mutilated and their eyes gouged out" (Cheah 1987: 133–134). The fear developed that the 'Chinese' were planning to take power: in historian Cheah Boon Kheng's words, "all Malays now seemed united in their struggle to prevent Chinese domination of their country" (236; Harper 1999: 50–54). After a few months some stability returned, partly because the British military administration (which had taken responsibility for governing the country) had begun to encourage the sultans to calm their subjects (240). A second and equally serious threat to 'Malay' interests was the formulation by the British government – also critical of 'Malay' wartime behaviour – of a new constitution that would reverse decades of British policy on the Peninsula. The strategy was to introduce a political structure, known as the Malayan Union, in which the sultans would no longer hold sovereignty and 'Malays' would lose their privileged status over 'Chinese' and other citizens.

Shortly after the Japanese surrender, nervous sultans were pressed into accepting the Union plan – but strong 'Malay' protest soon emerged. From one perspective this was a demonstration of the continuing potency of the *kerajaan* idea: protesters called out "Daulat Tuanku" ('Power to the Sultan') (Ariffin 1993: 101), and even usually anti-*kerajaan* activists recognized that they were able to extend their popular appeal by calling for restoration of royal sovereignty (Stockwell 1979: 76). But the campaign against the Malayan Union – portrayed as a common threat to 'Malays' right across the Peninsula – was also a time when the *bangsa Melayu* concept was much strengthened. It was not the radical elite – people in the Malay Nationalist Party, for instance, who sought unity with Indonesia in a 'Melayu Raya' or 'Indonesia Raya' – who gained leadership of this campaign, but rather the more conservative United Malays National Organization (UMNO), a federation of organizations from the different sultanates or states in British Malaya. Seen as "narrow-minded nationalism" by Ibrahim Yaacob, the UMNO conceptualizion of 'Malay' was relatively cautious about the inclusion not only of foreign Asians, but also of other peoples living elsewhere around the Archipelago (Soda 2000: 6–7; Ibrahim Yaacob 1951). The UMNO leader was Onn bin Ja'afar – the Johor aristocrat and journalist who had been editor of *Warta Malaya* in the 1930s and who had long been an effective advocate of the *bangsa* cause. The cry of 'Long live the Malays' (*Hidup Melayu*) was constantly heard during the anti-Malayan Union protests. If sections of the 'Malay' community still perceived themselves primarily as subjects of sultans, a growing number appeared now to see the *bangsa* itself as a focus of identity and allegiance. Like some earlier 'Malay'

ideologues, Onn appropriated royal language to advocate this sentiment, referring to the "Royal Palace of the bangsa Melayu" and using the word *derhaka* ('treason') – once deployed only with reference to treason to the raja – when speaking of disloyalty to the *bangsa* (Mohammad Yunus 1961: 51; Ibrahim Mahmood 1981: 304).

The fact that the rulers had initially bowed to British demands for the Union scheme damaged their prestige, as their humiliations during the Japanese period may also have done. Because of their weakness in the Union negotiations, some questioned the rulers' continued legitimacy. In colonial times, as discussed in the previous chapter, royal courts had already begun to accept that rulers had a responsibility to their 'people', and that their authority was to some extent based on 'performance'. Having now been seen to fail their people, there were calls for their removal. As Ariffin Omar has explained the transition, "the interests of the rajas" had become "subordinated to the demands of Malayism" (1993: 53). The people's sovereignty, argued one newspaper, was in fact more important than that of the rulers (54); another said it was possible to imagine a ruler being "deposed and replaced by another" (51). The whole position of the monarch began increasingly to be described as at best that of a "symbol" or "cement" (as Onn put it) (53, 102), assisting to hold the 'Malay race' together. Such formulations, of course, were part of the ongoing process of turning the political system upside down. They were a complete contrast to the old *kerajaan* equation in which subjects were understood to be virtually embodied in 'the raja' – defined with reference to him, and living in accordance with the *adat* (custom) that was conceived as being 'in his hands'. The language of the rulers themselves increasingly acknowledged the change. The sultan of Pahang declared at one point that "we Malays are not a nation of slaves", and the sultan of Perak explained that he spoke "as a Malay not as a Sultan" when he told a meeting of the UMNO that "we are Malays and must not lose our customs and religious practices, which are our prized possessions" (Ariffin 1993: 104; Harper 1999: 85, 343). Here again, both custom and religion seem to be being transferred implicitly from raja to *bangsa*.

It was an advantage that much of this change had been already underway in the colonial period. As discussed in the last chapter, ideological work had been done from the time of Munshi Abdullah to make the 'Malay people' a form of community and attachment that possessed an independent significance and potency. Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, Abdul Rahim Kajai, Ibrahim Yaacob, Onn Ja'afar and others – including not just journalists but also writers of novels and history that honoured the *bangsa Melayu* – all contributed to this process, with which the royal courts themselves had

begun to compromise. The fear of the large 'Chinese' (and, to some extent, 'Indian') community had assisted in promoting a defensive sense of 'Malay' unity; and I have stressed that a world classified in terms of 'race' was part of the European-derived epistemological structure set in place in the early nineteenth century.

A further asset possessed by the proponents of the 'Malay' *bangsa* in the anti-Malayan Union movement, and in the nation-building task generally, was demographic. Despite the genuinely large 'Chinese' and 'Indian' immigrant communities on the Peninsula, the point could be made that 'the Malays' still made up something like a half of the total population. Compared to the situation in Indonesia (even just in East Sumatra), or in Thailand, such a proportion would look promising. Such figures, however, are to some extent misleading. The size of the 'Malay' portion of the population was partly a result of ideological work: it had to be constructed. The large proportion of Dutch East Indies' immigrants in the population of British Malaya, in particular, had to be made into 'Malays'. And there was also the problem of getting long-term inhabitants of the Peninsula to give the *bangsa* priority over being royal subjects – members of one sultanate or another. The task was not merely one of persuasion. The concept of 'Malay' had to be open enough to incorporate all these recruits. In East Sumatra, by contrast, 'Javanese', 'Minangkabau' and other Archipelago peoples who in British Malaya were being brought into the category 'Malay' retained their identities, and the 'Malays' remained a very small proportion of the population. This is one (though by no means the only) reason why the fate of that 'Malay' community differed sadly from that of the 'Peninsular Malays'.

A critical aspect of the ideological task was to maintain the *bangsa*'s local focus. It was one thing to be inclusive – but new recruits needed something distinctive to join, and to which to be loyal. To find a balance between a pan-Archipelago vision and this 'Malayan Malay' identity was (and is) a complex task, and the celebration of Melaka-Johor in particular has helped (Siddique 1981: 80). The British administration had certainly sought to highlight the Peninsular heritage in building the colonial state – stressing the 'Peninsular Malays' in the modern histories used in the education system, and publishing traditional Malay-language texts that persistently profiled Melaka.

There is sometimes the impression of a sleight of hand in the way 'Malay' was given this local identity. On the one hand, UMNO leaders tended to give the *bangsa* a Peninsular focus, and presented themselves as the defenders of its purity. In so doing, they distinguished themselves from their MNP opponents – Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and others who, like Ibrahim

Yaacob earlier, stressed the cross-Archipelago 'Melayu Raya' idea and even expressed a willingness to make the Malay *bangsa* open to 'Chinese' and other immigrants. Having highlighted this distinction between an UMNO and an MNP approach, however, the UMNO leadership also seemed to have admitted and condoned real inclusiveness in their Peninsular-focused *bangsa*: Onn openly acknowledged the practice of outsiders 'becoming Malay' (Ariffin 1993: 119), and he and his colleagues knew full well that 'Javanese', 'Sundanese' and many other Archipelago people – even in certain situations 'Indians' and 'Arabs' – had been allowed entry. I mention an appearance of 'sleight of hand' here: but, in fact, it was only an appearance. The reason the 'Peninsular focus' cannot be dismissed as political double-talk is that such a power of absorption was in fact integral to even the 'purest' form of 'Malay', that of Melaka-Johor – certainly as related in court literature. I have already alluded to this, and we will need at a later point to examine the continuing Melaka-Johor role in more detail. One further, and interesting, feature of the UMNO formulation of 'Malay' – to which Sharon Siddique has drawn attention – is that (certainly as defined in the constitution of the country) 'Malay' is not actually defined specifically in terms "of race or ethnic origin" (1981: 77).

Making 'Malaya' and 'Malaysia'

To suspend for the moment the consideration of ideological tasks, in the developing political struggle on the Peninsula the British were startled by the strength of 'Malay' opposition to the Union scheme, and retreated. By 1948 they had agreed to an alternative, federal arrangement in which the rulers would keep their sovereignty (an indication of their continued potency), the Malays would be assured of special privileges, and only some non-Malays would receive automatic citizenship: this was the structure upon which the Malayan state was established in 1957. Those hoping for a future union with Indonesia found little encouragement in this compromise solution; nor was there satisfaction for *bangsa*-minded activists who might want to see an end to monarchy. The 'Chinese' now faced a situation that was almost the opposite of that which the Malayan Union scheme had held out for them, and not surprisingly some gave support to a 'Chinese'-led communist insurgency, which gathered pace from 1947 and continued after independence (1957). The first prime minister of Malaya – which initially consisted of the Peninsular sultanates together with Penang and Melaka – was Tunku Abdul Rahman, a member of the Kedah royal family who had taken over the leadership of UMNO on the promise that he would be more

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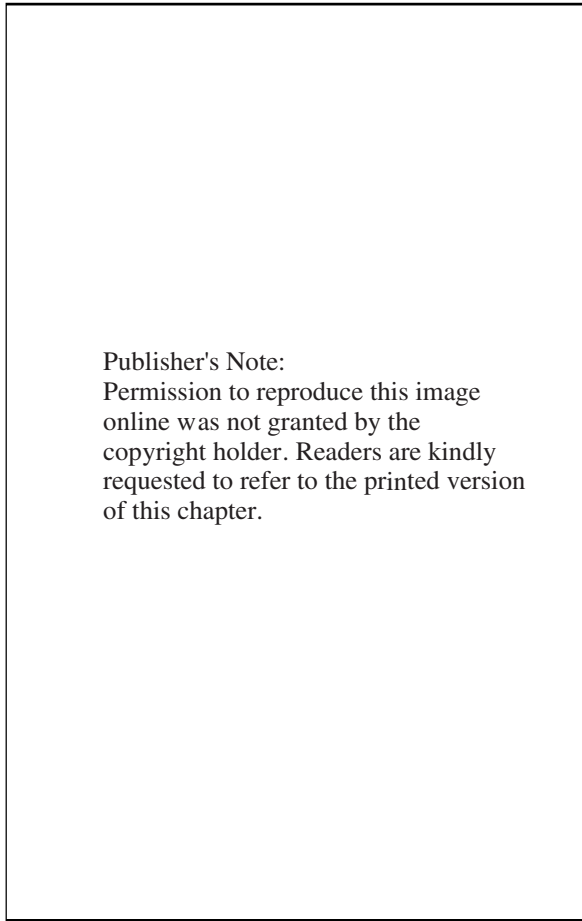
Figure 9   Dato Onn Jaafar, political leader on the Peninsula from the 1930s to
the 1950s. (Photo from Ramlah Adam, *Dato Onn G. Jaafar* (Kuala Lumpur:
Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992).

determined than Dato Onn in defending 'Malay' rights. Onn had attempted
to open up UMNO to 'non-Malays' in order to create a united nation; the
Tunku maintained the 'Malay' exclusiveness, but then formed an alliance
with a party representing the 'Chinese' community (the Malayan Chinese
Association, MCA). As Cheah Boon Keng has argued, the British "com-
pelled" the Malay nationalists to "work out a formula of inter-racial coop-
eration, unity and harmony among the various races in the country" before
they agreed to independence. The "bargain" between UMNO and the MCA

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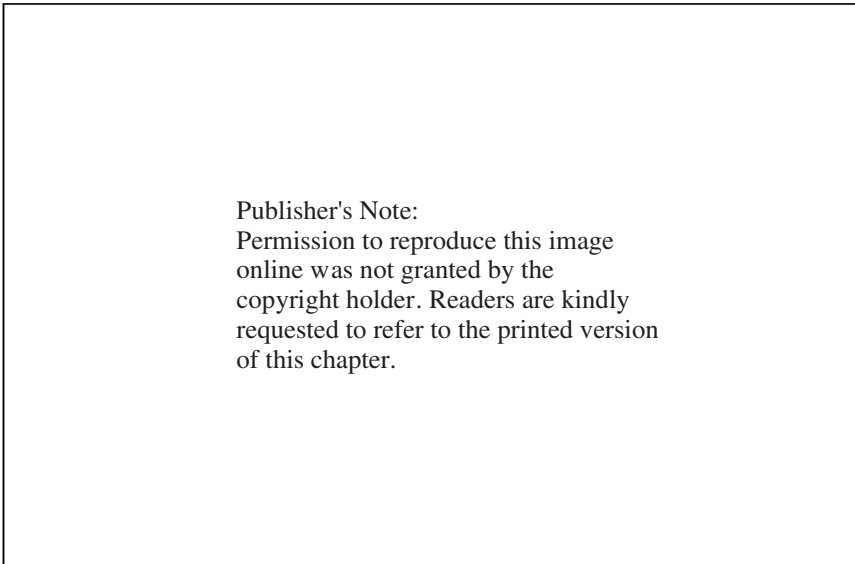
Figure 10   Dr Burhanuddin and Tunku Abdul Rahman, political leaders during
the early years of Malayan/Malaysian independence. Photo from Kamaruddin
Jaafar, *Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy: Politik Melayu dan Islam* (Kuala Lumpur:
Jayasan Anda, 1980).

(and an Indian party, the Malayan Indian Congress) was to remain "the
basis of the country's nation-building efforts" (Cheah 2002: 2, 39, 235).
The balance was not easy to achieve. Consider, for instance, the choice of
name for the country. 'Malaya' was unpopular with many 'Malays', who
associated the term with 'non-Malay' interests (Funston 1980: 53–54). In
the Malay language the new state was called Tanah Melayu, 'The Malay
Lands' – a far more attractive name (Harper 1996). A key element in the
bargain with the 'Chinese' was that the 'Malays' would possess special
rights (including a four-to-one ratio in the country's civil service and certain
economic privileges).

   In 1961 Tunku Abdul Rahman led an attempt to expand the Malayan
federation, hoping to incorporate Singapore, Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei –
all the territories formerly under British administration of one form or
another. This continued nation building had a distinctly 'Malay' aspect. The
Malay phrase sometimes used to describe the new 'Malaysia' was 'Melayu
Raya' ('Greater Malaydom'), which had been used by the radical Malay
leader Ibrahim Yaacob and others to refer to the far wider political scheme
that would embrace all the territories in both the British and Dutch colonial

spheres (Milner 1992; Soda 2000). In a sense the Tunku was hijacking the phrase for a narrower vision, but one in which the 'Peninsular Malays' (or, to be precise, those who had come to identify themselves as 'Peninsular Malays') would be dominant. When the Tunku proposed 'Malaysia' he faced opposition of a number of types. With respect to the Borneo territories, he had spoken about 'Malayness' and the Malay language in a manner that caused anxiety for 'non-Malay' peoples there – the use of 'Melayu Raya' was provocative enough in itself. He seemed not to recognize such groups as the Iban as separate ethnicities, but stressed that they were of "the same ethnic stock as the Malays" (and presumably ripe for conversion to Islam and 'Malayness') (Soda 2000: 190; Yamamoto 1999: 63, 75). Whether or not this amounted to 'Malay colonialism', as some of the Tunku's opponents in Borneo charged (Yamamoto 1999), it was certainly observed by one of Malaysia's most acute political analysts that "all the Malay advocates of Malaysia wanted to ensure the security of the Malays of North Borneo, a factor not unconnected with a sense of Malay brotherhood" (Mohamed Noordin Sopiee 1974: 133)

Another form of opposition to the formation of Malaysia came from those who still harboured the desire to join with Indonesia (such as Burhanuddin Al-Helmy), and also from the Indonesian leadership itself. The latter had become increasingly suspicious of the anti-communist Western world, and viewed the 'Malaysia' proposal as serving a continued British 'neocolonial' presence in the region. On this basis, Indonesia proceeded to implement a 'Confrontation' – including a military confrontation – against the new state (Mackie 1974: 204–205). It seems unlikely that the Indonesian leadership had been ambitious to incorporate the Borneo territories, but the Indonesian foreign minister did at least ask a Sabah leader in 1960: "Where are you people going? Are you going to come in with us or join with Malaya?" (Yamamoto 1999: 75). Within Malaya/Malaysia itself the fact that the 'Malay' opposition group favoured a pan-Archipelago nation was to have practical, political advantages for the UMNO leadership.

With various assurances and agreed conditions, the UMNO leadership was able to gain acceptance of the 'Malaysia' scheme from all the target countries other than Brunei – and the new Malaysia did indeed offer opportunities for expanding the influence of the *bangsa Melayu*. Malaysia has become an influential country in the world, and it has been consistently led by people who have identified as 'Malay'. Some might answer that these leaders have had Thai, Bugis, Turkish, Indian, Chinese and perhaps many other types of blood; but that would, according to influential interpretations of 'Malay', be a misunderstanding of what it means to be 'Malay'.

The establishing of Malaysia in 1963 was a victory for those advocating the 'narrower' Peninsular-focused 'Malay' *bangsa* – those who distinguished 'Malays' from 'Javanese', 'Bugis' and others (though at the same time tending to accept these people as recruits to 'Malay' identity). Because of the military character of Indonesia's opposition to Malaysia, those within Malaysia who continued to support the Archipelago-wide 'Melayu Raya' – now more easily branded as 'Indonesia Raya' – were discredited and could be portrayed as subversive. Members of this group, key opponents of the UMNO regime – including people who had worked closely in the past with Ibrahim Yaacob and established the MNP after the war – were now arrested as security threats, and UMNO went on to enjoy a crushing victory in the 1964 election (Funston 1980: 53–54). The 'Confrontation' with Indonesia also offered the opportunity of (or perhaps required) achieving a sharper definition of the 'Malaysian Malay' as distinguished from the 'Indonesian'. An anthropologist's report from the 1960s had noted that in Selangor – as in so many other regions – there were large numbers of people of Indonesian origin, and the Indonesian leader (Sukarno) was seen by many as a "more authentic Malay person" than the UMNO prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. Also, in spite of "constant radio propaganda, police blocks, and armoured cars patrolling through the village", there was a "general opinion in the coffee shop" that "Indonesians and Malays would not fight one another" (Wilson 1967: 33–34). A government response to this was to initiate a "nationwide, village-based Vigilante Corps, or Home Guard", organized locally by village headmen. An indication of the success of this corps was an "increased feeling of solidarity" among village members and a greater awareness of being "members of a larger, political community" (58).

Top-down Ideological Work

One means of enhancing the Peninsular emphasis in the concept of 'Melayu' was a growing stress on the Melaka hero Hang Tuah's famous loyalty – though it was now recast (in defiance of the textual evidence) as loyalty to the 'Malay people', not the raja (Milner 1992; Maday 1965). There was as well a resuscitation of 'feudal' titles, ceremonies and art forms recalling the Melaka and other royal courts (Mahathir n.d.). It is also in the mid-1960s that a greater distinction was made between 'Malay' and 'Indonesian' literature. In the words of the distinguished literary scholar Mohd. Taib Osman, 'Confrontation' was a "turning point for literature in the Malayan

territories". Until then, he says, Indonesian literature had been "an inspiration for the writers in Malaya who regarded the growth of Indonesian literature as part of the natural growth of Malay during the colonial period". As a result of the Indonesian 'Confrontation', Malaysia "began to shape its own traditions and characteristics without echoing any quarter" (1986: vi).

In the creating of Malaysia, and the 'Confrontation', we see a continuation of the 'top-down' ideological work that has been so important in the development of the 'Malay people'. In the 1960s some in the UMNO leadership – although in one sense constructing a relatively narrow 'Malay *bangsa*', considered the possibility of divesting the concept of its Islamic connotations, so that it could cover all the 'indigenous' peoples of Malaysia (Kadazan, Iban and so forth). The Tunku himself is said to have "thought of all indigenous groups in the Borneo territories as 'Malays'" (Soda 2000: 25). One advantage of such a recasting, of course, would have been to strengthen the 'Malay' numbers with respect to the so-called 'Chinese' and 'Indian' 'immigrant' communities. As it turned out, the term *bumiputra* ('sons of the soil') was developed to include all 'indigenous' peoples, and 'Malay' was reserved for Muslims. Such top-down work on *bangsa*, as I have indicated, had certainly been undertaken on the other side of 'Malay' politics. In 1947, when Dr Burhanuddin had joined with certain 'non-Malay' groups to propose an alternative to the 'federation' scheme being developed by the UMNO leadership and the rulers, an unambiguous proposal was made that 'Melayu' become a concept without religious connotations. "Non-indigenous inhabitants of the country", the opposition groups suggested, should be able to enjoy a "common national status" with the indigenous people, but they would need to change *bangsa* to do so. They would have to "become Malays" ("masuk Melayu"). There was nothing new about that, it was argued: the ranks of the royal families and aristocracies themselves included "some who have originated from China, India, Arabia, Turkey, and other bangsa" (Ariffin 1993: 113–116, 195, 210).

There was also logic to what Burhanuddin was proposing, at least when we consider some of the ways 'Malay' had been used in the past. In the shorter term, however, it could easily be dismissed by the UMNO leadership as a threat to the interests of the 'indigenous', Peninsular 'Malay' people. The Tunku would by no means allow the idea of a *bangsa Melayu* that would include 'Chinese' (Funston 1980: 137–139). During the 1950s and 1960s, the fear of a vibrant, successful 'Chinese' community was strengthening.

From the outset of the new Malaysia, the 'Chinese' leadership of Singapore personified such a threat. The political tensions between the UMNO

government in Kuala Lumpur and Lee Kuan Yew's administration in Singapore were in fact so serious that a separation was decided upon in 1965. The 'Malays' of Singapore – once seen as social and religious leaders for the 'Malay' community of the wider Archipelago – now became a minority group in a separate, 'Chinese'-led, nation state.

Four years later, following riots in May 1969 that occurred primarily between 'Malays' and 'Chinese', the 'Malay' leadership of Malaysia was changed. The long-serving prime minister was accused of lacking vigilance in his defence of 'Malay' rights – including failing to make Malay the sole national language (as promised in the 1957 Constitution). The new administration of 1970 (under Tun Razak) addressed this grievance, and proceeded to restructure the economy (to get greater economic power into 'Malay' hands), to draw large numbers of 'Malays' into the higher education sector, and to develop a state ideology confirming the dominance of 'Malay' culture (Siddique 1981: 79; Shamsul 1996a). There was much work to do, as the 'Malay' community had in fact made up a large proportion of the national sector that lived beneath the poverty line, and in 1970 included only forty accountants and seventy-nine doctors (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 311).

As I will discuss in the next chapter, top-down ideological engineering was a vital strategy in lifting the 'Malay' community – as it had been a key ingredient in leadership of the community over centuries (Johnson 1996, 2002). In the 1970s and then under the Mahathir government (1981–2003) – and, in fact, for much of the colonial period (Harper 1999) – attempts were made to revolutionize 'Malay' thinking, making 'Malays' more dynamic and entrepreneurial, and less feudal-minded. But these efforts raised a contradiction, in that the government during these years also made serious efforts to invoke 'traditional' concepts of loyalty. Another concern was to continue the absorption of outsiders in the Peninsular 'Malay' category: the flood of 'Cham' refugees from the war in Indochina was an example of this, in that the 'Chams' (Austronesian speakers like the 'Malays') were not only accepted in Malaysia but also rapidly classified as 'Malay Muslim Kamboja' (Wong 2006: 17). One different type of ideological move of the long Mahathir government was to introduce the phrase *bangsa Malaysia*: did this mean 'Malaysian people' or 'Malaysian race'? Certainly, the use of *bangsa* caused much speculation. In some ways it harked back to Burhanuddin's attempts to incorporate the non-Malay 'immigrants' in a category that was meaningful in Malay terms. Just what implications the development of *bangsa Malaysia* would have for the future meaning and significance of the *bangsa Melayu* is, as we will see, a question of interest.

Beyond the Peninsula

What did the formation of Malaysia mean for the 'Malay' communities of Sarawak and Sabah? There are problems again about how to define a 'Malay' in these contexts, but one estimate of the 1960s suggests that at most the combined Muslim population of these territories and Brunei would have been about 250,000 (Harrisson 1970: 156). In Sarawak (in the 1950s) the 'Malays' were said to be only about a fifth of the population (some 92,000 at the end of the war), though many more people were in the process of 'becoming Malay', adopting 'Malay' lifestyles and converting to Islam (Leach 1950: 15). When the Brookes ceded Sarawak to the British government in 1946, some of these 'Malays' – Sanib Said argues they tended to be members of a growing commoner intelligentsia (1985: 37, 48) – were strongly opposed, and an anti-cession campaign developed, leading to the murder of the British governor in 1949. Although there appears to have been substantial support for the 'Malaysia' proposal among Sarawak 'Malays', some (including people from traditionally pro-Brunei regions) were attracted to the idea of a more local 'North Kalimantan' political entity that would work closely with Indonesia. The prominent political figure in later years, Tun Ahmad Zaidi – who has been counted among those Malay "nationalists who advocated a pan-Malay movement calling for ethnic unity throughout the region" (Ishikawa 2003: 41) – was among those opposing the 'Malaysia' plan. He joined the 1962 rebellion of the Brunei leader, Azahari. Since entry into Malaysia, the politics of Sarawak have been complex: but "coalitions dominated by Muslim Malay-Melanau parties" (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 326) have played a critical role. In Sarawak the Malays and other Muslims have been challenged politically by a movement among Iban – just as the non-Muslim Kadazan people achieved a certain unity in Sabah.

In Sabah, where the British North Borneo Company had not deployed the 'Malay' identity as the Brookes had done, the 'indigenous' Muslims were identified as Bruneis, Bajau and Suluk as well as 'Malay'. In the 1950s one initiative was to promote the idea of an inclusive *bangsa Sabah* – a 'Sabah people' – which is a reminder of the flexibility of the concept of *bangsa* and was probably influenced by thinking among opposition groups on the Peninsula (Yamamoto 2001: 56). Other activists in Sabah at that time called for the different Muslim groups there to identify as 'Malay'. Not to 'become Malay', they were told, would mean they were "not fully civilized" (Yamamoto: 2004: 248). In this and other ways, the Muslims of Sabah were "exposed to ideas from (the Peninsula)

which crept in via the newspapers and periodicals published in both Malaya and Singapore" (Ahmat 2000: 224). Whether they identified with 'Malays' or not, however, the entire Muslim population was still a clear minority in the total population of Sabah at the time Malaysia was formed.

To convince both these provinces to agree to join 'Malaysia', compromises were made by the Peninsula leaders to placate the 'non-Malay' peoples, suspicious of 'Malay colonialism'. Among other matters, the English language would continue to be the official language; also, the indigenous people of the Borneo states would enjoy special privileges in Malaysia similar to those extended to their fellow *bumiputra* ('sons of the soil'), the 'Malays'. Despite these conciliatory moves, however, the Borneo 'Malays' were nevertheless joining a 'Malay'-dominated state in which their Malay language was the national language, Islam was the official religion, and the national government would almost certainly promote a 'Malay' agenda.

In Sabah, especially from the late 1960s, under two Muslim leaders (the first from Sulu in the Philippines), who worked closely with the federal government in Kuala Lumpur, there was in fact large-scale conversion to Islam and an early switch to the use of the Malay language. The idea was promoted that all the *bumiputra* of Malaysia should consider themselves a single people – which the Kadazans and other non-Muslim people in Borneo could easily perceive meant a 'Malay and Muslim' people (Reid 1997: 131). Increasingly, as Francis Loh has explained, "in official, media and academic discourse" the category "Malay-Muslim" has been used to refer to Muslim "indigenous ethnic groups" such as "the Suluk, Bajau, Illanun, Orang Sungai, Bisaya, Kedayan and Brunai Malays" (Loh 1992: 228; Luping 1994: 2; Kitingan and Ongkili 1989: 417). On top of these developments, Muslim immigrants have arrived from Indonesia and the Philippines in such numbers that by the 1980s they became the largest sector of the population. Just how quickly these immigrants (or, for that matter, 'Brunei' people and other 'indigenous' Muslims) have begun to call themselves 'Malay' is difficult to estimate. There has been a continuing effort to encourage them to do so – but there is also resistance. Statistics certainly suggest a strong increase in the number of Malays in Sabah: there appears to have been no 'Malay' category in the 1950 and 1960 census, and then in 1991 there are estimates from 60,000 to 100,000 (Reid 1997: 124; Ranjit Singh 2003: 27–28); the year 2000 census has 'Malays' at 15.3 per cent of the total population of Sabah (a percentage now presumably heading toward a total of half a million).

Dealing with the non-Muslim population of Sabah, the government has often enmeshed development initiatives with a promotion of both Islam and 'Malayness'. 'Development' is used as an "entry point into local villages", with the idea of a superior 'Malay' civilization being projected in both subtle and not so subtle ways (Doolittle n.d.). The large Kadazan community of Sabah, sometimes bitter about the strengthening of the 'Malay' and Muslim hold on Sabah, senses the rising power of *Semenanjung* ('the Peninsula') and the federal government commitment to Malay-Muslim domination (29). A non-Muslim, Kadazan-based party has held power for long stretches, but at the national level in 1986 it was brought into the UMNO-led ruling coalition.

Of all the territories in British Borneo, Brunei should perhaps have been the most enthusiastic about joining the 'Malaysia' project. A sultanate with a history intertwined in different ways with that of the Peninsular sultanates, and a majority population (though only 53 per cent of the 84,000 total in 1960) similar in culture to the 'Malays' of Malaya – although still calling themselves 'Bruneis' – the incorporation of Brunei would appear to have been a relatively easy matter. But Brunei did not join. There was anxiety that the sultan would lose powers in the Malaysian structure, and Brunei now also had a huge oil wealth it wanted to protect. The situation was further complicated by Azahari's short-lived rebellion of 1962. He had gained popular support in Brunei, with his People's Party polling well in the District and Legislative Council elections that were held earlier in that year, and had acquired (as already noted) something of the pan-Archipelago vision held by Ibrahim Yaacob and his supporters. Like Ibrahim, Azahari was in contact with Indonesian nationalists during the Japanese occupation, and he declared his aim in the rebellion to be the setting up of a Unitary State of North Kalimantan (using the Indonesian name for 'Borneo') (Brown 1970: 161–162; Hussainmiya 1995: 158–159). Ahmad Zaidi of Sarawak was defence minister in the shadow cabinet (Ishikawa 2003: 37). Azahari also said he'd been promised Indonesian military assistance. Hussainmiya makes the astute comment that had Azahari "emulated Tunku Abdul Rahman, who had skillfully manipulated the traditional ruling class to obtain common nationalist goals, he might have succeeded" (1995: 303). But Azahari did not do this, and in the resulting contest was no match for the sultan and his British allies. Over the next decades the royal leadership of Brunei established a modern sultanate that had to be the envy of every royal family across the Archipelago – a new nation in which 'Malay' nationalism (of a type) and Islam are articulated within a *kerajaan*-based ideology (Md. Zain 1998; Kershaw 2001a: 24–26).

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Figure 11   Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Mohamed. Photo © JIMIN LAI/AFP/Getty Images.

Other Nations

In Singapore there was reason for optimism in the Malay community in 1963, as the city-colony entered a new 'Malay'-led nation. The 'Malays' – even using a broad definition of the term – were at the end of the war only a small portion (some 11 to 12 per cent) in what had become over a century and more of British rule a 'Chinese'-dominated total of about 1 million (Djamour 1959: 3). Nevertheless, the island had long been a Muslim religious and intellectual centre, in which a 'pan-Malay' consciousness had been fostered (Rahim 1998: 14). Some in the population had been on the island (or in the region close by) for generations; many others were new immigrants. There was still a rural population and a fishing community, as well as many clerks and teachers, and a broad range of unskilled labourers. The old royal family in Singapore – descendants of the rulers with whom the British had negotiated to acquire Singapore in the early nineteenth century – were described as "impoverished" and some were employed as

semi-skilled workmen and junior clerks (Djamour 1959: 17). In the absence of *kerajaan* leadership – as has often been the case – the 'Malays' of the colony had a strong religious elite and, in recent decades, a growing *bangsa-*minded leadership.

When the British returned to Singapore after the war they did not intend to include Singapore in the new Malaya, and the 'Malay' leadership on the Peninsula had itself been anxious about the impact that so large a 'Chinese' community could have on the 'ethnic balance' of the new state. But there was also concern about leaving Singapore independent (especially considering the largely 'Chinese' communist movement on the Peninsula), and, after all, the inclusion of the Borneo territories was expected to counter to some extent the 'Singapore-Chinese' impact. Among the 'Malays' who lived in Singapore, there had been anxiety about the future. Some had campaigned against independence from Britain; the Singapore branch of UMNO (in 1957) had called for a 'Malay' governor-general, and for Islam to be made Singapore's official religion (Elinah Abdullah 2006: 340–345). In the lead-up to the Malaysia merger, the party was reassured by the agreement that Singapore 'Malays' would have the same "special position" as Peninsular 'Malays' enjoyed already under the Malayan constitution (Mohd. Azhar Terimo 2006: 365). In the short period in which Singapore was incorporated in Malaysia (1963–1965), the political contest was so sharp as to stimulate inter-ethnic violence. The perhaps too-eloquent 'Chinese' leader of Singapore (Lee Kuan Yew) called UMNO-led Malaysia "a medieval feudal society" and campaigned nationally for a 'Malaysian-Malaysia' in competition with UMNO's supposed 'Malay-Malaysia' (Turnbull 1992: 279–290).

In the social structure of the independent Republic of Singapore, the 'Malays' (as Mohd. Azhar Terimo expresses it so succinctly) have "found themselves a minority community once again" (2006: 381). They have tended as well to be deliberately dispersed throughout the wider population. Concentrations of 'Malays' have been discouraged by the government, with ethnic quotas being introduced (in 1989) in public housing estates (Rahim 1998: 76). The governing Chinese-led People's Action Party (PAP) has become the "primary political representative of the Malay community" (80), and the government has openly admitted the difficulty it has faced in attracting 'Malay' support (73). In Singapore – sometimes unjustly, sometimes not – there are complaints from the 'Malay' community about discrimination, just as there has been a long history of protest from sections of the 'Chinese' and 'Indian' communities in Malaysia (60).

Singapore is only one of many polities in which 'Malay' communities live as minorities, following the organization of Southeast Asia into nation

states in the second half of the twentieth century. The Singapore 'Malays' are by no means the least fortunate. In Thailand the incorporation of the *kerajaan* polities, as we have seen, has been a long and sometimes unpleasant process – and, unlike the case of the British and Dutch, Thai colonial rule (as some in the 'Malay' community would describe it) has not been withdrawn. On the contrary, the Thais have at certain times engaged in a vigorous imposing of Thai culture. As an objective this made some sense in terms of nation building – faced, as the Thais have been, by aggressive British and French colonialists, and in more recent times by the need to work in a neighbourhood of nation states (including the proudly 'Malay' Malaysia).

Opposition to Thai rule has not been unanimous. Also, there has been division among the groups that have campaigned against Thai rule – with one group seeking the restoration of the sultanates, a second stressing 'Malayness', and others again attempting to advance a more strongly religious agenda. Resistance not surprisingly came from *kerajaan* groups after they had been deposed early in the twentieth century – especially from the last raja of Patani and his son – and continued to be fostered by royal families in later years. These royals had family connections across the border with Malaysia: in fact, in the period of the Japanese occupation, the son of the former raja of Patani (Tengku Mahmud Mahyuddin) had worked closely with British and 'Malays' who were engaged in armed struggle against the Japanese. Following the war, members of the old ruling families continued to engage in resistance activities – sometimes, but not always, with the objective of reviving the *kerajaan* (Wan Kadir Che Man 1990: Ch. 2).

Enhancing 'Malay' identity has been an important element in the movement against the Thais. As I have discussed already, although the Patani *kerajaan* had much in common with the other *kerajaan* on the Peninsula, it would not appear that historically the people of Patani saw themselves as 'Malay'. It would be interesting to know more about how that changed. In the post-war period, the prominent anti-Thai leader Haji Sulong certainly insisted his people were 'Malay Muslims' and objected passionately to the Thai government's use of the phrase 'Thai Muslim', which always reminded him (he said) of the fact that "we Malays" had been "brought under Siamese rule by defeat" (Fraser 1966: 53). In these years there is another example of such 'Malay' rhetoric in the book (published under the pseudonym Ibrahim Syukri in the late 1940s), called *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani*. In using the phrase 'Malay kingdom' (*kerajaan Melayu*), this book differs, for instance, from the court text produced in that sultanate, the *Hikayat Patani*, which does not use the word 'Malay' to describe

the Patani *kerajaan*. In the 1940s history, the word 'Malay' is everywhere
– as in the *bangsa*-minded histories written south of the border, the author
makes 'the Malay people', not the sultanate, the protagonist in the events
described. In the closing section, Patani's 'Malay' context is formulated with
clarity and passion in the lament that "among the 100 million Malay people
of the world, the Malays of Patani are the most ill-fated" (Ibrahim Syukri
2005: 101).

Among the strategic reasons for stressing the 'Malay' character of Patani,
it must always have helped to remind 'Malays' across the border – people
who have at times been of substantial assistance to Patani activists – of the
common ground they share. Stressing 'Malay' would also have made special
sense in the late 1940s. During the war, the Japanese had handed Kedah,
and the other three states transferred to Britain in 1909, back to the Thais.
Following the Japanese defeat they were taken away from Thailand yet
again, and there was optimism among opponents of Thai rule that the Thais
would be pressed to make even more concessions. Some 250,000 people
signed a petition to the United Nations with the aim of incorporating Patani
and other southern Muslim provinces (Yala, Narathiwat and Satun) in the
emerging 'Malaya'. Haji Sulong, who was closely involved in these events,
was not, however, able to build on this success. He was arrested in 1948
and disappeared in 1954 (Wan Kadir Che Man 1990: 67–68).

Haji Sulong's prominence indicates the growing role of the third, reli-
gious, element in the struggle. Demands he made to the Thais in 1947
included the recognition of Islamic law and the formation of a "Muslim
Board having full powers to direct all Muslim affairs" (Wan Kadir Che
Man: 1990: 70). Religion continued to be prominent after Haji Sulong's
presumed death. One organization, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, had as
its chairman (in the 1960s) the headmaster of an Islamic school and was
influential in the education system in a number of provinces; it has been
anti-*kerajaan* in attitude, favouring a "Republic of Patani" (99). The Islamic
element, it will be seen, has become so potent over the last few decades that
there has been a call to redefine the character of the struggle.

As is well known, this opposition to Thai rule has continued until the
present day, in some ways becoming more serious with time. Reports over
a long period, including by anthropologists, have given a worrying picture
of the social relations between Thai speakers and Malay speakers in many
areas of the south (Fraser 1960, 1966; Cornish 1997; Hamilton 2000). The
murder toll has been steadily rising, and the complications for border rela-
tions with Malaysia are all too obvious. In 2007 it was announced that a
wall of 27 kilometres was to be built along the border in the Yala region
to limit the assistance which Malays in Malaysia can offer the anti-Thai

movement (*International Herald Tribune*, 5 February 2007). Here in strongly tangible form is a nation state's response to 'pan-Malay' aspirations.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, where the possibility of a political unit extending across both the Dutch and British Archipelago was considered briefly, and then rejected, the 'Malay' idea was simply not a powerful one. Even when considering the combined state it was thought of as 'Indonesia Raya', not 'Melayu Raya', and in the declaration of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 the phrase used was "We, the *bangsa* Indonesia". In so few words it was made clear that there was now to be only one *bangsa* in Indonesia – to speak of *bangsa* with reference to being 'Malay', or even 'Javanese', was (at least implicitly) to challenge that formulation. Sukarno, as the first President of Indonesia, later elaborated this point in a speech in Medan. There was, he said, "no *bangsa* Minangkabau, there is no Javanese, Balinese, Lombok, Sulawesi, or other such *bangsa*. We are all *bangsa* Indonesia" (Ariffin 1993: 209). There was historical momentum behind this formulation, as we noted in the last chapter. The Dutch themselves had fostered the idea of a centralized state focused on Batavia, and had also not chosen to use the concept of 'Melayu' as a unifying category for all indigenous people. By the 1920s the movement against colonial rule was employing 'Indonesia' as it developed the aspiration of an independent nation.

In East Sumatra, the rajas and their 'Malay' subjects – a weak minority in terms of population numbers – faced vast immigrant blocs of 'Javanese' and 'Chinese', and also difficult relations with a range of 'Batak' groups (some local to the area, others immigrants). Many from the royal courts met a cruel fate following the Pacific war. The rulers were accused of collaborating with the Dutch – who were fighting to regain control of their empire from Sukarno and the Republic – and were also condemned as being "antiquated" and "smelling" of feudalism (Ariffin 1993: 65–66). One sultan (from Siak) quickly sided with the Indonesian nationalists, declaring his support for democracy and agreeing that "we are now one *bangsa* and have one country and one language, that is, Indonesia" (71). Other rulers understood well what the mathematics of democracy would mean for themselves and their relatively small groups of supporters, who had benefited from Dutch rule and from the huge foreign-run plantation industry of the region. The 'Malay' subjects of these rulers, as we have seen, had made little headway in creating the type of ethnic unity that was being promoted

vigorously on the Peninsula. They had not formulated a concept of 'Malay' in a way that might incorporate other major groupings – despite having the experience in the past of bringing different Batak peoples into the *kerajaan*. As a newspaper article explained in 1949, not only was there little unity between the indigenous groups in East Sumatra (Malay, Karo and Simalungan), but the Malays themselves were "the most divided group" (208). Their loyalties, it would appear, had not developed beyond individual sultanates.

The contrast with the Peninsular situation should be underlined. There the concept of 'Malay' – though given a local emphasis – allowed for the assimilation of 'Javanese' and 'Baweans', as well as 'Minangkabau' and 'Bugis'. Even Christian 'Bataks' were counted as 'Malay' in Singapore. In East Sumatra and other parts of the former Dutch East Indies, 'Malay' was a narrower category, tending to exclude such groups. The inclusive concept that was being developed there was 'Indonesia'; and to the Malays of East Sumatra the specifically 'Indonesian' nationalist organizations (like the Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI) continued to look like agents of Javanese domination (Ariffin 1993: 23, 33). The relationship between the 'Malay' movement there – such as it was – and the *kerajaan* elite was also a contrast to what had developed on the Peninsula. In East Sumatra, even more than the Peninsula, the rulers had been reluctant to see the development of a pan-*kerajaan* 'Malay' consciousness – although, in the midst of the traumatic developments in Sumatra, the sultan of Deli did begin to use the term 'Malay', calling himself a "Malay nationalist" with a concern for the "Malay world" (Langenberg 1982: 7). An equally important difference from the Peninsula was the lack of strong, independent leadership for the Malay *bangsa* in East Sumatra. So far as Malays were brought into modern organizations, they continued to depend on leadership from the royal families – and this was an especially unhappy situation when the royal courts were savagely attacked in the so-called Social Revolution of 1946.

In March of that year the growing tension in the region erupted in a spree of killing, in which numerous royal family members and their supporters (including brave 'Malay' youth groups) lost their lives. The much-admired poet Tengku Amir Hamzah, a member of the Langkat royal family, was among those murdered. Analyses of these events suggest that those behind the killings were driven partly by the suspicion that the sultans were allying with the Dutch, but also by a desire to seize royal wealth and by a long-held sense of resentment. 'Bataks' played a strong part, triumphing at last over the royal courts. In the case of Deli and Serdang, for instance, many 'Karos' had been brought unwillingly under the sway of the sultanates during the colonial period (with Dutch support for the rulers). They now reclaimed

what they saw as their territories. As Anthony Reid has expressed it, "the social stigma attached to Karo identity" was now removed and many who "once preferred to pass as Malays began proudly to declare themselves Karo" (1979: 255). In Asahan too, people who had previously called themselves 'Malay' began to give their *marga* or clan names: 'Karim', for instance, became 'Karim Sembiring'. It was explained in later years to Ariffin that "it did not make sense anymore to be a part of the *kerajaan*" (Ariffin 1993: 82). We see here again of course the other side of the so-named 'Malayization' process – if change is possible one way, it is also possible in the opposite direction. In noting such developments, we deepen our knowledge of what it can mean to be 'Malay', and in particular gain further evidence about how closely the concept was connected to the *kerajaan* in East Sumatra.

In the East Sumatran context the overthrow of the *kerajaan* leadership was certainly traumatic for the 'Malay' community. As Ariffin explains: "With the removal of the sultans, the *kerajaan* – with their traditions and norms which had bound the East Sumatran Malays together – were gone, and there was no substitute for the Malays to turn to" (88). What this statement draws attention to is the extent to which in this region being 'Malay' was seen not so much as an alternative to, but as synonymous with, royal subjecthood. It had developed little further. The role of both custom (*adat*) and religion underlines the contrast with the Peninsula. As a member of the Serdang royal family pointed out, both religion and custom in East Sumatra were still grounded in the *kerajaan*: with the destruction of the sultanates there were no longer any "*adat* heads" and the administration of Islam fell under the control of a national, 'Indonesian', Muslim leadership (87, 93). The sultan of Langkat, whose family had suffered so dreadfully in the revolution, had also understood the implications for *adat*. He told the Dutch in 1947 that the "traditional kingdoms" were the "pillars of *adat*", and the only way in which "custom and tradition" could be made "strong again" was for "the traditional kingdoms" to be "made strong once again" (Langenberg 1982: 15).

The 'Malays' of East Sumatra had one last chance in the revolutionary era. The Dutch fought back against the Republic after the 1945 declaration of independence, and attempted to create a federal Indonesia in which there would be a 'Negeri Sumatra Timur' (a 'State of East Sumatra'). The *kerajaan* elite, hoping to return to authority in some form, were warm supporters of the short-lived, Dutch-backed state. The leadership was given to Dr Tengku Mansur, the Asahan royal family member who had been leader of the Persatoean Soematera Timoer (East Sumatra Association), which was the nearest thing to a 'Malay' organization before the war. From 1948 to

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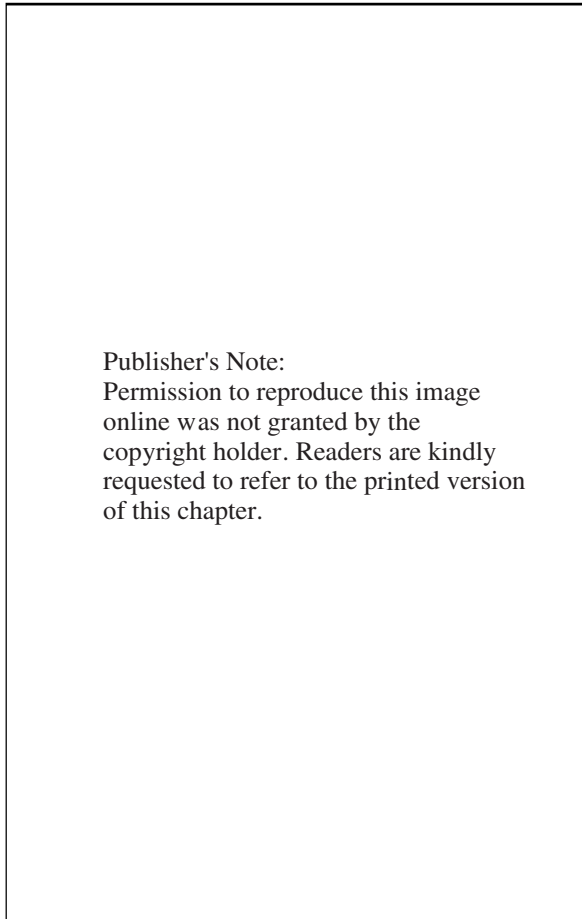
Figure 12   Dr Tengku Mansur, political leader of the 1940s from East Sumatra.
Photo from Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of
Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press,
1979).

1950, Mansur tried to build a 'Malay'-led East Sumatra that was not merely
a reconstituting of the old *kerajaan* structure. This strategy frustrated the
royal houses. More seriously, he was unable to attract loyalty from the large
'immigrant' communities (the Javanese and others). The suspicions were
too deep; also, the Republic of Indonesia was rapidly gaining support and
power *vis-à-vis* the Dutch. Mansur surrendered authority to the Republic
in August 1950.

During the short-lived State of East Sumatra there was ideological experimentation among the local 'Malays': but as the 'Malays' across the Straits would probably have observed, it came too late. In these years the East Sumatran 'Malay' leadership did give consideration to what type of *bangsa* might be developed to assure their future. Again, the flexibility of the term *bangsa* was exploited. The idea was suggested of a '*bangsa* Sumatra Timur' – a *bangsa* made up of the various indigenous peoples of East Sumatra ('Malay', 'Karo' and so forth) – but given the suspicion existing between these groups, the prospects of success would seem to have been poor. Mansur himself even promoted the idea of a '*bangsa* Sumatra' to counterbalance the claims of Java. The sultans of Langkat and Deli, not surprisingly, sought a federation of sultanates along the lines being followed on the Peninsula. The impression one gains from Ariffin's analysis of ideological developments in this period, however, is that although these 'Malay' leaderships were now examining different possibilities, Dr Mansur's state was generally perceived to be little more than a project of the '*bangsa feudal* Malay'. Such a narrow grouping – described so unattractively – could be no match for the great Indonesian national movement which had now gained ascendancy over the Dutch and was consolidating the new Indonesian nation (Ariffin 1993: Ch. 5; Langenberg 1982: 15).

In a sense, Mansur had been attempting what Dato Onn had been doing on the Peninsula. They were both aristocrats, but working independently of (and sometimes against) the royal courts; both were attempting to build a *bangsa*, and also trying to negotiate with outside groups (including hostile ones). In East Sumatra it had become impossible to make 'the Malays' a sufficiently inclusive *bangsa*, so Mansur had to try other strategies, such as the '*bangsa* Sumatera Timur'. In a fine narrative of these developments, Anthony Reid completes his account of the short-lived 'State of East Sumatra' in a way that drives home the ultimate failure of Mansur's attempts to create a Malay movement independent of monarchy. At the conclusion of the Muslim fast in 1948, Reid reports, very few visitors called on Mansur; but even then – despite the overthrow of the *kerajaan* in 1946 – crowds did call upon the sultan of Deli (1979: 262). On the Peninsula, the UMNO leaders had been able to exploit the authority of the sultans for their own purposes; but they had also made the *bangsa Melayu* a focus of loyalty and identity in its own right – a concept that reached beyond individual kingdoms, and was grounded not just in old *kerajaan* ideas but also in 'modern' understandings of how humankind ought appropriately to be organized.

After Mansur's submission to the Republic, East Sumatra was brought within the new province of North Sumatra, governed from Medan. As the 'Malays' had feared, over the next decades – through the long period of

Sukarno's successor, President Suharto (1966–1998) – the provincial governors did in general happen to be 'Javanese', and the 'Malay' community assumed a subordinate (and not generally prosperous) position. Members of the old royal families were prominent in promoting an interest in 'Malay' custom and culture – described by them specifically as 'Malay' in a way seldom done in the period of the Revolution and earlier (Lah Husny 1978; Luckman 1986). But the 'Malays' were no longer portrayed as a *bangsa*. As Rita Smith Kipp explained in the 1990s, "Indonesians use the word '*bangsa*' almost exclusively to name the nation state". Malays were now one of very many *suku* – and "the term sukuisme denotes tribalism, implying a charge of disloyalty to the nation" (1996: 65).

Other Regions

East Sumatra has a special interest in that the superficial similarity with the collection of sultanates on the Peninsula raises the issue of why its fate was so different. In Riau – located very close to what had been the British headquarters in Singapore, and administered from there by the Japanese during the Occupation – 'Malays' again faced frustration in the nation-building process. The sultanate of Riau-Lingga had been dissolved decades earlier – though there were attempts in the immediate post-war period to revive it and members of the old royal families continued to play a prominent role in the community. Since independence, the complaints from Riau have been particularly against 'Minangkabau' and 'Javanese'. After the Dutch recognized Indonesian independence in 1949, the Riau archipelago was joined with West Sumatra and administered from the Minangkabau centre at Bukit Tinggi. The "transformation of Riau into a 'Minangkabau' province", as Barbara Andaya has explained, "fuelled existing tensions between Malays and Minangkabau" (1997: 502). In Riau, unlike on the Peninsula, 'Malays' did not tend to accept 'Minangkabau' as members of their community.

In 1957 the Riau archipelago was brought into a new administrative region, including the old *kerajaan* territories of Siak, Kampar and Inderagiri (in East Sumatra), with an administrative capital at Pekan Baru (on the Siak river). Once again the 'Malays' faced a challenge from 'Minangkabau', who had migrated to Pekan Baru in large numbers, quickly becoming the majority population: one report said that by the 1990s "in every alley and lane one (could) hear people speaking Minangkabau" (Andaya 1997: 503). Even by the early 1960s, according to a 'Malay' leader, " 'Malayness' was hardly palpable in this city" (Al azhar 1997: 768). With 'Minangkabau' as well as 'Javanese' dominating the administration of the province, and with the

Indonesian national culture increasingly perceived as 'Javanese' culture, there were reports from many parts of Riau (just as from the province of North Sumatra) of 'Malays' feeling oppressed during the Suharto period (Derks 1997: 701–705). In Inderagiri (in the Sumatran portion of the province), for instance, an anthropological study pointed out the different negative ways in which 'Java' has been represented: in the "Javanese transmigrants who have been sent in large numbers" since the early 1980s, in the "Javanese itinerant merchants who have frequented weekly markets", and in the way television broadcasting "anchors Sumatra to Jakarta, the center of political power and information dissemination" (Kato 1997: 759).

Feeling against the national government during the long Suharto period was all the stronger in Riau because of its wealth – with oil resources, and islands like Batam and Bintan which benefit financially from being close to Singapore. The proximity of Malaysia has also been important, with Riau 'Malays' having in the past often preferred Malaysian over Indonesian television and radio, partly because of the Malaysian style of Malay language (Wee 1979: 21). One reported view was that "living in Riau is akin to suffering starvation while sitting on top of a milch cow" (Ford 2003: 138–139). As in other areas, 'Malays' have expressed anxiety about the future – not just in material terms, but about the possibility of the "final erasure of the *alam Melayu*" (Malay world) (Turner 1997: 658). Tenas Effendy, a Pekan Baru intellectual who has written widely on the culture and history of the 'Malays' of Riau, has insisted – and we must mark these words – that as long as "Malay moral, social and cultural values continue to exist then so does the *alam Melayu*" (Turner 1997: 658). The difficulty encountered when fostering 'tradition' during the Suharto period, however, was that it could be perceived as an attempt to revive the "feudal structures of the past" – which would raise the ire of the national government (Turner 1997: 657). The task of Malay ideologues – those who were not content simply to long (privately) for a future incorporation in the ever-rising Malaysia – was to foster a 'Malay' identity, but one that would be acceptable to the Indonesian state.

In Kalimantan as well the forging of the new Indonesia posed critical difficulties for 'Malays'. The *kerajaan* leadership was compromised here too by its past association with the Dutch, and then its involvement in the Dutch attempts in the late 1940s to set up a federal scheme. A short-lived State of West Kalimantan was in fact set up in May 1947 under the sultan of Pontianak, and when it was brought into the unitary Republic of Indonesia in 1950 some members of the royal family were imprisoned. In East Kalimantan, the Kutei and Bulangan royal leadership had also been supporters of the Dutch, and in addition were accused of disloyalty during the early 1960s, when Indonesia was engaged in the 'Confrontation' against Malay-

sia. The Javanese general who seized the Kutei sultan in 1964 is said to have burned the monarch's lavish clothes in the palace surrounds, and thrown them in the Mahakam river (Magenda 1989: 194) – an act that suggests that the potency of textiles (described above in Chapter 3) continued into the post-colonial period. The Kalimantan 'Malays', it should be said, were faced as well with the challenge of coming to terms with the new province of Central Kalimantan – described as a "triumph of 'Dayak nationalism' against the domination of Islam" (King 1993: 162).

As elsewhere in Indonesia the whole concept of Indonesian nationality (in Jerome Rousseau's words) "added to the taxonomy" – and advanced more quickly than 'Malaysia' as a new form of self-definition (1990: 74). 'Java', however, has loomed large in Kalimantan as in other places, especially under the Suharto regime – with the central government often perceived as essentially 'Javanese', high officials in the 'Outer Islands' frequently coming from Java and, again, the vast 'Javanese' transmigration scheme in which Kalimantan (like Riau) was a major target region. The moving of people from densely to lightly populated areas had begun in the Dutch period, but the huge increase under the Indonesian leadership was partly with the objective (as Victor King has expressed it) of enhancing "security in territorially marginal and 'empty' areas by spreading the majority Muslim Javanese widely through the archipelago" (King 1993: 288; Bertrand 2004: 55–56; Wee 2001: 17). In Kalimantan also 'Malays' were now a *suku* or a *suku bangsa*, and the maintenance of Malay traditions was again associated in particular with the former royal courts.

During the Suharto period associations across Indonesia cautiously developed programmes aimed at preserving 'Malay' culture and identity – issuing publications about 'Malay weddings', 'Malay houses' and so forth, and also seeking ways to address specific social and economic problems. One example was MABMI ('Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu Indonesia', the 'Indonesian Council of Malay Custom and Culture'), with branches in North Sumatra, West Kalimantan and elsewhere. Such organizations – stressing membership of a 'Malay' community and not merely 'Pontianak' or 'Deli' identity – had an obvious potential not only as a pan-Indonesia force, but also for cooperation with 'Malays' outside the country, including in Malaysia. This type of international activism, predictably enough, was discouraged by the Suharto government. At one meeting in Malaysia in the 1990s, the Indonesian embassy was reported to be taking the names of those Indonesians present and telling them to remember that they were 'Indonesians'.

The end of the Suharto regime in 1998 was followed by a new national strategy of decentralization (Turner and Podger 2003), which has had certain positive implications for 'Malay' communities around the country.

A popular 'Malay' leader was appointed as governor of North Sumatra, and 'Malay' groups there became increasingly active (including in attempts to assert historical land claims). 'Malay' aspirations also lifted in Riau, where Malay have begun in fact to leave "many non-Malays with a sense that they have no place to claim" (Ford 2003: 132). A 'Free Riau' movement was initiated, and in 2004 there were reports that the leader of a militant 'Malay' group (the 'Laskar Melayu Bersatu Riau') denied seeking independence for his region. As association with 'Malays' outside Indonesia is no longer discouraged, the governors of North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau and West Kalimantan have been drawn into the 'Dunia Melaya Dunia Islam' ('Malay world/Islamic world') meetings process – which has both cultural and business networking aims – organized by the then chief minister of Melaka (Malaysia) (Sakai 2004).

One prominent development in post-Suharto Indonesia has been a widespread revival of sultanates, including many described as 'Malay'. Among these are Landak, Mempawah, Pontianak and Sambas (West Kalimantan); Bulungan, Kutei and Pasir (East Kalimantan); and Serdang (North Sumatra) (Syaifuddin 2003). There is even a new interest in the Pagaruyung monarchy, which was overthrown in the first half of the nineteenth century. In some cases an explicit link is made between these resurrected sultanates and the promotion of 'Malayness': a 'Malay Brotherhood Customary Council' was started in Pontianak in 2000 (Klinken n.d: 8); 'Malay' associations have been involved in often lavish coronations of new sultans; and in the struggles between 'Malays' and immigrant 'Madurese' in Sambas, the sultanate has been described as "an important Malay identity symbol" (Klinken n.d.: 8). The sultan of Mempawah in Kalimantan is reported to have declared that in times of uncertainty, 'Dayaks' run to the long house but 'Malays' "run to the palace" (11). In such comments, however, it is difficult to judge whether 'Malay' or *kerajaan* has primacy. Gerry van Klinken, in a helpful overview, has drawn attention to the fact that the sultans have formed a 'Communication Forum for the Kratons (royal palaces) of Indonesia' – the suggestion is obvious here, that what the sultans really have in common is 'royalness'.

Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore are of course not the only nation states in which 'Malay' communities have had to be incorporated – though 'Malays' have been significant in one way or another in the nation-building process in each of these. In other countries there are small minorities, though in some cases they have played a special role as members of the trans-national 'Malay' movement, which continues to seek to shape the 'Malay' consciousness. In Cambodia the Malays, or 'Chvea', and other Muslims – together some 4 per cent of the total population – often live

apart from the Cambodian majority. The 'Chvea', who tend to live in villages in the south in the region of Kompot, are a separate community from the 'Chams', who have illustrious historic roots in Vietnam. The 'Chvea', speaking Khmer not Cham, are happy to be called 'Khmer-Islam', so as not to draw attention to their foreignness. They use Malay-language religious materials, write in the Jawi script, and many also speak Malay. Under the anti-communist leadership of Lon Nol (1970–1975), the 'Chvea' and 'Cham' formed an army brigade that was much feared by the communists. During the Pol Pot regime (1975–1979) they and other Muslims were seen as potentially subversive and were treated cruelly. Some 36 per cent of the 'Cham' and 'Malay' population are said to have been murdered, and many mosques were destroyed. As Milton Osborne has reported, some mosques were preserved and used as pig sties (Osborne 2004: 5; Collins n.d.: 44–45, 48, 56–60; Mohamad Zain 2001). Both 'Chvea' and 'Cham' have in recent years been drawn into 'pan-Malay' conferences and networks promoted primarily by Malaysia.

In Ceylon the 'Malay' community had a representative on the colony's Legislative Council from the 1920s, though this arrangement ceased in 1965 in independent Sri Lanka. Although 'Malays' have taken pains to affirm their loyalty to their host nation, they have also strengthened relations with 'Malays' in other countries and attempted to foster their own cultural and literary traditions. The old All Ceylon Malay Association, however, declined, and among recent initiatives to give leadership to the community has been an attempt by a Sri Lanka 'Indonesian' organization to reconstitute 'the Malays' as 'Indonesians' (Hussainmiya 1987: 21–22).

On the Cocos-Keeling Islands the small community of 'Malays' – most with origins in Java, Bali, Madura and other parts of the Dutch East Indies/ Indonesia – was removed from Clunies-Ross family rule in 1984. They were given the opportunity to vote (and some advice on how to vote) on whether to join Australia, but before that time many members of the community had already settled on the Australian mainland.

Borders

Looking across the nation states into which 'Malay' communities have been distributed, these international borders have not sealed off one concentration of 'Malays' from another. In most cases the borders are colonial constructions – and problems were almost bound to occur as national governments attempted to promote national consciousnesses, as well as assert national interests in such areas as immigration, defence, police and customs. Malaysia has been central in much difficult cross-border

interaction – which is hardly surprising given that it is a neighbour to so many other countries in the Archipelago, and that it expresses itself strongly as a specifically 'Malay' nation.

In the Malaysia–Indonesia case, contentious issues arose from the 1958 PRRI Rebellion in Indonesia – a rebellion led from Bukit Tinggi in West Sumatra – in which Malaya was seen as a supporter of the anti- Jakarta group and as assisting with arms. The Confrontation episode was even more difficult, drawing attention to the need to promote national loyalty among people who in many instances had family and friends 'across the border'. It was understandable that the national Malaysian broadcaster should run regular slogans along the lines of 'Malaysia stands united' and 'Beware of the enemies in our midst' (Wilson 1967: 53). From an Indonesian perspective, it was difficult to have royal families in Kalimantan who were sympathetic to Malaysia; and hardly acceptable in nationalist terms that Singapore bank notes were being used widely in Riau (Kato 1997: 751; Massot 2003: 68). In the Indonesian military itself there was hesitation about the struggle against Malaysia, particularly after 'Chinese'-led Singapore separated from the country in 1965 (Ricklefs 2001: 338).

In Brunei, the Azahari rebellion – which attracted considerable support in both Indonesia and Malaysia (including from Malay Nationalist Party leaders) – exposed the way in which some in Brunei were entangled in broader 'Malay' networks (Hussainmiya 1995: 158–159). It is true, however, that Azahari's claims that an army of 100,000 Indonesia volunteers was coming to assist him did not materialize (Leake 1990: 48).

In the case of Singapore, Khoo Kay Kim has suggested that from the moment Malaya became a nation state in 1957, "most of the writers, journalists and movie stars, especially those who were not Singapore-born, relocated as Kuala Lumpur emerged as the new centre of the Malay world" (Khoo Kay Kim et al. 2006: xxvii). Following the separation in 1965, many more "graduate Malays" crossed over to Malaysia (Rahim 1998: 253). Others, however, stayed and prospered – though questions have sometimes been raised about their loyalty. When the Israeli president (Hertzog) visited Singapore in 1986, 'Malay' protesters were portrayed by the Singapore leadership as disloyal, and as "taking cues from the Muslims in Malaysia" (100, 254). The next year Lee Hsien Loong (later prime minister) admitted that certain positions in the Singapore armed forces were closed on the grounds of "national security" concerns (100). A further issue is that Malaysian 'Malays' have not easily obtained work permits in Singapore, although ethnic 'Chinese' from East Asian countries have been given encouragement to seek permanent residence (72). One response to this perhaps predictable trend in Singapore policy – given the long-term anxiety there about being isolated in a largely Malay-Muslim neighbourhood – has been

that (according to surveys) the "Malay community" in fact possesses "a stronger sense of national pride and identification compared to the other major ethnic groups" (107). A reason for this, to be fair, may be the efforts taken by the Singapore authorities and academics to recognize the real 'Malay' contribution (including in pre-colonial times) to the development and international importance of the island (Kwa 1998).

Malaysia–Thailand border issues – a critical element in the separatist insurgency for many years – must have been exacerbated by the way in which different states and provinces have been moved back and forth, into and out of the Thai sphere. Building a wall between the two countries is not a sign of confidence about the future, nor has been the blocking of the Malaysian broadcasting frequency in Thai territory (Hamilton 2000: 24). But there is no doubt about the freedom that has existed for movement across the border, nor about the close family and other ties between the people on both sides. In the nineteenth century, at the time a tribute system operated between the Siamese court and the Muslim sultanates, a "natural flow of communication at the subject-to-subject level" continued between sultanates within and outside the Thai sphere (Kobkua 1988: 207); in the 1990s a Malaysian scholar reported that the "local people have been crossing the Golok river (between Kelantan and southern Thailand) since antiquity", and that they continue to do so without the use of passports (Mohamed Yusoff Ismail 1995: 6). Some cross-border activity has been highly political: the Patani prince helping with anti-Japanese resistance in occupied Malaya, and in more recent times Malays from Malaysia supporting anti-Thai movements in all types of ways. It is said that Malaysians have provided asylum, assisted with arms and other supplies, and arranged jungle warfare training in Kelantan. Apart from clandestine cooperation, some Malaysian political leaders have given public support to the Malay cause – especially leaders from the opposition Islamic party, PAS. In 1997 the Thai government actually threatened the Malaysians with economic consequences if they did not crack down on support for the separatists. The Mahathir government then arrested one of the key separatist leaders, handing him to Thailand.

For those living in border regions the consolidation of nation states has reinforced a process underway during the earlier construction of colonial states. We should recall that in the *kerajaan* era territorial boundaries were often very vague: what mattered was the relationship between ruler and subject – and between ruler and ruler. It was a time of relatively open frontiers, with a pioneering style of settlement and land use, and personal identity was also fluid in character from some (but not all) perspectives. Since the nineteenth century, new 'borders' – racial or ethnic ones, as well as 'state' – have begun to be established and patrolled by ruling elites.

The ambiguity and tension that can accompany the defining of such borders have been examined with particular sensitivity by Japanese scholars. One example (from Ishikawa Noboru) comes from a Sarawak village on the border with Indonesian Kalimantan. Two village elders live apart not only physically (at opposite ends of the village), but also in terms of their histories and attitudes. One had a brother abducted by Indonesians at the time of Confrontation; the other – who holds a vision of a cross-Archipelago 'Malay world' restored – had helped a pro-Indonesian Sarawak leader, and was imprisoned for doing so. The village itself had been deeply entangled in the border struggle with Indonesia – and Confrontation was a time when old local scores were settled under the guise of nation-state interests. Executions carried out by Indonesian soldiers, for instance, appear to have been revenge killings by people who had in the past crossed the border to find work in Sarawak and believed themselves to have been treated badly by village employers. At another point many of the village houses were set on fire, after which the government ordered an evacuation. The memories of this era, according to Ishikawa, have remained influential decades later (2003).

New national borders between Malaysia and Thailand also influenced the lives of individuals. Until the early nineteenth century this was "a lawless land" beyond police control. Many of the Muslim people there were called 'Sam Sam': some nineteenth- and twentieth-century descriptions suggest they were "of the Siamese race, who have adopted the Mohommedan religion"; others described them as "Malays who had turned Siamese in everything but their religion"; and another view was that they were "a race within themselves". Their lives were changed not just by the imposition of physical borders between the developing states, but also by the building of ethnic categories in the nation-state context. On the Thai side of the border – and it should be said that on the western side of the Peninsula Thai-speaking Muslims have been relatively easily integrated into 'Thai' society – the 'Sam Sam' now "do not recognize themselves as Sam Sam', and are simply members of the category 'Thai Muslim'. On the Malaysian side, however, when the "nation-state of Malaysia legislated officially . . . that Malays were Muslims who spoke Malay", the 'Sam Sam' have been trying to become "complete Malays by adopting the Malay language". Only a small percentage of the younger 'Sam Sam' villagers there can now speak Thai. They say that in Malaysia speaking Thai is "old fashioned and shameful for Muslims", and it "does not bring them progress in anything" (Nishii 1995, 2000).

Although 'pan-Malay' aspirations have posed no serious threat to the constitutional architecture of the region, such aspirations have not disappeared. They are present in academic circles where there is a call for "a

comprehensive (research) proposal which aims at studying southern Thai and northern Malaysia as if they were a single cultural unit" (Mohamad Yusoff Ismail 1995: 6); or where there is a suggestion to reinstitute the lively textile trade of the past – involving Kelantan and Trengganu (in Malaysia), Patani (in southern Thailand) and the 'Chams' and 'Malays' of southern Cambodia. This trade, it is argued, only collapsed when the builders of the Malaysian nation state decided that commerce should be focused on west coast ports (Maznah 1995). The second old man in Ishikawa's Sarawak narrative offered another example of 'pan-Malay' dreaming when he reflected on relations between the Brunei and the Sambas sultanates, and also on the far-flung Majapahit empire based in Java – and was nostalgic for the return of a 'Malay' world that had once been "undivided by nation-states both colonial and post-colonial" (2003: 40–41). There have been reports from Thailand as well of 'Melayu Raya' aspirations, with calls for the 'Malay' south to join both Indonesia and Malaysia (Haemindra 1976: 211). From the Malaysian point of view, a sense of 'Malay' community continues to be a factor in assistance given by various groups in that country to insurgent groups in southern Thailand, just as it was in the welcoming of many 'Cham' refugees from Indochina from the 1970s. A 'pan-Malay' ideal was certainly an inspiration in the Azahari rebellion in Brunei, and of course a range of 'pan-Malay' considerations (some contradicting others) operated in the 'Malaysia' proposal and in the struggle that followed.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to translate pan-Malay ideals into regional architecture was the 'Maphilindo' episode of 1963, when the Philippines president, Macapagal, together with the Malayan and Indonesian leaders, developed a 'confederation of nations of Malay Origin' to be known as 'Maphilindo'. The erupting conflict between Malaya and Indonesia put an end to this scheme. Nevertheless, twenty years later another Philippines president was still telling the Indonesians that the two peoples were "once one in race, in language and in culture, before our colonizers severed our links with one another" (Salazar 1998: 97). The Philippines involvement is interesting. Going back many centuries, we have noted the political and cultural influence of the Brunei sultanate in Luzon in pre-Spanish times. In the nineteenth century, as Ismail Hussein has pointed out, members of the Filipino elite (particularly Jose Rizal) stimulated a public interest in a 'Malay' substratum. After centuries of Spanish rule, the elite needed "an ancient time, a historical reference they could use to offset the humiliation they were enduring". Rizal immersed himself in the study of that past and began to formulate his nationalistic mission in a way that extended well beyond the Philippines: as a desire to "free the Malay races from the manacles of colonialism" (Ismail Hussein 1990: 62–63). The scholar Zeus Salazar has surveyed this promotion of 'Malay' consciousness

in the Philippines, noting for instance the dreams in the 1930s of a "unified Malaysia extending from the northern extremity of the Malay Peninsula to the shores of the remotest islands of Polynesia" (1998: 94). He refers to the Filipino's "sense of loss with regards to his Malay identity . . . the Dunia Melayu ('Malay world') of his fragmented memory", and to his people's vulnerability to "the vision of Dunia Melayu considered as past unity and future union of the area presently occupied by the four 'Malayan' states of Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Pilipinas" (101–102). These observations are compelling, but the categorization of the large, Christian Philippines population as 'Malay' also raises difficult issues for the ideological project of building 'the Malays'.

The 'Malay World' Movement

The phrase 'Dunia Melayu' ('Malay World') has been used over the last few decades in particular with reference to a movement initiated in Malaysia – a movement that does indeed transcend nation-state borders. In the 1950s Malaya had held Malay Language and Literature Congresses and cultural congresses – with participants from outside Malaya, especially Indonesia. The National Language and Literature Agency (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), established in 1957, was important in sponsoring such events, and they often had speeches from high-level government figures (Li 1975). The formation of the GAPENA (Malaysian National Writers' Association) in 1969 was a landmark especially because of the role it (and in particular the long-term president, Ismail Hussein) has played in the 'Malay World' movement. The first Malay World Assembly was held in Melaka in 1982, the second in Sri Lanka in 1985, with later ones in Vietnam, South Africa, Mindanao and Madagascar.

Leading figures in the Malaysian federal government have spoken at these events, and the Selangor state government established an International Malay Secretariat in 1996 – intended to build international relationships (including in the business area) between 'Malays' (Rahman Muda 1996). In 2000 the chief minister of the Melaka state government initiated a 'Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam' ('Malay World/Muslim World') process – again with regular meetings in various 'Malay' centres, and with networking aims that are commercial as well as cultural.

Cultural and other initiatives which might be seen as arising in some way from the 'Malay World' or 'Dunia Melayu' movement include the regular publication *Warta Gapena* (with news regarding events of the movement and international Malay developments in general), a Malaysia-based *Encyclopedia of Malay History and Culture* (launched in 1988), the establishing

of the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA) at the National University of Malaysia (with a 'malaycivilization' web portal initiated in 2005), and a range of 'Malay studies' centres in Indonesia (including in Riau and Yogyakarta). A Serumpun (Malay-family) Chamber of Commerce and Industry (including business people from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia) was formed in 1992, a range of 'dialogue' processes between Malays in Sumatra and the Peninsula have been instituted, and a Malay cultural festival held in Batam (Riau), with participants from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei as well as Indonesia (Rahim 1998: 16). In England in 2005 there was a London Malay Festival, which focused on cultural entertainment and food, and advertised participants from Sri Lanka, Madagascar and South Africa as well as Southeast Asia.

The 'Dunia Melayu' movement has had benefits for 'Malays' outside the core Archipelago region. The holding of the Malay World Symposium in Sri Lanka in 1985 gave the Malay community there a greater sense of being "part of a larger Malay world" (Hussainmiya 1987: 23; *Terang*, 1996). Opening a Colombo office of the International Malay Secretariat in 1997, the Malaysian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka explained that it would facilitate commercial and investment links, giving the 50,000 Sri Lanka Malays access to some 280 million Malays all over the world (*Daily News*, 22 February 1997). In South Africa new 'Malay' organizations emerged in the 1990s – including a Cape Malay Chamber of Commerce and a Forum for Malay Culture – stimulated by the engagement of the local community in 'Malay World' activities (Muhammad Haron 2001). There have also been measures to give 'Chams' a stronger feeling of belonging to the 'Malay World', with a Malay Symposium being held in Vietnam in 1995, and GAPENA (the Writers' Association) organizing 'Cham' study tours to Vietnam and Cambodia. Cooperation in research and culture (as well as in religious education) has also been promoted by Malaysia (Wong 2006).

Malaysia's international profile is boosted as a consequence of the movement. Although a middle- to small-size country in terms of population, Malaysia can claim to be a model state – "a show-case for Malay civilization" – for an international community numbering some 350 million people (Ismail Hussein 1990: 73). The Riau intellectual Al azhar has explained that "the intelligentsia" in his region point to their "near kin in Malaysia" to show that "heirs of Malay culture are capable of competing with the heirs of whatever other culture" (1997: 772).

'Dunia Melayu' objectives seem to be varied. Clive Kessler has referred to the persistent "Malay longing to be something in the world", and I will return to his observation later in this book (1999: 31). Apart from the emphasis on 'the Malay heritage' (with its cultural and historic dimensions)

and the establishing of business networks (influenced by what Malays know of the way other diasporas have been mobilized to achieve commercial success), there is also a post-nation-state dimension to the movement. In Ismail Hussein's words, the "national boundaries within which we now live are unreal, for they are not determined by an exclusive group of people or an exclusive culture". Colonialism divided the region, and state nationalism (including academic 'national studies') seeks to continue to do so. The "unity of an earlier era", he says, needs to be rediscovered. The promotion by Malaysia of the 'Malay World' idea makes sense at a time when "we are confronting the age of post-nationalism", and when it is clear that the Asia-Pacific of the future "will be dominated by two huge families of races: namely the Family of China-Japan in the north and that of Malay-Polynesia in the south". To "confront this new dawn", Ismail Hussein proposes, it is "paramount" to "enhance both family ties and cooperation" within each "family of races" (Ismail Hussein 1990: 70–74; 1993: 13).

In some ways 'Dunia Melayu' is a continuation of the process of redefinition that has been underway over the last two centuries – a process that has faced some serious reversals, but has involved the incorporation (or redefining) of 'Bataks', 'Dayaks' and 'Orang Asli', as well as Muslims (such as 'Bugis' and 'Javanese') as 'Malay'. In the post-independence period this has continued most of all in Malaysia – but the 'Malay World' movement may well be working as an encouragement to some groups in Indonesia (or perhaps sections of the 'Cham' community in Cambodia) to develop a 'Malay' consciousness, as well as sharpening the sense of 'Malay' identity in Sri Lanka. This said, there is also strong resistance (perhaps accompanied by some bewilderment) in Indonesia to talk about Malay 'brotherhood' or 'sisterhood'. Ismail Hussein has pointed out that Indonesians have seen the idea of a 'Malay family' as an indication that Malaysians might be "racists" – and are only slowly beginning to comprehend that in fact "Malaysia is taking a cultural stance towards Malay history and culture" (1990: 13).

This brings us back again to the issue of how the concept of 'Malay' is to be understood – and what type of concept of 'community' it is. The issue will be examined from a number of different directions in the next chapter, where we will draw in part on the work of anthropologists. Reviewing the manner in which 'Malays' have been built into nation states, the point should be clear by now: 'Malay' communities have had to face an extraordinary range of futures – at the one extreme, the dominant community in a show-case nation; at the other, as embattled minorities. But examining 'Malay' fortunes in the post-colonial world of nation-state building has underlined yet again another type of contrast: the variation in ways in which the concept of 'Malay' itself has been understood.

7

Multiple Forms of 'Malayness'

Looking across the 'Malay' communities in different nation states today, there are great contrasts in the life experience of the people, and just what it means to be 'Malay' varies from one place to another, as it has also altered over time. We often encounter the term 'Malay' being used in a manner that suggests the existence of an identifiable community of 'Malay people', and it is also the case that the promotion of a 'Malay' consciousness of one type or another has continued throughout the post-independence period. There has been experimentation and debate, however, and while some have spelt out with passion various visions of 'Malayness', the view that this type of solidarity is a diversion away from more important types of community and commitment is also gaining ground. From one perspective 'Malayness' is presented as a force with the capacity to challenge the current nation-state configuration; from another it is actually vulnerable. The long-term fear remains, that 'the Malays' could actually "disappear from this world".

How have 'the Malays' been characterized in modern times? I shall consider first the accounts that have been given over the last half-century by social scientists, and then examine the different and often contesting ways in which leaders of the 'Malay' community have sought to define 'Malayness'.

Social Scientists Describing 'the Malays'

One dramatic, empirical feature of the 'Malay' community in the post-independence period has been the demographic increase – at least of people classified as 'Malay' on the basis of the narrower definition. In Malaysia the numbers have increased from some 2.5 million in the immediate post-war period (Ooi 1964: 124) to about 13 million. In Singapore in 1947 there were

only some 72,000 'Malays' (Djamour 1959: 3); today it is more like 600,000. As noted already, there are more than 7 million 'Malays' in Indonesia.

Although 'Malays' live in a broad range of social and political situations, I have suggested already that the idea of 'the Malay' remains potent for scholars as well as the people themselves. The phrase 'the real Malay' may have died with the colonial period, but the 'Malay race' or 'people' continue to be discussed in ways that imply the possession of certain fixed characteristics, a definable essence. Governments at times use such language, including in tourist information. The Singapore culture pack (discussed at the beginning of this book) certainly details 'Malay' religious and cultural features – spelling out the rituals of Islam, the 'enthronement' of the couple at a wedding ceremony, the traditional 'Malay' house and clothing style, and other matters. Writing in anthropology (introduced in Chapter 1) – though often claiming to be descriptive and certainly rich in ethnographic detail – illustrates the way modern scholarship has also helped to constitute 'the Malay', in a sense, building on the work begun in the field of 'Malay studies' in colonial times.

In Singapore, wrote Judith Djamour, "the Malays" were distinguishable in part by "peculiarities of dress, gait and posture" (1959: 21). In other accounts, as noted already, we continue to see 'the Malay' characterized not only by adherence to Islam, but also by the presence of *bomoh* (shaman) and shadow plays (now only in a few regions). There is often mention too of *adat* ('custom'), *halus* (refined) behaviour, anxiety about reputation, dignity and status (*nama*, *maruah*, *pangkat*), shame and deference (*malu*, *hormat*) and 'running *amok*'. The *keris* is cited as still having a 'Malay' symbolic function, as is the figure of Hang Tuah.

Descriptions of a 'Malay' pattern of living have often included discussion of eating and housing. The "everyday Malay meal" consists of a plate of rice "surrounded by a number of 'side dishes' dictated by situation, season, region and supply". These side dishes are to be understood as "complements to the rice rather than dishes to be eaten in large quantities for their own sake", and they might include small amounts of carefully flavoured fish, meat or vegetables (Brissenden 1996: 191). As to accommodation, houses continue to be built on piles, as they were in the past – though increasingly made of sawn timber rather than woven bamboo strips, and with roofs of clay tile or corrugated iron rather than palm thatch. In Selangor "most characteristically, a 'Malay' village comprises a number of houses strung out along both sides of a road or path" (Wilson 1967: 113). In central Pahang too villages are said to be "strung out along the high banks of the Pahang and Bera rivers" (Wilder 1982: 25). In Sik in Kedah each household is said to consist of a man, a woman and their children – but

there might also be children from an earlier marriage, adopted children or grandparents (Banks 1983: 41). In a survey of a Trengganu village of 541 people, the most common household contained "a nuclear family of five" (Bailey 1983: 92; Swift 1965: 102). Coconut trees often surround the houses: the villagers in Trengganu explained that the trees like "people and the sounds of habitation" (Bailey 1983: 88). Many houses are built in a manner that allows them to be moved from one place to another. This might involve taking the house apart and re-erecting it in a new place, or just lifting and carrying the entire structure (Carsten 1997: 35, 38). The dominant role of women in the house is conveyed by the way in which the "mother of the house" must hold the central house post (*tiang seri*) when it is erected (36).

The central post, as Janet Carsten has explained in the case of Langkawi, is considered to be the abode of the house spirit, which is also said to be female – and there is a ritual of wrapping or dressing the post to make the spirit attractive (36). One report after another on 'Malay' communities stresses the role of what Thomas Fraser (writing on Patani) called the "substratum of beliefs and practices concerning a large population of spirits" – a substratum which lies "not far below" the "formal adherence to Islam and Islamic concepts of law and theology" (1960: 168). There is often (but not always) said to be tension between Islamic officials and the *bomoh* (or shaman), who have expertise concerning this spirit world. In Mawang on the Kedah–Penang border, Karim encountered a *bomoh* who was believed to have five 'helping spirits' (and whose aid was often sought by villagers), and an imam at the mosque who considered the shaman to be practising sorcery prohibited by Islam (1992: 157; Fraser 1960: 189–191). There is much scholarly writing on exorcism – particularly the trance performances in which spirits are in one way or another propitiated. In Sik these were often denigrated by the "religiously pious" as "blasphemous pornography" (Banks 1983: 75; Laderman 1993). Such *makyong* exorcism, it is often observed, has been in steady retreat in 'Malay' communities, at least partly because of Islamic criticism.

Bilateralism

One characteristic of 'Malay' society persistently singled out is bilateralism. Raymond Firth's study of "Malay marine fishing" in Kelantan – which opens with a discussion of "the salient characteristics of Malay rural society" (1966: 1) – observes that although the aristocracy and families of Syeds (who claim descent from the Prophet) stress descent through the

father, the "great body" of the people had no descent groups. They operated "a bilateral kinship system alone" (11). In such bilateral or cognatic kinship, "equal or almost equal importance is attached to kin on the father's and on the mother's side" (Djamour 1959: 23). Firth noted that this bilateralism meant that 'Malay' society lacked a "source of built-in patterns of leadership" (1966: 11), and certainly the "lack of legitimate leadership roles within the village" has been described as part of "the character of Malay society" (Swift 1965: 169–170). In the absence of strong family heads, it would seem, social leadership fell to the royal elite and its appointees. Japanese anthropologists have contrasted this system with their own patrimonial one, with its "definite, fixed group or corporation" – in which people belonged to a single family group, with the wife losing membership on marriage, and the male traditionally exercising control (a tendency reinforced by Confucian values) (Maeda 1975: 163–164). In 'Malay' society multiple family memberships have been described – the married woman not being restricted to her husband's family. Relationships in 'Malay' society gave the appearance of being based on personal rather than family ties; there was a sense of a greater individualism, and the 'Malay' family (unlike the 'Japanese' one) was not "the building block or keystone of social structure" (164). The 'Malay' village – from the Japanese perspective, as well as Firth's – tended to lack "definite leadership"; its members also "move more freely from one village to another", and the community was a "rather amorphous gathering of people and houses" in which "membership is fluid" (165).

There is a systematic rigour to this 'Japanese' – 'Malay' comparison, but references to the looseness and the seeming individualism of Malay society are often encountered in the anthropological literature. In Patani one report points to the "strong stress" on individualism in the "family group", and the preference for individual activity rather than "co-operative effort" (Fraser 1960: 122); Conner Bailey, commenting on rural production in a number of areas in Malaysia, has argued that "only rice farmers (not rubber tappers or fishermen) have a recurring need to work together" – because rice farmers need to coordinate the planting schedule and the "mobilization of the community's labour during the transplanting and harvest seasons" (1983: 200). In a report on a Selangor village there is again mention of an absence of "unity arising out of the interlocking of social relations" (Wilson 1967: vii), and of a link between social individualism and the operation of a bilaterally organized kinship system (146).

In discussing the consequences of this system for the role of women, Wazir Jahan Karim has explained that the way 'bilaterality' promotes "fluid, loose interlocking social networks, ego-centric ties" emphasizes the

"diffusion of role and status concepts in relation to gender" (1992: 8). Bilateralism, she found, "facilitates women's active participation in ritual and community relations" (230). Even with the challenge during recent decades of Islamic revivalism – which tends to carry assertions of male dominance – she considers that the prominence of bilaterality in 'Malay' custom has "secured women's position in society in the short and long term" (230). Among other studies that highlight the prominence of women, Djamour's book points to how bilateralism can assist a woman's independence because she is always able to "depend upon her own kin's support"; also, although 'Malays' seldom leave substantial property for their heirs, what they do leave is described as being divided more or less equally without consideration to gender (Djamour 1959: 143, 40). Among fishing people in Kelantan and Trengganu, women have been said to control the household finances: if a man wants to buy a new boat, he must "ask his wife" (Firth 1966: 27; Bailey 1983: 132). In southern Thailand as well, women were "accorded equal rights with men in family matters and occasionally even in business" (Fraser 1960: 222).

The frequency of divorce in 'Malay' society is often linked to the comparative assertiveness of women. Karim reported on statistics suggesting the majority of divorce cases (in Kelantan and Trengganu) were initiated by women (142). In Kedah, although theoretically a woman cannot dissolve a marriage, "in practice it was easy for her to do so" – she could, for instance, insult her husband "in a public place, and so shame him" (Banks 1983: 100). What is often made clear is that a divorced woman – pressed into an arranged marriage in the first instance – can possess considerable freedom to arrange her own, new marriage. The first marriage may be at an early age, especially for the woman – soon after puberty, to make childbirth outside marriage less likely, so it is observed. A second marriage has been common. As one analysis presents the matter: unlike Europeans, who "allow the freedom before marriage in choice of partners and apply the restraint once the marriage tie is made" (the anthropologist was writing many decades ago), "the Malay applies the constraint before marriage and allows freedom to break the tie and conclude another one afterwards" (Firth 1966: 46).

Divorce in such a system "carries no stigma", and "no moral prestige is gained by putting up with a marriage that has become unsatisfactory" (Swift 1965: 121). Within the marriage itself, sexual satisfaction is admitted to be a matter of concern – and sexual prowess is looked for in both partners, with men seeking therapy at times (including from a *bomoh* or shaman) and women admired for being good "sparring partners". The

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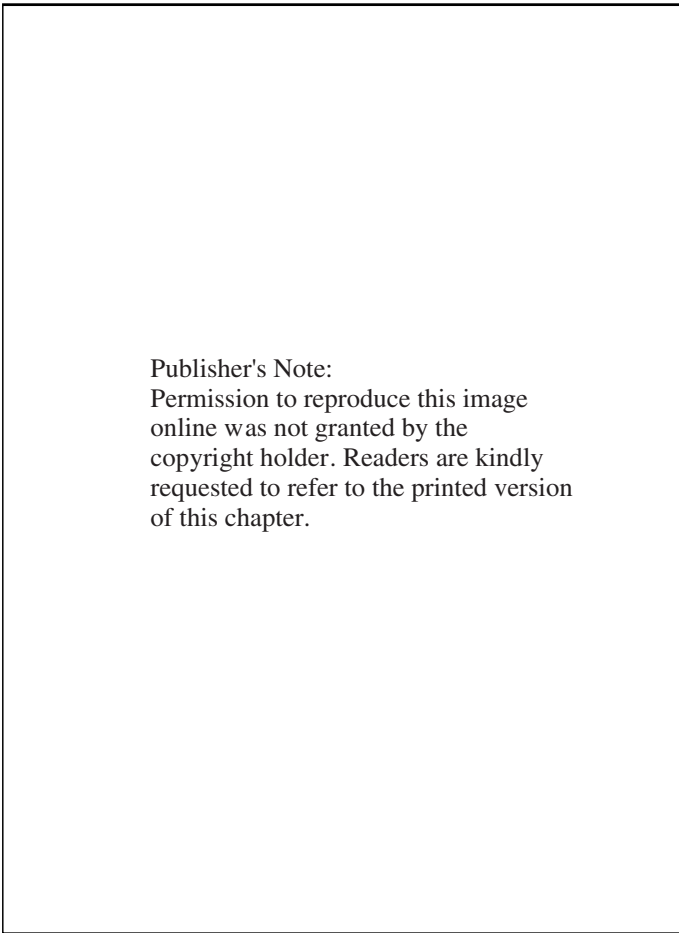
Figure 13 Busy woman in the new Malaysian administrative capital of Putrajaya.
Photo © Deborah Johnson.

stress placed on male sexual performance is such that (as Karim has explained) "older men in particular become the butt of male and female joking behaviour" if their wives' complaints of their low sexual performance become "public knowledge", as they often do (143). Polygyny, of course, is possible under Muslim law, but most accounts suggest it is not common: in Sik in Kedah it was noted that new wives in such marriages were referred to "by the condescending word *madu* (honey)" (Banks 1983: 99).

Pioneers

Another feature of 'Malay society' often drawing comment has been its frontier character. Some ethnographies, at least at first glance, seem to imply a residential stability. When an anthropologist writes, as Raymond Firth did, of "the salient characteristics of Malay rural society", we might assume that the society being described is necessarily stable and unchanging. Yet even in Firth's case it is soon evident that 'his' Kelantan community is actually of "very recent growth", and that the population included people from Trengganu and Patani, as well as from different parts of Kelantan (1966: 64–68). Japanese anthropologists have been particularly sensitive to the mobility of Malay rural settlement. Having contemplated their own country's rural history (as Kato puts it), they "are inclined to think peasants form settled populations and are conservative and non-adventurous by inclination". They are not prepared for the "mobile peasant" of island Southeast Asia (Kato 1997a: 2). Most 'Malay' villages, according to Maeda, are "pioneering settlements in the sense that they have been colonized in the relatively recent past" (1975: 165); Tsubouchi (in his *One Malay Village*) has described "the basic character of Kelantan" as a "pioneering society" (2001: 4), and explains that in such a society villagers consider it "only natural for people to leave in search of new land before the population increases beyond the village's capacity" (235).

In Kedah, David Banks invoked bilateralism again in discussing the frontier. Under an inheritance system that "gives males and females equal rights of succession to a man's or woman's landed estate", cultivated lands are inevitably fragmented, and this leads to "expansion through pioneering" in a spirit "of rugged individualism" (1983: 11). The population of Sik, where he researched, included immigrants from Patani who had been coming since the nineteenth century; he also noted the arrival of people from Sumatra and Java, as well as from Setul in Thailand, over that period (22–27). Carsten's research village on Langkawi had people with Penang, Melaka, Thailand, Acehnese and other Indonesian backgrounds (1997: 14). In Jendram Hilir in Selangor, it was reported that the population was made up largely of immigrants from Sumatra, and that the village had only been settled during the twentieth century (Wilson 1967: 18). Shamsul wrote of the influx of settlers from Kelantan and Java to Selangor (1986: 19). Another study concludes that "most West coast Malays were either born in Indonesia or have some Indonesian ancestors" (Provencher 1971: 43–44). The inhabitants of Wilder's village in central Pahang "today claim to be descended from ancestors born in Rawa, Minangkabau or Kampar in

Sumatra" (1982: 134–135); Fraser's Patani village (Rusembilan) was again settled over the previous century, commencing when "one man and his son moved from Pattani and started to clear the jungle from the land behind the beach at Rusembilan" (1960: 29). Perhaps the frontier tale is most dramatic in the case of southwest Sarawak, at least in Tom Harrisson's description of 'Malays' having "pioneered a whole huge tract of land out of jungle into permanent cultivation within a century" (1970).

The pioneering discussed here is in rural contexts, and the expansion of population and other factors are reducing the available rural frontiers (Tsubouchi 2001: 243–244). Today the *kampong* itself is also less rural – in the sense that urban forms of employment and social practice have spread into the countryside, assisted by great development in transport and electronic communication, thus intermeshing more closely than in the past 'village' and 'city' (Thompson 2007). Maeda, however, has made an observation about the new spheres in which a frontier spirit might be expressed. In urban situations, he suggests, the "abstract characterization of the flow-oriented frontier" can also apply. Frontiers "can take various forms: black hole, rural, bazaar, colonial, urban, and so on" (1988: 171). We see this expansion of the concept of pioneering evoked in Tania Li's study of Malay society in Singapore, in her discussion of the motives driving immigrants who have come to the city. Most 'Malay' immigrants have migrated as individuals, finding work for themselves on arrival. Many have been "young men seeking adventure and escape from the constraints of parental authority", and single women were often "divorcees seeking to escape village and family gossip". Singapore offered "relative freedom and anonymity" and the possibility of work as "independent wage-earners" (1990: 96). Commenting on the closing of rural frontiers, David Banks pointed to how education has helped parents fulfil their responsibilities "in other ways than opening new land": education "replaces land as an element of parental wealth gradually transmitted to children as they reach their majority". Going off to urban centres (often far away) can be seen as a form of pioneering – but it is also a development accompanied by anxiety, as parents fear they will lose touch with their children and be abandoned by them in old age (1983: 174–176).

To what extent do these different ethnographic reports conjure up a specifically 'Malay' social formation? The frontier spirit, the prominence of women, the loose community ties, the bilateralism, the animist substructure might be gathered together with other often-repeated motifs – the refined manners, the wavy-bladed *keris*, the figure of Hang Tuah – to give substance to the idea of 'Malay' society and culture. And yet it should be said that the closer one seems to look, the more we find contradictions.

The bilateralism, as already noted, does not apply to the royal and aristocratic elites, nor does it cover the matrilineal traditions in Negri Sembilan and other regions of the Peninsula where the people are certainly called 'Malay', and inherited land passes down through the female line (Swift 1965: 22). There is also debate about just how 'loose' these 'Malay' communities really are.

Community

The way anthropologists have discussed 'looseness', in fact, draws attention again to the whole question of how the concept of 'community' might best be understood in a 'Malay' context – and not just at the rural and local level. Some ethnographies raise the question as to whether Malay (and other Southeast Asian) villages may be loose in one sense, but not in another. They stress that "Malay community life" is in fact "very strong" (as Raymond Firth once argued), when we take into account its religious obligations (including charity) and such rituals as funerals, marriages and circumcisions, as well as the shadow play performances and séances (Firth 1966: 291–292). Another report (by Provencher) suggests that a "cognitively naïve Westerner" might well be struck by the structural looseness of a Malay community – because of the lack of "permanent, sociocentrically defined, involvement groups". But in terms of "interactional behaviour", the "West coast Malay social structure" is "tight". Provencher stressed the role of formal behaviour and manners – including the following of custom (*adat*) – closing his report with the Malay saying: "Let us live in the world according to custom (*adat*), for manners (*bahasa*) are not bought and sold" (1971: 205–206; also Benjamin 2006: 21–22).

   One implication of conformity of this type is that it has the effect of making invisible much of the diversity of origins of people within a village. Carsten noted in Langkawi that "present-day inhabitants of the island whose ancestors have come from elsewhere" were "quite indistinguishable in their dialect, dress, or house styles": the "processes of incorporation at work are highly effective; the conformity in patterns of behaviour very great" (1997: 4–5). The stress on style of behaviour as a unifying force also suggests the need for caution in commenting on individualism in Malay social behaviour. The observation has certainly been made that individualistic behaviour – encouraged by bilaterality – should not be confused with a preference for solitude. The "Singapore Malay" (according to Djamour's classic study) had "a particular dread of solitude, of being *satu orang* (which literally means 'one person' and usually implies living alone)" (1959: 35).

In 'his' Selangor village, Wilson reported that the "explicit desire to be surrounded by an emotional cocoon seems to be the major underlying rationale for the utilization and expression of kinship ties"; and these so-called "kinship ties" incorporate people who are in fact emotionally close but not related by blood (1967: 125). Incorporation in the house and family (as explained by Carsten in her more recent Langkawi study) "occurs largely through feeding" – "the nature of the food consumed, and who it is consumed with" (1997: 286). But there is also the need to learn "appropriate forms of behaviour" – as Carsten discovered with some discomfort as she herself was being incorporated in a Malay family as "a young adult daughter". She was sent into the kitchen (*dapur*), for instance, when male guests came to the house (276). Another element in incorporation (for a woman) involved entry to the intimate, coarse (*kasar*) style of behaviour and discourse prevailing in the female-dominated inner household (54–55).

In the wider community the stress is on refined (*halus*) public behaviour – and it is often said that there is a desire to avoid the crude (*kasar*). William Wilder's Pahang report emphasizes that the "distinction *halus*–*kasar* exists in tradition (*adat*) and in the spoken word (*bahasa*)". The dichotomy *halus*–*kasar* is "applied to thinking and behaviour and symbolizes Kampung Kuala Bera [his research site] as an entity and its members' place in it". The word *bahasa* can refer not just to speech but also to manners: a person "who is 'polite' and cultivated has a deep knowledge of *adat*", and such a person's "manners and speech are *halus*" (1982: 116–117). It is often said that *kasar* (crude) behaviour is the opposite of *halus* (refined) behaviour – but my impression (particularly from reading reports from Janet Carsten and James Scott) is that the seemingly informal, unconstrained, *kasar* behaviour possesses its own discursive structure, and that achieving a complete absorption in village or household requires knowledge of this 'code' as well as *halus* ways.

The content of *adat* – as we have noted earlier – alters from one place to another, though it is a concept which at the most general level has been described as "unify(ing) the mind of the Malay world" (Zainal Kling 1989/1990: 115). Wilder suggests that the way in which a village is seen to possess its own *adat* is summed up by the proverb: "Other pools, other fishes; other fields, other crickets". That is to say, every village has its own "accent, custom, personality and history" (Wilder 1982: 117). Despite this variation in content, however, the idea is always there of *adat* consisting of "ancient customary usages" – which "as Malays see it, lie outside Islam" – and of the village being "united" by this "secret code" (115). Just how vital the *adat* has been to the community (and therefore to the individuals within the community) is suggested by the much-quoted saying which I cited in

Chapter 3: "Better to let the child die but not the *adat* ('custom')". This is the "tightness" about which Provencher wrote, when he warned that Malay communities only looked "loose" to a "cognitively naïve Westerner". Loose or tight? The answer would seem to depend on what exactly is being examined, as it does when we are considering the whole community of the 'Malay people'. We will return to this issue.

Apart from the difficulty of defining what are the specific characteristics of 'Malay' communities – bilateralism, looseness? – the further issue arises as to how far the generalizations that are made about 'Malays' happen also to be equally applicable to a much wider grouping. Are we sometimes talking about 'Southeast Asian' rather than merely 'Malay' societies? Many generalizations in the reports I have been discussing do seem to be of this character. Rosemary Brissenden stressed that the 'everyday Malay meal' structure of rice and side dishes is to be found elsewhere in Southeast Asia as well (1996: 191). When Japanese researchers have been intrigued by 'mobile peasants' – who seemed so different from Japanese farmers – they have tended to refer to a 'Southeast Asian' phenomenon, rather than a feature distinguishing 'the Malays' from others around them. Tsubouchi has proposed what he terms a "general model of farm villages in Southeast Asia": most such villages (he says) were settled in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and he believes they possessed "the characteristics of pioneer settlements", had a "bilateral kinship structure" (which precludes the formation of "fixed kin groups") and in general lacked "group-like characteristics". In the Chao Phraya delta in Thailand, for instance, he found just "the type of villages with looser group identities and indistinct boundaries" that he encountered on the Peninsula (2001: 229, 233). Regarding bilaterality, Karim also insists it is a feature of "numerous Southeast Asian social systems" (1992: 8). The "rather independent" position of women has as well been portrayed as an element in "a familiar pattern in Southeast Asia" (Carsten 1997: 24).

A Malay Essence?

Giving real substance to a 'Malay' essence – an 'authentic', 'mainstream' or 'real Malay' – is clearly a challenge. The ethnographies on 'Malay' societies – in many ways a valuable post-independence literature – often give the sense that all 'Malays' were 'Other Malays' (to use Kahn's phrase). Everywhere we turn there is migration and heterogeneity: the 'Javanese' and 'Kelantanese' who were identified in Shamsul's Selangor village; the range of Indonesian and Peninsular people in Langkawi; people of Bugis

(Sulawesi) origins who began to be called "authentic Malays" in the very south of Johor (Maeda 1988: 174); and the extraordinarily heterodox backgrounds of the 'Malays' of Borneo, including a wide range of non-Muslim autochthonous peoples, as well as people of Peninsular and Sumatra origins (King 1993: 31; Harrisson 1970: 246). In Singapore, as Tania Li has explained, the "popular view" is that "the Malay population as a whole" is "predominantly indigenous, rural and unchanging"; but, in fact, large numbers only arrived after 1945, and perhaps 20 per cent are of Bawean descent and 50 to 60 per cent of Javanese descent (1990: 93–94).

Despite this heterogeneity, we have seen that the idea of 'the Malay' is embedded – but just where? What do the ethnographies I have been citing say about how the people themselves understand the 'Malay' bonds that unite them? Manning Nash reported that the notion of a 'Kelantan Malay' carries assumptions about sharing the same blood (*darah*), and that "ideally, 'Malays' do not marry or mate with 'non-Malays', so that the 'blood' does not cross category divisions in the taxonomy" (Nash 1974: 33). On the contrary, Wilson (writing on Selangor) considered that for 'Malays' "racial (i.e. biological) differences are quite unimportant" and "the Chinese passion for pork (a culture trait) is far more significant" (1967: vi). With respect to 'cultural traits', however, we have noted in Chapter 1 that there seems to be no real consensus regarding which ones are critical to 'Malayness'. In Sabah a quite recent point of view has been that (as in Singapore and Sarawak) it is only necessary to practise Islam and speak the Malay language in order to 'become Malay'; but another view has entailed accusing people of Bajau origin of not being 'true Malays' (Yamamoto 2004). Adherence to Islam is often identified as a key ingredient in 'Malayness' – but it is unnecessary in Singapore, and Banks's Kedah study explains that 'Malays' there who marry 'Thais' and take on the Buddhist faith are still called 'Malay' (1983: 26). A young 'Malay' in Riau told a researcher that Orang Laut (Sea People) are "of course . . . also Malays like us, even if they are not always Muslims" (Faucher 2005: 129). In other areas to be 'Malay' means to speak the Malay language – though, in Kedah again, 'Malays' are reported to refer to some 'Thai' Muslims as 'Malays who speak Thai' (Banks 1983: 25). Sometimes adherence to Islam and use of the Malay language are not enough. According to Maeda, in Johor when people become 'Malay', the process also involves changes in rituals and custom (*adat*) (1988: 174).

The variation within the category 'Malay', it seems to me, cannot be analytically resolved. It is a phenomenon of interest in itself – acknowledged (at least implicitly) by 'Malays' themselves. Kelantan people, apart from speaking their own dialect, have been reported as saying that they wear a distinctive sarong and head scarf, and that their customs and body gestures

are different from those of 'Malays' elsewhere (Nash 1974: 29). People in Mawang (Kedah) see Kelantan women as obsessed with jewelry, and Johor women as "cold and unapproachable"; they see men from Melaka and Kedah as "crude and loud" (Karim 1992: 135). The food of Kelantan and other northern Peninsular states exhibits Thai influence, just as there is Indian influence in the west of the Peninsula and a Javanese imprint in the more mildly spiced food of Johor and Pahang (Brissenden 1996: 190–191). People of 'Bugis' background (in Melaka), who have 'become Malays', nevertheless exhibit residual 'Bugis' characteristics in the high number of their first-cousin marriages (Tsubouchi 2001: 231). 'Javanese' who are now called 'orang Melayu' (in Johor) tend to speak Malay with a distinctive pronunciation, are often believed to possess strong magical powers and sometimes express less respect for Islamic orthodoxy than most other 'Malays' (Miyazaki 2000). Even descendants of "old Malay ruling families" in the Lingga region continue to speak a form of Malay comparable with that used by the Orang Laut (Benjamin 2002: 27). Sarawak 'Malays' have been reported to be "proud" of their "non-Malay blood" – whether it is 'Sea' or 'Land Dayak', 'Javanese', 'Bugis' or something else; they have also been said to feel "little of common origin or identity" with Peninsular 'Malays' (Harrisson 1970: 159–160). King has written of 'Dayaks' becoming 'Malay' in the Kapuas basin in Borneo, but continuing to live in long houses and to follow some 'Dayak' customs (1993: 132). In West Kalimantan, when 'Dayaks' have converted to Islam and espoused a Malay identity, "a sense of brotherhood" has been promoted between the Dayak and Malay communities, and they have even "had stories of common origins in their mythological repertoires" (Bertrand 2004: 57). In the Cocos-Keeling Islands the small 'Malay' community speaks its own characteristic version of Malay, and has appropriated some Scottish traditions from its former rulers (including Scottish reels danced "to the accompaniment of Malay drums and violins") (Bunce 1988: 66–67).

In certain contexts a perceived hierarchy of 'Malayness' has been reported. In the last chapter I drew attention to the way Malaysia itself is sometimes portrayed as a 'show-case' state, especially in the context of the 'Malay World' movement. Within Malaysia, for example in Selangor, the states of Kelantan and Melaka are sometimes viewed as "centers of 'real' Malay culture" (Provencher 1971: 94); and the people of Pasir Mas (in the relatively highly populated delta of the Kelantan river) were reported as believing they live in "one of the bastions of Malay culture on the Peninsula" (Nash 1974: 7). I have argued that most of the 'Malay World' (at least in the past) was viewed as a 'frontier'; but some areas must have been perceived as comparatively more remote than others. In Sik, in the lush

mountainous region of Kedah, the people were considered "rural unsophis-
ticates" a century ago, and their simple food ("eaten either raw or burned
over an open hearth") is one example of the persistence of "the upcountry
Malay taste" (Banks 1983: 24–25, 31). Edmund Leach found that few
'Malays' in Sarawak (unlike Brunei) could "provide satisfactory informa-
tion about the norms of their customary behaviour": these Sarawak 'Malays',
he said, "are, as it were, provincials" (1950: 80). Another form of cultural
periphery is perhaps to be encountered in the 'Malay' community in South
Africa, where the Malay language is not spoken, or in Sri Lanka, where,
when it is spoken, other 'Malays' (for instance, from the Peninsula) have
difficulty handling the Singhalese-influenced syntax and the way words tend
to end with 'ng' rather than 'm' (Saldin 1996: 56–57).

Becoming 'Malay'

In identifying 'upcountry' or marginal regions, however, we must be careful
not to lose sight of the cultural or civilizational frontier that has operated
all over the 'Malay World', even in the would-be 'heartlands' on the
Peninsula. The process of 'becoming Malay' – often referred to in this book
– has to be a matter of central concern in a study of 'the Malays'. In the
anthropological accounts which I have been examining in this chapter, its
continued importance is often confirmed. It is still a phenomenon, for
instance, among the 'Dayaks' in South Kalimantan and Sarawak, and many
other areas of Borneo (Bertrand 2004: 52, 57; Harrisson 1970; King 1993:
31). Groups that are already Muslim are also said to merge with 'Malays':
we are told that the *adat* of the 'Melanau' in Sarawak has come closer to
Malay *adat*, and an old Melanau man has been quoted as observing that
"it will not be long before we are all Malays" (Morris 1991: 311). In Sabah
it has been remarked that 'Malay' is increasingly used "as a generic term
to describe traditionally Muslim groups who speak Malay" (Regis 1989:
417). We have already noted the ongoing 'Malayization' of 'Orang Asli' on
the Peninsula, and here (as in Singapore) it continues to be common for
Muslims of 'Bugis', 'Minangkabau', 'Javanese', 'Bawean' and many other
backgrounds – as well as 'Orang Asli' – to engage in the process of 'becom-
ing Malay' (Maeda 1988; Rahim 1998: 15–16; Miyazaki 2000; Benjamin
2006).
   In Sumatra the strong trend of pre-colonial and colonial times for 'Bataks'
to convert to Islam and become incorporated in the local sultanates (and
later, the 'Malay' community) did not continue. But we do read of 'Minangk-
abau' people in Kuantan (further south) choosing to reclassify themselves

as 'Malay' (Kato 1997). In the Riau archipelago 'Orang Laut' (Sea People) have continued to enter 'Malaydom' – and the transition has often been a long one. Vivienne Wee quoted one 'Malay' informant as saying that these 'Orang Laut' "have become Malays but only recently; they are still being taught" (1979: 8). In Cambodia, the strong influence of Malaysia in religious education has involved a degree of 'Malayization' among the 'Cham' community, including the wearing of 'Malay' dress and the study of the Malay language (Collins n.d.: 62, 72). The many thousands of 'Chams' who were allowed into Malaysia as refugees from the war in Indochina tended to be referred to by 'Malays' in Malaysia as 'Melayu Muslim Kemboja' ('Cambodian Muslim Malays'), and Malaysian cultural organizations were vigorous in promoting the idea that these people should be considered part of the 'Malay' community (Wong 2006). Change, as we have already noted, can occur in the opposite direction as well. People who had been 'Malay' in Indochina for long periods – usually living in close association with Muslim 'Cham' communities – would sometimes reclassify themselves as 'Cham' (Taylor 2007: 45–46, 63). In East Sumatra we saw 'Malays' taking on clan names (again), and identifying with one or another group of 'Batak', and Leonard Andaya reported that 'Malays' might 'go to the jungle and become members of the Sakai (Orang Asli) group'. Vivienne Wee and Ariffin refer to the phrase *keluar Melayu* ('leaving Malayness'), as well as *masuk Melayu* ('entering Malayness') (Wee 1979: 6; Ariffin 1993: 82).

In considering this dynamic process of 'becoming Malay', or turning away from Malay identity, scholars have asked why this takes place. In the case of 'Minangkabau' in Kuantan beginning to identify as 'Malay', Kato explained that they had been classified as 'Minangkabau' by the Dutch in the colonial era. In independent Indonesia they became a part of the Riau province, and "given the pervasiveness of 'Malay' in the cultural arena in Riau it simply does not make sense politically to identify as Minangkabau" (1997: 760). In some instances 'Malayization' seems to be perceived explicitly in terms of civilizational advance. In the last chapter we noted that in Sabah in the 1950s the suggestion was made that it was not enough merely to convert to Islam: Muslims in North Borneo "would only become civilized through 'becoming Malays'" (2004: 248). Researching in particular in the Riau region, Vivienne Wee portrayed "the Melayu 'civilizing process'" as "an upward path whereby a higher state of existence may be attained" (2005: 6; Wee 1988).

One researcher has referred to the "manipulation of ethnic identities", giving an example of a person born in Pahang who had lived a long time in Johor and whose father came from Aceh in Sumatra. Just which identity this person assumes depends on circumstances. He often presents himself

as 'Acehnese', but not when disputes are taking place – because 'Acehnese' are believed to be violent. In work situations he favours the 'Johor Malay' identity – because people from Johor have a reputation as hard workers (Armstrong 1986). In another case a woman frequently declares herself to be 'Malay', but at one point when her interviewer (Judith Nagata) praises the way she cleans the house, she describes herself as 'Arab'. "Arabs", says the woman, "are not lazy like Malays". Nagata noted a further situation in Penang in which the inhabitants of a particular *kampong* – people who usually assert varied ethnic identities – felt threatened by a development company. They "suddenly became monolithically Malay" and spoke of the danger to "Malay interests". Fearing next that the leaders of the Malay Chamber of Commerce were entangled in the development move, they accused these leaders of being "self-interested Arabs". In discussing what she calls this "situational selection of ethnic identity", Nagata made a comparison with West Africa, "where exclusiveness of tribal identity and membership is apparently maintained even within the broader ties of the Muslim community". She observed as well that the "switching of ethnic identity" in the 'Malay' context is not associated with the "remotest symptoms of personal insecurity or marginality". "Ethnic oscillation" is also not a new phenomenon – and here she cites the nineteenth-century writer, Munshi Abdullah, whose views we have discussed at length, and who sometimes called himself 'Malay' and other times did not (1974: 340, 343).

This reference to switching, selection and manipulating of ethnic identities certainly raises again the issue of what might be understood by 'ethnicity' in the 'Malay' context. Reflecting on this flexibility, Mohamed Aris Othman has confirmed that "a Malay who marries a Javanese or a Minangkabau may identify himself as a 'Malay', a 'Javanese' or a 'Minangkabau' whichever suits him in a particular situation" (1977: 227). But Mohamed Aris warns against the notion of a "change of identity". If a Malaysian Arab, for instance, says that he is a 'Malay', this is "not conceived as a change of identity". A "Malay and an Arab or a Malay and a Javanese do not constitute two separate identities". In "certain situations" an 'Arab' is "always a Malay" and "so is a Javanese or any of the Indonesian ethnic groups". The issue, in Mohamed Aris's account, is not one of identity change but rather of "the dynamics of Malay identity". 'Malay' is best understood as a "cover term", to be compared with 'European': a German who says he is 'European' is not necessarily undergoing a change of identity. A "Malaysian Arab is a Malay at the same time and so is a Javanese" (234–235). Adopting such a perspective, in Mohamed Aris's view, helps to explain why some of the research informants for his study were "puzzled

or annoyed" at questions about their ethnic group – explaining that such inquiries tended to "split the community". They did not want to be asked about being 'Malay', 'Javanese' and so forth because "we are all the same Malay" (217), and at one level they clearly believed this to be true. Mohamed Aris's approach also points to the difficulty of using terms like 'ethnicity' or 'race' when discussing 'Malayness'. What is less certain, however, is whether the notion of 'cover term' captures the idea of 'Malay'.

Being Left Behind

In the post-colonial just as in the colonial period, another continuing feature encountered in most 'Malay' societies – encountered just as persistently, one could say, as the frontier ethos and the urge toward the 'Malayization' of neighbouring peoples – has been the powerful sense of disadvantage. Even in Malaysia the sense of being 'left behind' economically – of "Malay backwardness" (Hussein Alatas 1977: 166) – seems to have been deeply ingrained, being expressed in the media, in novels, in the formation of development organizations and, of course, in government policies. There has continued to be sound basis for the fear. In Malaysia in 1970 – more than a decade after independence – almost 50 per cent of all households were below the poverty line, and of these some 75 per cent were 'Malay'; not only were very few 'Malays' in professional occupations, but also only 1.5 per cent of all equity ownership was 'Malay' (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 302, 311, 313). In Singapore it has been argued that at the end of the twentieth century, 'Malays' were still "on the socio-economic, educational, and political margins of society", just as they were under colonial rule (Rahim 1998: 19). In southern Thailand the economic situation of 'Malays' has been well below that of the rest of the country (Wan Kadir 1990: 36). In Riau (Indonesia), 'Malays' have been reported as feeling "oppressed" and "colonized" (Derks 1997: 705). In Sri Lanka the 'Malays' have experienced the highest unemployment and higher education dropout levels in the country, although their literacy levels are relatively high (Saldin 1996: 48–49).

Nearly always, the sense of deprivation has been linked to the perception that other peoples in their broader regional or national community are faring much better. Like Munshi Abdullah's comments about races "on the move", a century or more later the eloquent future prime minister, Mahathir Mohamed, referred to "industrious and determined immigrants" (Mahathir 1979: 25; Khoo 1996). In Singapore, the gap between 'Chinese' and 'Malays'

in the highest occupational categories has been seen as growing: in the words of one 'Malay' activist, 'Malays' know they have made absolute gains but when "they look at how the Chinese are surging even further ahead . . . they perceive themselves as not having moved at all" (Rahim 1998: 24). The same sentiment of being 'left behind' is encountered in South Thailand, where 'Malay' fishermen have continued to use small fishing boats, while 'Chinese' and 'Thai' "employ trawlers equipped with modern technology" (Wan Kadir 1990: 37); or in West Kalimantan, where the huge transmigration of people from the island of Madura has been accompanied by a perception that these particular immigrants had already progressed under national government policies during the Suharto period (Bertrand 2004: 55); or in Sarawak (some decades ago), when it was said of a future Malay leader that everywhere in his thinking "looms the shadow of the Chinese" (Harrisson 1970: 625); or, again, in Riau, where 'Minangkabau' have long been resented for dominating business, including rubber and copra trading (Andaya 1997: 499).

In analysing why 'Malays' have performed badly in comparative terms – in the economic sphere – certain themes continue to reappear, and debate has sometimes been heated. There is also continuity with the deliberations that took place in the colonial period – going right back to Munshi Abdullah's frustration with a *kerajaan* elite that he considered to be preoccupied with ritual and impossibly conservative. In the second half of the twentieth century, Mahathir Mohamed, sometimes employing Munshi Abdullah's hectoring tone, was a persistent social critic and reformer – pointing to "the danger" of being left "far behind" in education and other areas, and complaining of 'Malay' "feudal" mentality and fatalism. He insisted on the need to "break away from customs", "acquire new thinking" and develop a disciplined work ethic, and he warned the 'Malays' that they would be no match for the "industrious and determined immigrants" (Mahathir 1979: 25; 1971; Khoo 1996). In response to such commands, the prominent intellectual and social analyst Syed Hussein Alatas argued that "the sociological origin of the myth of the lazy Malays was based on their refusal to supply plantation labour and their non-involvement in the colonially-controlled urban capitalist economic activity" (1977: 80; Bailey 1983: 201–202). He then proceeded to detail areas in which 'Malay' people have worked extremely hard, and instances in which they have been complimented for doing so. Harrisson's observation on how Sarawak 'Malays' had "pioneered a whole huge tract of land out of jungle into permanent cultivation" would certainly support this viewpoint. Alatas argued that it was not the 'Malay' mentality that should be blamed, but the 'Malay' leadership (1977: 163).

Looking across the different 'Malay' societies, the sense of being left behind has been addressed in a range of ways, and not only by governments. Associations have been formed – and they debate causes and solutions, and seek to implement programmes of assistance and reform. The Indonesian Council for Malay Custom and Culture (MABMI) has sought to promote business networks (for instance, in Medan). In Singapore in 1965, the Malay Youth Literary Association initiated a campaign named 'Gerakan Obor' ('Light the Torch') to bring about a change of attitude toward education. The radio lectures stressed the need to change the "ways of thinking of Malay people, to make them adapt to change, not to be complacent, day-dream, live in the past, or waste time in cinemas or night markets or watching Malay dramas whose content was irrelevant to progress" (Li 1990: 169). In 1982 the Council on Education of Muslim Children (Mendaki) was established and has continued to be prominent: it quickly pointed to an "absence of a long-standing tradition of excellence and high achievement" among Malays (Rahim 1998: 213). It is not rare, however, for 'Malay' organizations to concentrate on the responsibility others bear for 'Malay' economic failure. When the National Convention of Singapore Malay/Muslim Professionals met in October 1990, "suggestions were made for the implementation of anti-discrimination laws and the establishment of a body to monitor discriminatory practices in society" (Rahim 1998: 25).

In Malaysia – not surprisingly, given the 'Malay' political dominance – the government has confronted the issue of economic "backwardness" with dedication. In fact, as Tim Harper has explained, "many of the remedies [that] have been propounded in modern Malaysia have their origins in the colonial period" (1999: 228). The 'Malay' rioting of May 1969 added to the determination to redress what was seen, in ethnic terms, as a severe economic imbalance. 'Malays' were brought into the higher education system in large numbers, and strategies were implemented – including those of Mahathir and his predecessors to change 'the Malay' mentality – to help 'Malays' gain a solid share of corporate equity in the commercial world. From 1970 to the end of the century, that share in fact increased from 2.4 per cent to somewhere between 20 and 30 per cent (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 313). Few commentators would deny that in Malaysia over three or four decades there has been a substantial increase of 'Malays' entering the modern sector of the economy, the modern education system and the urban environment (Shamsul 1999: 100; Searle 1996). In the latter part of his long prime ministership, Mahathir on some (certainly not all) occasions expressed pride in the progress made by 'Malays' – in one instance, in the fact that 'Malays' were by then serving as "heads of departments, scientists,

actuaries, nuclear physicists, surgeons, experts in the fields of medicine and aviation, bankers and corporate leaders" (Khoo 1996: 337).

Despite the evidence of genuine economic and social transformation, however, certain important elements of continuity have been noted. 'Malays' continue to gravitate toward government service in Malaysia and some other states: the modern word for 'government' (in Malaysia) is *kerajaan* – and although it is now supposedly stripped of its former potency, the term may continue to signal status opportunities offered by government service. In industrial relations – in situations where 'Malays' have seemingly joined the proletariat – 'Malay' workers continue to display styles of behaviour reported from an earlier era. Recall the anxiety expressed in the *Malay Annals* about being "reviled [by a ruler] with evil words"! On the basis of an important study by Wan Zawawi, it is no exaggeration to say that workers' sensitivity toward the manners and language of their managers, and other issues of status, bears comparison with values enunciated in such *kerajaan* literature. If the manager scolds a person, according to Zawawi, the workers insist that "he should exercise discretion and do so in private rather than in front of fellow workers". It is demanded that the manager express a spirit of empathy, and not speak in a rough (*kasar*) manner: one manager was told, "you cannot speak in this way to a Malay because it lowers his *maruah* (dignity)" (Zawawi 1998: 4, 120, 130, 136–138). The concept of *maruah*, it should be noted, is closely associated with the idea of *nama* (reputation) (Karim 1992: 7), which I have discussed in detail in my examination of pre-colonial socio-religious dynamics.

With respect to entrepreneurialism in the 'Malay' community, although it is true that there has been an influx of 'Malays' into corporate leadership positions, we again find echoes of an earlier era. Mahathir himself has observed that Malay business people tend not to become independent capitalists but "depend on the government". They acquire government licences as quickly as possible and then sell them to Chinese who actually operate the businesses. In Mahathir's emotional words of 2002, "no work is done [on the part of the Malays] except to be close to people with authority in order to get something because they are Malays". After selling the licences they obtain in this way, the 'Malay' 'entrepreneur' "comes back to ask for more" (Yao 2004: 220).

Such entangling of business with government – and the absence of an independent entrepreneurial class – is immediately reminiscent of the *kerajaan* economics of the past. A lively recent study by Patricia Sloane has added substance to this perspective. In examining 'Malay' entrepreneurialism, she discovered that certain things functioned less well, such as "completing a job or a project, getting work done, earning profits". What did

function successfully was the mobilizing of resources – "accessing decision-makers and allies, plumbing for opportunity" (1999: 192). When Sloane offered "business-minded suggestions" regarding enterprises or products – she had once been in the commercial world herself – her informants "invariably responded with impatience". It seemed "that part of entrepreneurship was secondary, their primary work was networking". They told her: "We'll just hire someone to run the business later" – and that 'someone' tended to be 'Chinese' (194). Malay entrepreneurship, Sloane concluded, was about "service and obligation" (23). There is a suggestion here, I think, of Michael Swift's observation on 'Malay' villagers decades ago. He explained (in the language of the time) that while for "the Chinese" wealth is "desired not only for consumption but for accumulation", by contrast "the Malay" is only "interested in the short run" – wealth being "only for consumption" – and this weakens the 'Malay' position when "in economic competition with groups or individuals with a long-run orientation" (1965: 29).

Reading Sloane's description of networking, I begin to conjure up the image of operations and manoeuvrings around a royal court. The similarities multiply, although Sloane says the ideology of entrepreneurship has helped to create an elite of 'New Malays' who claim to disdain the feudal past. Some people, Sloane tells us, argue that entrepreneurship is producing a civil society that is "an alternative source of power and prestige to the state itself". In fact, "Malay entrepreneurship serves the needs of the state by aligning and organizing Malay political loyalty and justifying its system of economic rewards" (202–203). Political and economic status, as in 'kerajaan economics', are aligned: advancement comes through service to 'the ruler', or the ruling party. Money has social not cash value, and when obtained is used for "status-oriented purposes" (35). Sloane was clearly irritated by what she sees as the hypocrisy of these entrepreneurs, speaking of duty, obligation, generosity, sincerity and "a traditional communal morality" (189) while actually seeking rewards for themselves. What she encounters, however, may be an echo of the "sweet words" and fine manners that have long been a feature of 'Malay' societies, and were renowned in the kerajaan period.

Equally, having pointed out that the 'Malay' entrepreneurs failed with respect to "accumulating money or profits", Sloane is left with the question of "what is really being served by all this extraordinary activity and belief?" (192). Apart from the way in which 'Malay' entrepreneurship allowed the "UMNO-dominated state" to reward loyalty, she notes that the "social rewards" seem to be high (192). True, her informants were "not actually accumulating money or profits" – but merely "demonstrating entrepreneurship" (presumably networking skills), as she relates the situation, holds

"tremendous legitimizing weight" (195), bringing status to the exponent of these skills. There is in addition a religious dimension – a sense (expressed by many of her informants) that "awakening to a dutiful relationship to Allah was to be expressed best through the paradigm of modern entrepreneurship, purposeful action in the material world" (61). It is no exaggeration to see here a further step in the *kerajaan* logic of the past: economic activity is not carried out for its own sake: rather, it is performed in the context of the polity, and brings a status in that polity which also has implications for one's prospects in the 'world to come'. The quest for *nama* – for status in this world and the next – was a driver in the old sultanates, and might well be part of a heritage of ideas that continues to influence economic behaviour in modern 'Malay' society.

Top-down Ideological Work

Certain types of behaviour, developed over a long period, are resistant to change. Having made this observation, however, it is also true that 'Malay' communities have been subject to centuries of ideological (including identity) engineering. It is an often encountered feature of 'Malay' societies, and in recent times is evident in the way the 'Malay' leadership has responded to the problem of 'being left behind'. In a sense, the ruler of Melaka was engaged in ideological work when he was described as "commanding" all his people, "whether of high or low degree", to become Muslim: the Portuguese said he was "instructing" people. We can speculate as well about the possibility that the rulers of Srivijaya and other polities centuries before Melaka were also "instructing" their people. Even today 'Malay' monarchs on the Peninsula are regularly reported to be advising their subjects, especially on religious and moral issues. It is in this tradition that modern political leaders have taken up the task of ideological leadership (Johnson 1996, 2002), and it is also the case that some of their initiatives have struck at the very substance of what had been perceived to be 'Malay'.

For instance, in the 1970s when the government called for a revolution in 'Malay' thinking – a *revolusi mental* – 'Malays' were told to become more disciplined, entrepreneurial and economically minded. The government said they lacked the acquisitive spirit, and needed to express more frankness. American, Chinese and other successful capitalists were held up as examples to be followed. Among the condemned 'Malay' traits, as Syed Hussein Alatas pointed out, were some "which have moulded the traditional Malay character" (Senu et al. 1973; Hussein Alatas 1977: Ch. 10). There was in addition a contradiction in the strategies of government

leaders at that time, in that emphasis was placed as well on 'feudal', Melaka-oriented values of loyalty – on a 'Malay' 'neo-traditionalism' (Hooker 2000: 310; Kahn 1988–1989). We noted in the last chapter the stress during Tunku Abdul Rahman's government (1957–1970) on the loyalty of Hang Tuah. In that period the young Mahathir Mohamed had complained of the 'feudal' values being inculcated in Malay society (Mahathir n.d., 1971), but in his own prime ministership of the 1980s and 1990s there was also inconsistency. In particular, he called for a 'New Malay' not long after introducing a new "regime-stabilizing anthem", the 'Loyalty Song'. The 'New Malay' (*Melayu Baru*) was to be a more entrepreneurial, assertive Malay – a person less tradition-bound and less inclined toward the type of self-effacing, deferential behaviour that can lead to easy domination by other ethnic groups (Muhammad Ikmal 1996: 64–65; Shamsul 1999; Harper 1996). The 'Loyalty Song', on the other hand, as Clive Kessler has pointed out in a classic essay on modern Malay political culture, includes key words from the royal vocabulary of allegiance – *bakti* ('devotion'), *setia* and *taat* ('loyalty') – and also refers to the "much-lauded rajas" as well as the *bangsa*, the religion and the state (Kessler 1992). It was in fact observed in the 1980s that Malaysia was "awash with the symbolism of 'traditional Malay culture', with government-sponsored handicraft industry initiatives, and politicians and popular magazines invoking the 'feudal' heritage" (Kahn 1992: 163). In promoting concepts of 'Malayness' in the wider community, as Joel Kahn has observed, the work of the popular culture industry – including the cinema – is often more significant than that of intellectuals and religious scholars (2001, 2003; Johnson 2006).

One further ideological element in the effort to modernize 'Malays' has been a downgrading of what at times has been a critical ingredient of 'Malayness', the Malay language. After years of struggle to create a "linguistically homogenous nation" – recall the slogan of the 1930s, 'Long live the Language! Long live the Race!' – the governing elite has in recent times begun to question the economic and technological usefulness of Malay. In 1994 – and remember here that Malay had never replaced English and Mandarin as the everyday language in the private sector – Mahathir suggested that technical subjects should begin to be taught in English (Shamsul 1997: 211; Muhammad Ikmal 1996: 40–47). He stressed at one point also that "knowledge" was in fact the "soul of the *bangsa*" (*ilmu jiwa bangsa*) – reformulating the well-established slogan, *bahasa jiwa bangsa* ('language is the soul of the *bangsa*') (Ibrahim Syukri 2005: 115). How critical an element the Malay language is in 'Malayness' is one issue, and we have seen that the role of custom (or *adat*) has been another. Recalling that Mohd. Eunos Abdullah and Ishak Haji Muhammad (whose views

Virginia Hooker analysed) were concerned that people who changed their style of behaviour might lose their 'Malayness', the downplaying of the Malay language together with the creating of a *revolusi mental*, and of 'New Malays', have clearly carried dangers.

These comments concern attempts to mould or modify 'Malay' character, but some ideological work continued to focus on who might, or might not, be defined as 'Malay'. Of course the whole project of creating a consciousness of 'race' – reaching back to Munshi Abdullah and then Mohd. Eunos Abdullah – was an example of the long tradition of top-down ideological leadership. It was a further instance as well of drawing upon the dominant ideas of the age (in this case the theory of 'race') in a way designed to assist the local community. As has been discussed in previous chapters, just who might be considered 'Malay' and what was the substance of 'Malayness' were sometimes matters of vigorous debate – and the different sides appear to have felt no hesitation in expounding their views on these issues to their readers and followers. In the lead-up to independence, some (for instance, Dr Burhanuddin) were willing to define 'Malay' in a manner that had no religious implications; others required both parents to be of 'Malay' descent; others again, one or neither parent.

The degree of debate, the assumed flexibility, the extraordinary openness to ideological construction (or invention) are significant aspects of the ongoing process of 'making the Malay people'. In a sense the opportunity for such construction was all the greater because (as noted in the last chapter), even in the constitution, the concept of 'Malay' is not discussed in specifically racial or ethnic terms. A second observation that might be made about this top-down ideological work concerns the skill with which the Malaysian leadership – the UMNO party's conservative elite (as Ariffin describes them) – assembled a concept of 'Malay' which drew upon the Melaka/Johor tradition. As discussed in the last chapter, it was a Peninsula-focused concept, but carried the idea of a 'Malay *bangsa*' capable of absorbing peoples from all over the Archipelago (and from even further afield); it was a concept that honoured but transcended the sultanate. One of the reasons for the Malay success in dominating Malaysia – and it must be remembered that things might have turned out very differently – arises from such ideological virtuosity.

This leads to the further point about the shaping of 'Malayness' – that concerning the important contrasts which we have discerned between one 'Malay' community and another. In Sumatra and Borneo, those shaping 'the Malays' during the colonial period were frustrated by the royal courts, who preferred to promote local identities and attachments, particularly the sense of being engaged in a community focused on the ruler himself. The

promoters of *bangsa* here made much less progress in the conceptual task of building a *bangsa Melayu* that could provide a form of association and identity that was an alternative to the *kerajaan*. Even after the independent Indonesian state came into existence, the 'Malays' who lived there were not only reduced in stature by being branded as mere *suku bangsa* (in contrast with the 'Malay' *bangsa* of Malaysia), but they also continued to be largely oriented toward royal courts (or the remnants and memories of royal courts). Despite the earlier attitude of the royal courts, it was often descendants of former sultans who played leadership roles in these relatively narrow communities, working hard to keep alive the customs and rituals of the past. In the last chapter we noted in addition the current problem of analysing the re-emergence across Indonesia of a range of sultanates – accompanying the decentralization of the post-Suharto period. It is not always clear whether these royal groups are making claims on behalf of 'the Malays' or of the sultanates themselves.

Ideological Contests

A fourth, and final, observation about the ongoing ideological work in 'Malay' communities concerns the challenges that have been arising in recent years, and which seem highly significant for the future. There had of course been plenty of challenges in the past: ideological work was often undertaken in a context of debate. The idea of 'Malaysia', for instance, was constructed in a situation where rival political forces had been advocating a much broader pan-Archipelago 'Melayu Raya'. There was also on the Peninsula as well as on Borneo and Sumatra the long-term contest between 'Malayness' and 'monarchy'. On the Peninsula in the 1940s – in the struggle over the Malayan Union scheme – the rulers were brought into a form of alliance with the builders of the *bangsa Melayu*, some rulers explicitly accepting the formulation in which raja was subordinated to *bangsa*. In the eventual constitution of the independent Malaya (and Malaysia), the rulers remained sovereign, retained certain powers and were confirmed in their symbolic role (Smith 2006). Conflict between some rulers and elected leaders occurred from time to time over the next decades, and in the 1980s Prime Minister Mahathir sought to cut back royal powers.

The resulting contest took the form (at least at some points) of a clash between *bangsa* and *kerajaan*: rallies were held for both rulers and the prime minister (also, of course, the head of the United Malays National Organization, UMNO); articles in government-endorsed newspapers heralded 'Malay' non-royal nationalist achievements; and certain royal-court

publications stressed the centrality of the sultan in the lives of his subjects (declaring "a people cannot exist without a raja"). One ruler explained to Malaysians that although a political leader is bound to favour his or her own party, sultans treat all subjects equally – a reminder, among other things, of the trans-ethnic reach of monarchy (Stockwell 1988; Smith 2006; Milner 1991). The Mahathir government's 'Loyalty Song' might also be considered in the context of this contest: as one further example of the appropriating of potent vocabulary from the old sultanate – words for 'devotion' and 'loyalty' – on behalf of the *bangsa*, and the 'state' as well. Exactly who won the contest between Mahathir and the rulers is unclear – but it created division among 'the Malays' and, as Muhammad Ikmal Said has suggested, the attempt to reduce the rulers' powers was "also an attempt at redefining Malay culture", reducing the role of the rulers "as the symbols of Malay unity, of protectors of Malay rights" (1996: 54). The political risk for Mahathir in moving against the sultans was obvious, and he by no means removed them as a significant force in Malaysian politics and society (Nazrin Shah 2004). His confrontation also appears to have played a part in perhaps the most dangerous threat to his dominance in national politics: the emergence of a political opposition led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. Here Mahathir faced an opponent who himself possessed strong royal credentials, as well as a talent for ideological leadership. His party was called the Spirit of 46 Party – a name that conjured up the sense of unity (including between rulers and 'Malay' nationalist leaders) that characterized the successful post-war struggle against the threat of the British Malayan Union scheme.

Two ideological challenges which the builders of the 'Malay *bangsa*' (particularly in Malaysia) face at present are, firstly, the problem of reconciling 'Malay' community and identity with constructions developed on behalf of the nation-state; and secondly, responding to growing 'Malay' demands that Islamic obligations be given priority over mere ethnic or national commitments. I have discussed the building of 'the Malays' into nation states in the last chapter. On the face of it, the greatest challenges occur when 'Malays' form minority communities. In this context the tension between membership of the 'Malay' community, on the one hand, and citizenship in the nation state, on the other, is at present perhaps sharpest in the case of Thailand. But there are also problems of reconciling the two forms of membership and attachment in Malaysia, where the 'Malays' have seemed to achieve dominance. There are social issues here, of course, which help to shape the ideological ones.

In one way the particular dynamics of the Malaysian state have promoted 'Malay' solidarity. The country's 'plural society' – conceptualized in terms

of large blocs of 'Malays', 'Chinese' and 'Indians' living side by side, 'yet without mingling', and to some extent in competition – has acted to heighten ethnic awareness. Aspirations, anxieties, struggles are likely to be perceived in terms of 'race' or 'ethnicity', and when the different groups live in close proximity, the sense of ethnic separateness and rivalry can be exacerbated. Even in the 1940s Djamour suggested that it was when they perceived themselves as a 'discrete section' of Singapore's population that 'Malays' felt "in-group solidarity", and spoke of "we Malay people". In the 1960s Marvin Rogers noted that because the Johor 'Malay' village he studied was located close to a small Chinese town – and the "two communities looked different, sounded different, smelled different" – the "sense of ethnic identity (among the 'Malays') was intensified" (1977: 17). Among other reports of powerful ethnic (or inter-ethnic) feeling from these early decades of Malaysia, Wilson noted the view in Selangor that although "individual Banjarese" might be trusted, "individual Chinese and Indians" were always seen to "represent the totality" – and the totalities were very likely to be viewed negatively (1967: 23–24). In Kelantan, Nash concluded that "ethnicity is the parameter against which all economic and political behaviour is measured" – though he qualified carefully what he meant by 'ethnicity' (1974: 143). There was, he said, no "viable 'Malaysian' culture that transcends the ethnically based cultures" (147). In what is today acknowledged to be a classic survey of 'Malay' ethnicity issues, Judith Nagata (in 1974) concluded that "most members of the Malaysian population . . . think primarily in terms of ethnic affiliation(s) and only secondarily as Malaysians" (347).

In more recent years, there has been evidence driving in the opposite direction – something which is from one angle cause for optimism, but does raise issues for the future articulation of 'Malayness'. A 1989 survey of opinion leaders suggested a surprising number of 'Malays' (53 per cent) were by then taking a relaxed view about whether Malaysian national culture should be based solely on 'Malay' culture – indicating acceptance of the idea that it might be based on the cultures of all the different communities. There are also indications of a "convergence of cultures" among the middle classes of the different ethnic groups, with recognition of the importance of the English language, an interest in the "West's high culture (ballet, classical music, jazz)" and a preference for living in cosmopolitan suburbs (Muhammad Ikmal 1996: 57). Other surveys undertaken in the 1990s have added to the impression of a growing number of 'Malays' and 'Chinese' being "absorbed into a non-ethnic universalistic sphere" (Mansor 1999: 77). In a recent article, Yao Souchou detects signs in the growing 'Malay' middle class – "capitalists, academics, and technocrats" – of a

"professionalism" that leads "beyond immediate self-interests and communal concerns" (2004: 219). He sees the rise of a "national cosmopolitanism" – a "new structure of feeling that encompasses cross-ethnic concerns in the social and economic arena within the nation state" (222). Sumit Mandal has written sensitively about the vital task of establishing a language through which to discuss "transethnic solidarities" (2004). In a survey of 'Muslim Malaysians' of 2005 (which I will discuss in further detail below), 97.1 per cent of the 1,000 respondents agreed it was "acceptable for Malaysian Muslims to live alongside people of other religions". There is a suggestion as well that because Malaysians generally have "adopted many aspects of Malay culture – food, dress and language", we are seeing a "blurring of boundaries that differentiate Malays from the rest of the population". And furthermore, the respondents declared that they saw being 'Malaysian' (and to a much higher degree, being 'Muslim') as a more important identity than being 'Malay' (Martinez 2006).

Surveying these developments in the constructing of a national society, and assuming they will continue, it can be asked how the builders of the 'Malay people' will adjust to the claims of the competing community of the 'nation', as well as the corrosive (in terms of *bangsa* identity) impact of a growing cosmopolitanism. As Tim Harper has reported, there has been a warning from 'Malay' ideologues that "the middle class" is no longer "racially based as it had been in the past" but is now "dividing the Malays" (1996: 245). The Mahathir government's response to this threat, however, was in some ways surprising. With respect to the claims of 'nation' – and also of 'religion' – it engaged in ideological work that might in the long run assist in subverting rather than merely redefining the *bangsa Melayu*.

Having fought over many decades for the 'Malay' cause, Prime Minister Mahathir made clear in the 1990s that his ultimate aim was a "united Malaysian nation" which would be made up of one "Malaysian race" possessing a "sense of common and shared destiny" (Khoo 1996: 331; Hooker 2004). He even contemplated a time when "a non-Malay might become prime minister" (*The Australian*, 21 June 2000). Despite the suspicion with which he was once viewed by non-Malays, he now actually acquired "a substantial personal following" amongst them (Harper 1996: 248). Official documentation began to speak of a *bangsa Malaysia* – a phrase which is not only a reminder of how flexible a word *bangsa* has been, and is, but also raises immediate questions about whether a *bangsa Malaysia* would be a homogenous or plural entity, and also about how *bangsa Melayu* might now be understood (Shamsul 1999a: 33–34).

When the Malaysian minister for culture, Rais Yatim, wrote a 'Foreword' to a recent book on 'Malaysian' customs and etiquette, he made the point

that *adat* (or 'custom') is the "difference between one *bangsa* and another *bangsa*" – a comment that brings to mind Zainal Kling's assessment of *adat* as the "collective mind of the Malay peoples" (cited in Chapter 1). Apart from whether Rais Yatim's comment is an indication of a post-Mahathir revival of *adat* in the conceptualizing of 'the Malays', the suggestion certainly points to difficulties in the constituting of a *bangsa Malaysia*. As the book itself makes clear, the 'Malays', 'Chinese' and 'Indians' of Malaysia certainly have different customs. The *bangsa Malaysia* would possess at least three systems of customs. Would there be some way of integrating the different *adat*? And how would one then refer to 'the Malays' and the other constituent elements? Each would presumably need to be demoted to something less than a *bangsa* (as in Indonesia). The author of the book (Noor Aini Abdullah), despite demonstrating the variation in their customs, actually does just this – referring to the Malays, Chinese and Indians as *kaum* ('parties' or 'groups') (2005: 14, 73, 85).

Another aspect of the 'nation-state' challenge arises from the official efforts to promote an international 'Malay' community. Malaysia's 'Malay World' initiatives, as I have suggested, have probably enhanced the prestige of the country. But they can also promote ideological (including identity) confusion and even contradiction. The 'Malay World' is often portrayed on the largest scale, reaching out not only to most of the peoples of Indonesia but also to the Philippines and the Merina of Madagascar. This is the type of extensive vision of 'the Malays' that we find, for instance, in Wallace's mid-nineteenth-century classic, *The Malay Archipelago*. But it does not fit with the definition of 'Malay' in the Malaysian constitution, which insists that 'Malays' be both Muslim and "habitually speak the Malay language". The languages of the Philippines and the Merina may be in the same language family as Malay, but they are not comprehensible to Malay speakers. There is also the question of religion (Alvarez 1995). When considered as a community of 350 million people and more, the 'Malay World' must be seen to encompass vast numbers of non-Muslims.

From some perspectives this is not a problem. We have noted that in parts of Indonesia, to 'become Malay' can convey conversion not to Islam but to Christianity, and there are Christian Bataks in Singapore who prefer to be (and are allowed to be) identified as 'Malay'. In Malaysia, however, building a 'Malay' consciousness that incorporates millions of Christians – and, in fact, reaches right across the vast range of people whom academics have described as 'Austronesian' (extending in different directions to Hawai'i, Taiwan and Madagascar) – must have implications for the way 'Malay' is conceptualized within Malaysia itself. Thus, in 1991, when a former Malaysian foreign minister saw the need to criticize the current

stress on Islam in defining 'Malay' because it excluded non-Muslim Malays from the 'Malay World' (see Chapter 1), he necessarily confronted those who have been seeking to build an even stronger religious element into 'Malayness'.

It is to overcome possible contradictions that I think the word *rumpun* has been introduced in discussing 'Malay World' aspirations. The *rumpun Melayu* conveys the idea of a loose 'family' of Malays – "in *rumpun* everything grows spontaneously, autonomously on their own, from the same roots" (Ismail Hussein 1993: 12). It is a term that is perhaps less demanding than *bangsa* as a concept of community. Nevertheless, the idea of 'Malay' in 'Malay World' does continue to convey a collective much broader than that which the UMNO leadership constructed – this latter concept, as I have explained, being inclusive in the sense of welcoming newcomers, but nevertheless defined in a way that reflects strongly the Melaka/Johor heritage. The 'Malay' in 'Malay World', it might be observed, is closer to the formulation of Ibrahim Yaacob and his colleagues – determined opponents of the UMNO party – who favoured the inclusion of Malaya in a 'Melayu Raya' (or 'Indonesia Raya') with Indonesia. In fact, the concept of 'Melayu Raya' put forward by Ibrahim's successor, Burhanuddin, when he opposed the Tunku Abdul Rahman government's proposal for creating Malaysia, included the Philippines as well (Soda 2000). It is not surprising, when we consider these comparisons, that the 'Malay World' leader, Ismail Hussein, has actually praised Ibrahim's "dream of a united Melayu Raya" (1990: 69).

A further issue arising from the 'Malay World' movement – one of exclusion, not inclusion – concerns the implications for non-Archipelago Muslims. The UMNO 'Malay' has of course been capable of absorbing many Muslims having an Arab or Indian background, and it might be asked whether they would retain 'Malay' status in the context of the 'Malay World', or the *rumpun Melayu*.

The Islamist Challenge

The second ideological challenge in the opening decades of the twenty-first century is posed by the changes underway within Islam. We have seen that from the early 1800s an increasingly influential section of the Islamic community condemned many aspects of the *kerajaan* polities, and were sometimes in competition as well with the proponents of the new *bangsa* vision for 'Malay' society. Since the 1970s a fundamentalist (sometimes called 'revivalist', 'Salafi' or 'Islamist') movement of great influence has emerged

within the 'Malay' community, particularly in Malaysia. In the first years of independence, certain academic analyses had predicted almost the reverse, assuming that with modernization there would be an increasing separation of state and religion, and that "religious issues [would] probably become somewhat less important" (Means 1978: 402–403; Rosenthal 1965: 301). The anthropologist Peter Wilson judged that Islam was simply "too integral a part of Malay culture for it to be a force for change and new involvement" (1967: 64–65). But the ambitious government-led schemes of the 1970s that aimed to 'lift' the 'Malay' community – including ambitious educational and ideological programmes which brought 'Malays' into urban areas and urban employment – helped to promote a religious transformation. Participation in the revivalist (*dakwah*) movement, as Karim has concluded, "has been significantly important in urban areas" – where "observance of dakwa does not contradict basic patterns of social relations" that are likely to be well grounded in rural areas (1992: 176).

In close touch with Islamists elsewhere in the Muslim world, proponents of a vision of social and political reform based on the Shari'ah or Holy Law, like the Shari'ah-minded of the colonial period, have been critical, first, of 'traditional Malay' society – including the ritual and beliefs of the royal courts, which are much influenced by pre-Islamic traditions, and many elements of popular custom and entertainment. Examples of the latter are what Islamic reformers see as pre-Islamic wedding ceremonies, with the Indian-derived 'sitting-in-state' of the bridal pair and "*adat* forms of cultural entertainment" (including *joget* and *ronggeng* dancing, and the shadow puppet theatre with its Hindu god-figures). Opposing all of this has meant that the *dakwah* activists have been condemning what are often considered to be explicit markers of 'Malayness' (Karim 1992: 176). The second form of denunciation in which these Shari'ah-minded critics have engaged is of man-made doctrines relating to nationalism, the large secular segment of the legal system and the general influence of Western values. The fundamentalist critique cannot be dismissed as a cry from the past: it seeks to establish blueprints for the future that "could be set off against capitalism or communism as rival social systems" (Hodgson 1974, vol. 3: 389).

The Islamic critique has brought many changes – the most obvious being in dress styles and language. More and more women took to conservative clothing, including wearing the veil; some men began to wear the Arab headgear (*serban*) and robes (*juba*); Arabic vocabulary became increasingly common (for instance, the Islamic greeting *as salamu alaykum*) (Chandra 1987; Nagata 1984; Karim 1992: 175–176). Even in popular music there has been a fashion for Islamic lyrics, performers wearing a "global form of Islamic dress" and Middle Eastern rather than local landscaping in video

clips (Kahn 2003). The dropping of divorce levels also seems significant, as it has been directly attributed to "modern reinterpretations of Islamic teachings" (Tsubouchi 2001: 139, 131). Those associated with the *dakwah* movement argued that family relations should now conform to Islamic requirements, just as banking should be operated on Islamic principles, and literature and art judged by Islamic criteria.

Exactly how extensive the impact on 'Malay' society has been is difficult to assess. The anthropologist Joel Kahn carried out surveys in the 1980s to investigate how far 'Malay' middle- and lower-class residents in housing estates felt "traditional Malay culture" was being threatened. For most, "cultural loss was not an issue since Islam was their main priority"; others did consider "Malay culture was disappearing", but "felt this was desirable to the extent that traditional Malay practices contradicted the tenets of Islam" (2006: 88). Such observations to some extent anticipate the results of a survey of 'Malaysian Muslims' carried out in 2005. This found that a clear majority (72.7 per cent), when asked what term of identity defined them best, chose 'Muslim' rather than 'Malay' (12.5 per cent) or 'Malaysian' (14.4 per cent) (Martinez 2006). The survey, it should be stressed, was of 'Malaysian Muslims', not 'Malays', and the way 'Malay' and 'Muslim' were juxtaposed in the respondents' minds probably needs to be carefully unpacked; but the comparative figures are nevertheless striking. Martinez suggests the "heightened self-consciousness about being Muslim" may be a result of the blurring of boundaries between 'Malays' and others in Malaysia, because so many 'non-Malays' have been engaging in 'Malay' culture; but it may also of course point to an intensification of religiosity.

Other commentators have been reluctant to admit to so radical a turn toward Islam. The anthropologist Wazir Jahan Karim has pointed out that "*adat* forms of cultural entertainment" are not always condemned as *maksiat* ('wasteful' or 'immoral'). Also, although women may not now eat publicly with men in colleges, "many have steady boyfriends and go riding together on motorbikes"; she reports one woman admitting that such a mode of travel meant close physical proximity to a man, but adding that any sin implied was reduced by her wearing a veil (1992: 176). Karim argues that "throughout history, Malay culture, in *adat*, has ensured women a position equal to men" (219). The Islamic movement, it is true, can "invoke Muslim patriarchy and female domesticity" (231), and women do tend to wear the veil more than in the past – but this, says Karim, may be an anti-Western rather than an anti-*adat* gesture. She is in general optimistic that Islamism will not succeed in reducing the female "contribution to social, economic and political life", or the equality of men and women in inheritance and other areas (222–227). Despite "Islamic revivalism", she

judges that the "norms of socialization that govern Malay men and women continue to be influenced by the bilaterality of *adat*" (226). Single women (unlike married women), Karim admits, are socially marginal in the revivalist scheme – but she adds that they were in a "structurally similar" position in the old village context (226).

In a recent study, another anthropologist (Michael Peletz) has also been cautious about the Shari'ah-minded impact on Malay society. He suggests that "many, perhaps most . . . ordinary, especially rural Malays" are hostile toward the *dakwah* movement. He agrees that Malays "increasingly refer to themselves as 'we Muslim people' rather than 'we Malay people'", but judges that "ordinary Malays" in fact "experience profound ambivalence" about the "overall trajectory and cultural cost" of Islamic resurgence. Although these people "experience Islam as central to their daily lives and cultural identities", they see the sanitizing of Islam by *dakwah* agents as a misunderstanding of Islam, resent their attack on rituals concerned with local spirits (*jin*), and see many of these agents as arrogant, hypocritical and supportive of harsher (Shari'ah-based) legal penalties. Such "resurgents", says Peletz, are "commonly perceived" by "ordinary Malays" to have waged a "direct attack on sanctified elements of their basic values and cultural identities" (2002: 225–227; 1997: 259).

There is debate, therefore, about how much change is being wrought by fundamentalist critics – but few doubt that they have been able to articulate a powerful alternative vision for 'Malays' and other Muslims in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere).

Government Responses

Faced with this contest over religion, Malaysian leaders have been ideologically creative – as one might expect – and in ways that have borne upon the meaning of 'Malayness'. It must be acknowledged that some have been sincerely convinced by their Islamic critics, and are not merely seeking to placate or outmanoeuvre them: motives cannot be taken for granted. From the late 1970s the UMNO government certainly gave the impression of seeking to "mainstream" rather than directly confront the Islamic movement (Shamsul 1997: 217). It took a leadership role, introducing such institutions as an Islamic university and an Islamic bank, and expanding the government's role in religious education. The government also co-opted the prominent Islamic scholar Syed Naquib al-Attas, who had been a major influence on the *dakwah* movement and who was committed to providing "an Islamic response to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the

modern world". The building that housed the Islamic Institute which Syed Naquib opened (with government support) "was designed by him and reflects strong Hispano-Moorish styles and features" (Farish 2003: 225). The recruiting by UMNO of a leader of the Islamic youth movement (Anwar Ibrahim) in 1982 – an initiative which Prime Minister Mahathir would eventually regret, as the two men descended a decade later into a brutal struggle for power – was perhaps the most dramatic example of the government moving into the 'religious sphere' to counter its critics, especially in the country's Islamic party (PAS). Since the early 1980s that party – which has held power for long periods in the state of Kelantan – had come under the leadership of *ulama* (or Islamic scholars) and had developed a 'Shari'ah-minded' programme of reform. An indication of the cynicism with which UMNO has sometimes acted when adopting Islamic causes is the comment by former Prime Minister Hussein Onn: "You may wonder why we spend so much money on Islam . . . If we don't Parti Islam will get us. The party will, and does, claim that we are not religious and the people will lose faith" (Mohamad Abu Bakar 1980: 171).

The UMNO government, however, has not only engaged in mainstreaming. One way it has actually resisted Islamic demands is by the promotion of 'traditional' culture. Consider Joel Kahn's observation that during the 1980s Malaysia was "awash with the symbolism of 'traditional Malay culture'". He suggested this ought to be interpreted as a "dialogue with modernity" (1992: 174), which may be partly the case. But such a stress on the "feudal and patriarchal" can be understood in terms of other contests as well. It may have been a strategy for advancing the 'Malay *bangsa*' and the national leadership at a time when the Mahathir leadership was in conflict with some of the sultans. Such promotion of 'feudal' tradition could also be interpreted in terms of the 'dialogue with Islam', or rather with particular interpretations of Islam. This might be one reason why Islam (as Kahn reported) played "a relatively minor role" in this vigorous promotion of 'traditional Malay culture' (165).

In the post-Mahathir era, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi has to a certain extent continued the mainstreaming of the Islamic movement. In some of his speeches proposing what he calls 'Islam Hadhari' ('civilizational Islam') as a guiding philosophy for society, he has spelt out an approach to development that he considers consistent with the teachings of Islam. He insists these teachings are "the foundation and inspiration for our actions" and will bring benefits to "all Malaysians, Muslims as well as non-Muslims alike". The question may be asked here, as in so much of this mainstreaming, whether it is to be understood as helping Islam to become a stronger element in the defining of 'Malay'; or, to go one step further, could it be

assisting a process by which Islamic identity and allegiance are being developed into an alternative to 'Malayness' as the foundation of the national culture?

Discerning the consequences not just of government policy but of the Islamist movement in general, as I have suggested, is difficult. Some see an effective reinforcement of ethnicity. Judith Nagata (in her pioneering research on the *dakwah*) suggested that the "revitalized Islam" was perhaps being used by Malays as the "chief symbol and guiding spirit of a new form of Malay distinctiveness" (Nagata 1984: 72). Despite the use of Islamic terminology and symbols, she considered that "the interests of dakwah have a strong, if latent, ethnic component" (127). Shamsul, on the other hand, has suggested that the *dakwah* movement (including the role of government) has "redefined Malay ethnicity", pressing "Islam as a pillar of Malayness" to "centre stage in politics and society". Shamsul adds that this has been occurring at a time when two other "pillars of Malayness" – "royalty and language" – have "come to be seen by the Malay elite as problematic" (1997: 210, 222). As I have suggested, however, it can also be asked whether we have been witnessing not the redefining but the challenging of 'Malayness'. Just as the *bangsa Melayu* had been presented in the past as an alternative form of community and identity to that offered by the monarchy, so might membership of the Islamic community – the would-be Shari-ah-abiding *umat* – be understood in such competitive terms.

This interpretation would help to explain the way some 'Malay' commentators have responded to the religious struggle in their community, expressing fears about the "break-up" or "disappearing" of the 'Malay *bangsa*' (to quote from some book titles) (Milner 1991). A recent textbook for Malaysian schools on 'Islamic Civilization and Asian Civilization' conveys a particularly poignant expression of that anxiety. After examining at length many features of Islamic civilization – and acknowledging the view that the history of Malaysia needs to be written from an Islamic perspective – it ends with a section on 'Malay civilization'. Somewhat defensively, the book closes with Hang Tuah's defiant remark that "the Malays will never disappear from the world" (Milner 2005: 153–154).

The potential for deep division over the relation between Islam and *bangsa* has undoubtedly long been present in 'Malay' society. I have discussed how in the past some of those building the *bangsa Melayu* had been explicit about the need to give *bangsa* priority over religion. Islam (like 'the raja'), it was indicated, could best be conceptualized as a constituent of 'Malayness'. In the 1930s, Abdul Rahim Kajai criticized non-Malay Muslims who did not want the stress on the 'Malay *bangsa*' but " 'advise' us to acknowledge Islam only" (Ariffin 1993: 17; Abdul Latiff 1984: 372). In the

struggle led by UMNO against the Malayan Union (as Hussin Mutalib has stressed), the slogan 'Long Live the Malays' demonstrated the priority of "Malay as distinct from Islamic considerations" (1990: 21).

Against this view of the role of religion, we have noted that those who might today be seen as precursors of the current leadership of the Islamic party (PAS) urged the priority of the community of Muslims (*umat*) over the Malay *bangsa*. Although the early 1900s journal *Al Imam* acknowledged that Muslims had obligations to their race (*bangsa*), it cited the Qu'ran in insisting that the ultimate commitment was to the broader community of Islam. In the 1920s another religiously oriented paper argued that advocacy of the *bangsa* should never compete with the "aims and obligations of the religion" (Milner 2002: 172, 288). In 1951 Ahmad Lutfi declared that "nationalism such as the one led by Datok Onn was prohibited by Islam" (Safie 1981: 22); his Singapore magazine *Qalam* tended to address its articles to the Islamic *umat* rather than the 'Malay *bangsa*', and its audience certainly went beyond Malaya to Thailand and Borneo (Yamamoto 2004: 246–247). In more recent years (during the so-called Islamic 'resurgence') there has been a sustained Islamic condemnation of nationalism as a man-made phenomenon – a view much encouraged by the influential Islamist Abu Ala Maududi (from Pakistan), who had declared that "Islam cannot flourish in the lap of nationalism, and nationalism . . . cannot find a place in the fold of Islam" (Mohamad Abu Bakar 1988: 163; Farish 2004: 354). Farish Noor has conveyed well the genuinely religious authority of Nik Aziz Nik Mat, one of the scholars who gained leadership of PAS in the early 1980s: committed to purifying Islamic practice, Nik Aziz has used his rhetorical skills (including the particular dialect and phraseology of Kelantan Malay) to make Islam "a living reality and a solid presence in the daily lives of ordinary Kelantanese people" (2003: 211).

Looking back over the last century, therefore, we see a long history of Islam-influenced resistance to *bangsa* claims. It is the movement's potential to undermine (not strengthen or redefine) the 'Malay' community – to undercut the power of the *bangsa Melayu* – that I am inclined to emphasize. How the ideologues of 'Malayness' handle the Islamic challenge is obviously a matter of urgent importance, not only for Malaysia but also for the future of 'the Malays' generally. Stressing that Islamic obligations and spirituality can best be achieved in a specifically 'Malay' idiom – rather than by adopting Arabic language, clothing and style (as some critics of the Islamists would describe the latter's endeavours) – may be one strategy. The reassertion of *adat* – which can cover many areas relating to social values and cultural activity, as well as the role of the sultans – may also be under

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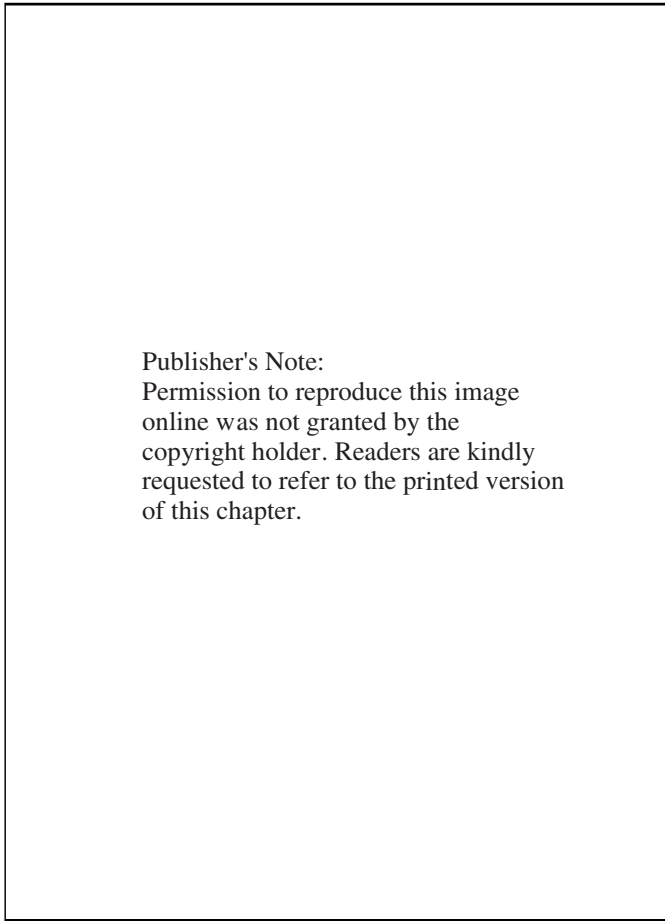
Figure 14   Abdul Hadi Awang, president of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS),
escorted by his supporters before registering as an opposition candidate, 2004.
Photo © Reuters/Bazuki Muhammad.

consideration, as is suggested by the comments from Malaysian minister
Rais Yatim about the role of *adat* in defining *bangsa*.

Beyond Malaysia

Although this discussion of the continued building of the *bangsa Melayu*
has focused on Malaysia, 'Malay' ideological work has certainly been

taking place in other countries, and in some cases comparisons are revealing. In Singapore 'Malay' is inclusive, as it is in Malaysia, and the concept has a primacy as one of the key 'races' into which the Singapore population is officially classified (Lian 2001: 874). One might ask, however, about the implications of the absence of a royal court – and also the lack of a government with the type of Islamizing and 'Malay'-promoting programmes that have been implemented over the last decades in Malaysia. In Singapore, unlike Malaysia, it is not a requirement to be Muslim in order to be 'Malay', and yet it is also the case that 'Malays' are sometimes categorized as part of a broader 'Malay/Muslim' grouping. Does this, one might ask, tend to weaken the specifically 'Malay' consciousness that continues to be fostered in Malaysia? Does it reduce (for Arabs and Indians, for instance) the attractiveness of identifying as 'Malay'?

In Brunei the official ideology is a forging of the concepts of 'Melayu', 'Islam' and 'Monarchy' (*Beraja*) – often referred to as 'MIB'. The potential for incompatibility between the monarchy and a form of Malay nationalism was demonstrated in the Azahari rebellion of the early 1960s; and Islamic activists operating not far away from Brunei have condemned monarchy as well as nationalism. The "philosophy of the Malay Islamic Monarchy", according to the minister of religious affairs, "is the essence of the identity of the Brunei people and their noble Malay culture, which accepts and experiences Islam as a full and complete way of life". It presents the 'Malays' as the "dominant race" of the country, and spells out the different ways in which the government "strengthens Islam" – especially through education and preventing the promotion of other religions. But in Brunei, more than any other 'Malay' community, old *kerajaan* concepts continue to influence the formulation of the monarch's role. The institution of the monarch, the minister points out, provides "an identity for the Malay race", and the sovereign "holds a mandate from God". As a result of the "development of Islam" in the country, so the official philosophy insists, "the position of the monarch" will also grow even stronger (Fealy and Hooker 2006: 260–262; Md. Zain 1998).

In Indonesia, 'Malay' ideologues have certainly worked in a very different context. We have seen that the concept of 'Malay' that has become influential is a narrow one – distinguishing 'Malays' from 'Javanese', 'Bugis' and 'Minangkabau' as well as non-Muslims such as 'Batak', and employing the phrase *suku bangsa* rather than *bangsa*. One irony here is that the Malay language of Riau – a region once located in the 'Malay core' of the Melaka-Johor sultanates – is now "dismissed as a dialect" with reference to standard Indonesian (Maier 1997: 692; Benjamin 2002: 57). As 'Malays' face new opportunities in Indonesia's decentralization process – for instance, in Riau

– their narrow conceptualizing of 'Malayness' makes some of them extremely cautious about extending 'Malay' (or 'Riau') identity to people they see as outsiders ('Minang', 'Javanese', 'Sundanese', 'Acehnese', 'Batak' and so forth) (Ford 2003: 145–146).

The continued 'feudal' entanglements of 'Malayness' in Indonesia are such that in interviews in Riau, Carole Faucher has reported that some Malays find it "unacceptable" to redefine Malayness "outside the logic of a sultanate structure" – that is, in the way it is defined in Singapore and Malaysia. Aristocrats in Riau even go so far as to insist that for a person really to be 'Malay', it is necessary to have some kin relationship to a sultanate (2005). In Kutei (Kalimantan), there are people referred to still as 'Kuteis' who would almost certainly be called 'Malay' in Sarawak or Peninsular Malaysia. They are Muslims, believed to have 'Dayak' ancestors, and recognize the Kutei sultan as the 'head of *adat*'. There are also people who are called 'Melayu', and these are sometimes said to have come originally from Sumatra (Bullinger 2006: 11, 38). Some "non-Kutei Malays" had traditionally lived in the 'Kampong Melayu' in Tenggarang, and they are described as people who had served the sultan in some way in the past (Magenda 1989: 126). In East Sumatra over recent decades, 'Malays' could often be encountered living in the surrounds of former royal palaces: prominent local examples of royal family members who have been leaders in the recording and promotion of 'Malay' heritage are Tengku Lah Husny and Tuanku Luckman Sinar.

In sum, the continued *kerajaan* focus of 'Malayness' in Indonesia – and the failure to develop an alternative, non-royal leadership (Al azhar 1997: 768; Lenhart 1997: 583) – has been a problem from more than one direction. First, there is the strong tendency for local loyalties with a specific *kerajaan* heritage (e.g. Siak or Kampar in Sumatra; Pasir, Kutei, Berau and many others in Kalimantan) to continue to prevail over "a more general Malay brother- and sister-hood" (Derks 1997: 714; Klinken n.d.: 15; Magenda 1989: 126). In East Sumatra (now in 'North Sumatra'), it was only in the 1970s that MABMI (the Indonesian Council of Malay Custom and Culture) was developed as a specifically 'Malay' association that extended across the many former sultanates. Secondly, with the overthrow of the sultanates in the early period of the Republic, and the lack of an alternative leadership, these 'Malay' communities and 'Malay' culture – despite the interest displayed by members of former ruling families – have lacked real patronage, as well as the "rallying point" which the rulers had been "for so many centuries" (Al azhar 1997: 767). Thirdly, where efforts have been made to revive a form of 'Malayness' focused on the *kerajaan* heritage, they have run the risk of seeming to support the 'feudal structures

of the past' (as Ashley Turner pointed out in the case of Riau) (1997: 657), which inevitably causes anxiety in a post-revolutionary country such as Indonesia. And finally, as discussed in the last chapter, it is not certain yet how far the autonomy moves in post-Suharto Indonesia are affecting the significance and formulation of the concept of 'Malay'.

Describing the 'Malay' cause in Indonesia in this way – as generally conservative and defensive – it is important not to ignore the fact that, even in the Suharto era, those whom Al azhar (writing about Riau) calls "engineers of Malayness" (769) have not only been promoting the history and culture of their people, but also experimenting with ideas for the future. They have often looked across enviously at the achievements of the 'Malays' of Malaysia, and have tried to identify the "preconditions for Malay greatness" in the past in Melaka and other Malay sultanates. In particular they have noted Melaka's inclusiveness. As Al azhar has observed, the "formation of a hybrid culture was not seen as a problem" in Melaka, and this might be a model for Riau in modern times, where there is "suspicion and perturbation" about newcomers (766, 772). Despite this aspiration, however, it has been reported recently that with moves toward regional autonomy, defensive "feelings about ethnicity have gotten much stronger", especially among 'Malays' (Ford 2003: 145).

The Islamic Challenge beyond Malaysia

The Islamic critique is an issue for 'Malayness' not just in Malaysia but in many other regions. In southern Thailand we remarked that the overthrow of the sultanates had opened up opportunities for alternative Islamic leadership, as well as for those wishing to give an ethnic, 'Malay' character to the struggle against Thai rule. On the one hand there has been the ongoing effort to promote a sense of 'Malay' identity and ethno-nationalism reaching beyond Patani and other local remnants of the *kerajaan* era – a recent website for the Patani United Liberation Organization continues to insist that the "people of Patani are historically and racially part of the Malay people". Parallel to (and sometimes in partnership with) the promotion of the ethnic cause, there is the strengthening of religious themes in the anti-Thai struggle (Wan Kadir 1990: 105–106). Public support for the rising Islamic leadership is reported, for instance, from Yala province where rajas of the past tend to be seen as "cruel and vindictive", and "older people say that Malays are now better off being led by religious leaders" (Cornish 1997: 5–6).The Iranian revolution of 1979 was an inspiration for Islamic reform in southern Thailand as in many parts of the Muslim world (ICG

2005: 10). In more recent years the influence of Malaysia, especially of the Islamic party, PAS (with its strong base just across the border in Kelantan), has been important in developing a "more radical interpretation of Islam" (Gilquin 2002: 61).

A local factor that may have assisted the fundamentalist cause is the sense of dignity a specifically Islamic identity can bring to embattled Muslims in the social context of southern Thailand. Andrew Cornish has commented that although townspeople look down on Malays dressed in rural style, the 'Arab' style encouraged by *dakwah* groups can "provide an avenue for overcoming the shame experienced by rural 'Malays' venturing into Thai-dominated towns" (Cornish 1997: 13; Chaiwat 1994). Presumably, as in the case of Malaysia, the actual teachings of the new religious leaders – which define and respond to social and political issues in a confident Islamic idiom – also contribute to this new self-respect. In a searching review of the current conflict in southern Thailand, Patrick Jory has drawn attention to the growing influence of an "Islamic discourse that rejects ethno-nationalism": there are signs of a 'Malay' identity – which had been promoted so assiduously over half a century or so by opponents of Thai rule – being replaced by a specifically 'Islamic' one. This is not only because of the international influences (especially from Malaysia): Jory suggests as well that the way the anxious Thai government has favoured Islamic rather than ethnic identity (seeing 'Thai Muslim' as preferable to 'Malay') has itself been significant – an ironic turn of events, considering the post-September 11 fear of Islamic radicalism (2007).

In Sri Lanka as well there have been signs of 'religious revival'. Especially among those 'Malays' who have sought employment in the Middle East or undertaken the Haj, what has become "important" is "the Islamic ummah and not an ethnic identity". They pay "less attention to their Malayness". With the 'Malays' making up only one-twentieth of the total Muslim population, the fear has been expressed that the idea of the "indivisibility of Islam" will be "used for the purpose of hurrying the Malays in their journey to extinction as has happened in South Africa" (Saldin 1996: 45–46). In South Africa too, there has been a concerted effort of redefinition – some leaders seeking to show how colonial influences helped to constitute the 'Cape Malay' idea, and arguing that the concept of 'Cape Muslim' is more appropriate. But it is also the case that other leaders – partly influenced by contacts with the 'Malay World' movement based in Malaysia – have been reasserting 'Malay' ethnicity (Muhammad Haron 2001). In Cambodia the 'Malay' community has felt the influence of Islamism through contact with *dakwah* organizations from Malaysia and Patani, as well as from the Middle East. Malaysia has been so closely involved in the restoration of

Islam in Cambodia, following the brutal suppression of the faith in the 1970s, that current religious trends in Malaysia were bound to be influential. In Cambodia too there are reports of Islamic identity being preferred by 'Chams' as well as 'Chvea' (or 'Malays') over ethnic labelling (Collins n.d.: 64–68, 72–73; Omar Farouk 2002).

   In each of these countries, as in Malaysia itself, such developments could have profound consequences for the concept of 'Malayness'. Will the idea of 'being Malay' simply be superseded by the spiritual and emotive claims entailed in membership of the Islamic community (*umat*)? Alternatively, as I have suggested, ideological work may be undertaken to strengthen the *bangsa*. If this happens to entail making 'Malayness' conform completely with the demands of Islamists, the refashioning may have to be radical. An illustration arises from a debate underway in Malaysia in 2007 about a woman wishing to convert from Islam to Christianity. The relative ease with which people have been able to join or leave the Malay community is incompatible with an Islamic rejection of apostasy, and the flexibility of 'Malayness' would therefore need to be reconciled with the Malaysian chief justice's declaration (warmly applauded by Islamists) that the woman in question "cannot at her own whim simply enter or leave her religion" (*International Herald Tribune*, 31 May 2007). Contradictory as it may seem, however, my survey of the 'history of Malayness' suggests the concept of 'Malay' may in fact be adaptable enough to be recast in this way – as a more uncompromising form of obligation.

Flexibility and Substance

The flexibility of the 'Malay' concept has certainly been evident time and again in this discussion of social and ideological developments. Beginning with a discussion of anthropological literature, we have noted the continuing debates about what is 'Malay' and what not, and examined how people have been able to move out of the 'Malay' community, as well as join it. Some move back and forth – for instance, between 'Arab' and 'Malay' – almost within a single conversation. Such an ease of 'conversion', it has been clear, has worried certain builders of the 'Malay *bangsa*' – encouraging their fear that 'the Malays' might indeed 'disappear from this earth'. It also invites scholarly concern about whether 'Malayness' is really best understood in terms of 'ethnicity' (or 'race'). The notion that 'the Malays' are bonded together through descent has at times gained influence, but is also often questioned: the anthropologist Peter Wilson considered that "racial (i.e. biological) differences are quite unimportant" for Malays, and

Ismail Hussein argued that Malaysian thinking about the 'Malay World' is 'cultural' and not 'racist'. The moulding or engineering of this culture over the centuries has been a theme not just of this chapter but of much of the book. There has been the extolling of 'feudal' or *kerajaan* values, the stress on custom or *adat* (which is itself subject to much variation and revision), the different ways of casting the role of Islam, the celebration (and then the downplaying) of the Malay language, and the promotion of the robust 'New Malay'. Almost all these ideological moves have been undertaken in the face of challenge or contest.

Drawing back the veil of 'Malayness', which has been my intention from the outset, has revealed an extraordinary range of constructions and experiences of 'being Malay'. I have almost inevitably focused on processes, not 'a people'. We have often been tracking a concept. Given the dynamic complexity of that concept – reaching right back to the mention of 'Malayu' in seventh-century Sumatra – it is time to attempt a review of the 'history of Malayness'; and also to return to the question of whether what we are dealing with is best described as an 'ethnicity'.

Ethnicity, Civilization and the Fear of 'Disappearing from this World'

Focusing on 'Malayness' rather than 'the Malays' has, I think, helped to clarify, but not necessarily to solve, issues. It certainly assists us to appreciate the complex and special character of the term 'Malay'. Writing this book has led me to consider the possibility that 'being Malay' may well be something different. Whether this is true – or whether it is simply the case that the 'conversation about being Malay' is cast in ways that are unfamiliar – the sense of 'difference' is palpable, and thought-provoking. It encourages me to puzzle about my own national culture and 'ethnicity', about the 'ethnicity' of the Japanese community in which I currently write as a visiting professor, and about concepts of community in general. If there is a danger here of exoticizing the concept 'Malay', the risk would seem to be worth taking.

The stress on 'Malayness', in my view, recognizes that 'Malay' is a "fraught term" (Vickers 1997: 175). It assists us to learn more about the wide range of people who have come to think of themselves as 'Malay'. Not to take for granted the existence of an identifiable 'Malay race' or 'ethnicity' projecting back over many centuries makes us better able (to use Joel Kahn's phrase) to see all 'Malays' as being in a sense "Other Malays". It is easier to appreciate the radically different social formations in which they lived at one time and another, and in addition the contest of futures which these people would appear to have contemplated – in some cases futures that were not specifically 'Malay'. Perhaps most of all, in perceiving the *bangsa Melayu* to be a constructed thing, the process of that construction comes clearly into view – as one of the great transformations of the last two centuries, but also one that brought into being an entity that is ultimately fragile and vulnerable.

Thinking about 'Malayness' rather than 'the Malays', I would suggest, makes more pressing the question of just how to classify the concept

'Malay'. How appropriate are terms such as 'race' and 'ethnicity'? How appropriate are these generally, and not merely in the 'Malay' situation? I have already indicated that in the 'Malay' case there may be advantages in thinking in civilizational rather than ethnic terms – partly because to do so helps to account for the high degree of flexibility and adaptability encountered in the use of the term. But appreciating that 'looseness' must raise the question of whether there is ultimately any real substance in 'Malayness'. Could such a seemingly powerful term as 'Malay', I have begun to wonder, really be empty of essential meaning? I think the answer is 'no'.

Let us review our history of 'Malayness'. What 'Malay' may have meant in the early Indianized world of Sumatra was difficult to determine. The 'Malays', like the 'orang Pahang', are likely to have taken their names from a river; but in their wider associations they were probably above all subjects of a ruler – members of a *kedatuan* or (later) a *kerajaan*. It was also these raja-centred polities that eventually appropriated the religion of Islam, ushering in a 'golden age' of Archipelago sultanates. I hope I have conveyed that in these early centuries, in the creative encounter with Indian and then Islamic doctrines – just as during the colonial period – there is a history of ideas to be recounted in these Archipelago societies. Although the insightful writing of Syed Hussein Alatas generally demands respect, it seems to me that his observation that there was "no functioning intellectual community" in this region "before the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century" is misleading (1977: 238).

From the point of view of this book, it is especially important that by the time the Portuguese carved their way into the region, 'Malay' had been given a meaning well beyond that of a river-based identity. The 'ways of Malay' were the 'ways of Melaka': language, dress, manners, entertainments and so forth might be referred to as 'Malay', and this Melaka-based culture or civilization was acknowledged right across the Archipelago. After Melaka was conquered by the Portuguese, and the ruling family had established a successor polity in Johor, it would appear that the 'ways of Malay' continued to be fostered – although how quickly they began to have an influence in surrounding sultanates is something that is difficult to determine.

The Europeans who engaged in trade and war around the region from the sixteenth century made various forms of contribution to the development of the concept of 'Malay'. They acknowledged the importance of the Malay language (sometimes called 'Jawi'), and employed the description 'Malay' for a very wide range of people around the Archipelago. I have been cautious, however, about the extent to which this use of 'Malay' reflected self-definition among the people themselves. We need to try to

imagine what a 'pre-ethnicity' world might have been like. Historians and anthropologists have certainly recognized that in using 'ethnicity' in that period the term needs to be qualified by adjectives such as 'permeable' and 'open'. Ryoko Nishii, discussing Kedah history, has referred as well to "a former situation where the boundaries of religion and language are more vague and relaxed" (2000: 196). In thinking of the pre-colonial period, I put stress on identification by river and, most of all, membership of the raja-centred polity: but my main concern is to suggest that a new configuration was introduced in colonial times – and one constituting a genuine break with the past.

The Reconfiguration

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – with the development of the concept of 'race' in the purportedly scientific classification of humankind – there can be no doubt about the European impact on the 'structure of belonging' in the Archipelago. I have examined in some detail the role of people influenced by the idea of 'race' – the determined reformer Munshi Abdullah, the newspaper editor Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, and later ideologues – in shifting the focus from sultanate (or *kerajaan*) to a trans-regional concept of 'the Malays'. Their initiatives, it has been suggested, are best viewed in a wider regional setting – in which concepts of a 'Javanese people', a 'Minangkabau people' and so forth were also being crystallized. The new preoccupation with racial classification which occurred during the colonial period brought 'the Malays', and perhaps the Archipelago more generally, a transformation which might be judged to have been at least as radical as that accompanying the conversion to Islam, or the experimentation and adoption of Indian modes of thought in even earlier centuries. 'Race' became the structural basis, in particular, for both colonial and post-independence Malaya (and Malaysia). Political, economic and social arrangements were organized in terms of 'race', and all types of competition for resources and influence were conceptualized in this way.

The details of this transformation among 'the Malays', however, and especially the particular contributions of their own concept builders, require close attention. In developing the idea of the 'Malay race', the term chosen for 'race' was *bangsa*, which carried the idea of descent, and had been used in the past with reference to royal descent and that of *syeds* – those exceptional groups (in communities characterized primarily by bilateral kinship) for whom descent really mattered. Particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, some members of the elite that was engaged in building the

'Malay *bangsa*' really did put an emphasis on descent, denying status as 'Malays' to people of Indian and Arab descent. But even in this period, I have noted developments that seem to question the extent to which the notion of 'the Malays' as a distinct 'race' or 'ethnicity' was assimilated among the people themselves. There is the comment of the British census-taker of 1931 about "Oriental peoples" having "no clear conception of race", and an anthropologist in the 1940s concluded that 'Malay' was "not a race in the strict sense of the term" (Djamour 1959: 21); again, in the 1960s Wilson stressed that racial differences seemed to be unimportant to Malays. In Sabah, the superintendent of the 1951 census declared with obvious frustration that the "question of race or community has vexed every census-taker" (Ranjit Singh 2003: 7). With respect to the novelty of the idea of 'race' in Borneo, a stark contrast has been pointed to between local forms of identity (often by river name and mobile) and "the bounded, permanent and stable ethnic identity" which Europeans tried to impose. The second form, Tim Babcock has suggested, cannot be said to have merely replaced the first: "becoming Malay does not necessarily mean ceasing to be Melanau".

The continuing ease of movement into (and sometimes out of) 'Malay-dom' is in fact further reason for caution about the extent to which 'Malay' began to be understood in terms of descent. We have seen what some have called 'Malayization' taking place in pre-modern times on Sumatra and the Peninsula, as well as on Borneo, and wondered when the term first began to be used to describe people adopting Islam and being incorporated in one sultanate or another. A *kerajaan* text made clear how flexible 'ethnic' categories were considered to be when it described Portuguese, following their eventual defeat in Melaka, changing their "customs, language and clothing" to "become Jakun". In the process of 'becoming Malay', it is true, other factors (especially conversion to Islam) tend to be stressed – and just what importance is placed on 'customs, language and clothing' can vary from one situation to another. This 'Malayization', however, does seem to be more about 'culture' or 'civilization' than 'ethnicity'. As we saw in the last chapter, 'Malays' themselves have perceived it to be a process of 'teaching', and sometimes of moving up a type of civilizational ladder.

Muslim people as well as 'Bataks', 'Dayak' and 'Orang Asli' have 'become Malay', and in some situations (particularly on the Peninsula) this has been common. But in Indonesia and Sabah, largely due to influences during the colonial period, it is far less frequent. In Malaysia people often switch back and forth between classifications, or seek to hold both simultaneously (as in the Sarawak case of the Melanau). The switching has been referred to as "ethnic oscillation" – but it has also been argued that 'ethnic' is the

wrong word. Mohamed Aris Othman proposed that 'Malay' should be understood more as a "cover term" – allowing one to be, for instance, 'Malay' and 'Arab' at the same time. It is reported as well that some people interviewed about whether they are 'Malay' or 'Javanese' or 'Arab' have tended to be "puzzled or annoyed", claiming that such questions "split the Malay people". A strong contrast to this flexible attitude has been encountered in Riau, where there are local 'Malays' who insist that only those people having genealogical connections with the old sultanate are really 'Malay', and that it is certainly not possible to redefine 'Malayness' outside the logic of a sultanate structure.

What has become clear is how varied are the ways in which 'Malay' has been formulated. People who in one situation are called 'Malay' may be 'Arab' or 'Melanau' in another circumstance. Top-down ideological work, I have stressed, exercised a key role in this defining of 'Malayness'. Our main focus in this respect has been on Malaysia (drawing upon the work of Shamsul, Ariffin Omar and others), but I have as well made comparisons with Indonesia and other areas where "engineers of Malayness" (to use the Riau writer Al azhar's phrase) were also at work. In the early twentieth century on the Peninsula (and less so in Indonesia), much effort and skill were invested in making the *bangsa Melayu* a community and identity independent of the *kerajaan*, the sultanate. One strategy was to appropriate concepts that were critical in the *kerajaan* itself, particularly those related to loyalty and status, to add emotive substance to the *bangsa* – to help it to satisfy the communitarian needs that the *kerajaan*, for instance, may once have fulfilled. In writing of devotion or disloyalty to the 'Malay people', these "engineers" used the same words – often Sanskrit in origin – that had been potent in the raja–*rakyat* (ruler–subject) dynamic in the sultanates, and even earlier. Some of those building the *bangsa* actually reversed the relation between subject and ruler – portraying the sultan as serving his people. The sultan could be presented as 'cement' helping to bond the *bangsa*, or as the 'symbol' of the Malay race. Other ideologues stressed that "language is the soul of the people" (*bahasa jiwa bangsa*). Others again have put the emphasis on *adat* (custom) – seeing it not merely as the bonding element of a village community but also (as Zainal Kling has expressed) as "the collective mind of the Malay peoples": the "expression of [their] fundamental unity" (1989/1990: 111).

There has been plenty of contest about the substance of the *bangsa Melayu*. While some have been anxious to preserve what they see as old 'Malay values' – believing that to do so (as a Malay leader from Riau has explained) is essential to prevent the "erasure" of the 'Malay World' – Prime Minister Mahathir promoted the idea of the dynamic 'New Malay', who

would discard habits of deference and other values inherited from a 'feudal' past. With respect to the Malay language, I cited Mahathir's suggestion that perhaps it is really "knowledge", not "language", that is the "soul of the *bangsa*", and certainly such a view facilitates the strategy of enhancing English as the language medium most likely to promote 'development'. At certain stages Islam has been portrayed as the fundamental element in 'Malayness' (with *adat* awarded a very subordinate role). The Mahathir government sometimes conveyed the impression of doing this: the idea of the 'New Malay' (as Shamsul explained) conveyed "an increased sense of religiosity" (1997: 210). On the other hand, we have noted an UMNO leader wondering aloud about whether religion might be put aside as an essential ingredient in being 'Malay'.

Exactly who should be included in the 'Malay' community has been a definitional issue with obvious practical implications. In the 1930s those insisting that Islam is not a *bangsa* wanted to ensure that people whom they thought of as 'Arabs' or 'Indians' were not able to take control of the 'Malay' community. In this period, when descent was given exceptional attention, there was in fact deep disagreement over important detail. Some participants at a conference held (in 1940) partly to determine the criteria for 'Malayness' insisted that descent through the father was essential. Others from Negri Sembilan (where matrilineal traditions are strong) objected to this. In the same year, future Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman said descent through the mother ought to be enough, especially when it was so necessary to enhance the 'Malay' population numbers *vis-à-vis* the large communities of 'Chinese' and 'Indians'. Dr Burhanuddin's answer was a call to implement procedures that would allow these 'Chinese' and 'Indians' to join the *bangsa Melayu* – a concept he also saw covering peoples right around the Archipelago.

The 'Malay' leaderships in many parts of the Dutch East Indies (and later, Indonesia) tended to take a far narrower view, defining 'Malays' as separate not just from 'Chinese' but also from 'Javanese', 'Bugis', 'Minangkabau' and many other groupings. The leaders of the UMNO party, which has been able to dominate Malaysian government for five decades, took a middle position – and one to which I have given particular attention. Their formulation of 'Malay' has been Peninsular focused – honouring in particular the Melaka/Johor tradition. It is a community that transcends individual sultanates – and possesses a substance (including a degree of egalitarianism) that gives it a status independent of, and to some extent subversive of, 'monarchy'. Finally, the UMNO version of the *bangsa Melayu* is open to recruits from the Archipelago and other places as well. Even the possibility

of incorporating non-Muslims (something which the category already allows for in Singapore) has been contemplated.

'Race', 'Ethnicity'?

All this ideological engineering must be seen to carry the assumption that the *bangsa Melayu* continues to be a concept in motion – a notion of community that is by no means fixed but, rather, open to redefinition or refashioning. Even the term *bangsa* – selected, it would seem, precisely because it conveyed the idea of 'descent' that was so important in the European conceptualization of 'race' – seems to me to have been increasingly characterized by flexibility, especially in the twentieth century. Not only did certain intellectuals and leaders in the Dutch East Indies begin in the 1920s to speak of *bangsa* as being able to incorporate the whole range of Archipelago people under Dutch rule (the '*bangsa* Indonesia'), but we also encounter the '*bangsa* Sumatra', the '*bangsa* East Sumatra', the '*bangsa* Malaya' (which would include Chinese and Indians) and the '*bangsa* Sabah' (which would cover the large Kadazan population as well as Muslims). The term *bangsa*, it would seem, has come a long way since it was first employed on behalf of the new concept of 'race' – as has the notion of 'the Malays'.

When we consider how closely the concepts of both 'ethnicity' and 'race' continue today to be tied to the idea of 'descent' (Scott 2006; Kipp 1996: 19; Smith 1987), there does seem to be something noteworthy about the degree of flexibility that the *bangsa Melayu* displays – its openness to redefinition, and the apparent ease (in many but not all situations) with which people can enter or even leave the community. The perceived significance of supposed blood ties must be seen to be comparatively limited. As I have suggested (in Chapter 5), although there is good reason to portray the conceptual reorganization of the Archipelago in terms of 'race' or 'ethnicity' as a radical transition in the human history of the region – an instance of the far-reaching impact of European colonial rule – there is an indication here that the idea of 'race' was reformulated, or 'localized'. It would seem to have been fused with local concepts of 'community' as part of a process of understanding, as well as of ideological leadership. Apart from the role of descent, I have suggested that the way the emotive content of *bangsa* reflects earlier *kerajaan* thinking is another way in which such recasting has taken place.

To some extent the relative discounting of blood ties ought not to be surprising. Descent, as anthropologists have explained, plays a relatively

weak role in most 'Malay' societies. It is not observed to be a critical bonding factor in the village community (particularly by the standards of the Japanese village), and even the family unit tends to display strong powers of absorption. As Carsten states, "the line between foster kin and consanguinal (or blood) kin is blurred and highly permeable". It is usual, for instance, to refer to a foster mother "using simply the consanguinal term *mak* (mother)" (1997: 280). This is not to say that the village and family should be dismissed as exceptionally loose units. In fact, we tend to encounter strong communitarian attitudes in 'Malay' societies – a need that had to be accommodated in the forging of the *bangsa Melayu* concept in the colonial period. In local contexts, becoming a member of the family (and a European or Chinese can certainly do so) involves learning "the appropriate forms of behaviour" (Carsten 1997: 276), and in particular the process of cooking and eating together (286). Far from being weak, Carsten calls the "conformity in patterns of behaviour very great" (5). The village community, as explained in the last chapter, can be called 'tight' because of conformity with formal codes of behaviour – of politeness. It has been described as being united by a 'secret code', that of *adat* or custom; and custom determines what is correct behaviour. Such sayings as "let the child die but not the *adat*", or life is "contained within custom" – which we first considered in Chapter 3 with reference to the *kerajaan* world – convey well just how powerful the notion of such conformity could be, despite the relatively low stress on descent.

Localizing the *Bangsa*

Given these observations, it makes sense that in adopting the idea of 'race' – even assuming 'Malay' ideologues became committed to the idea of making it a powerful organizing principle in their world – such leaders might have tended to play down the dimension of descent. One way of understanding their approach is to see the idea of the *bangsa Melayu* assuming a specifically Melaka-Johor flavour. After all, the Melaka hero Hang Tuah was reported as having "played at relatives", which I take to mean using kin terms for relationships that were not consanguinal or 'blood' based. The Melaka-Johor concept of 'Malay', as the Hang Tuah epic also makes clear, certainly allowed people who were not related by descent (such as Javanese) to become 'Malay'. Especially important as well, the manner in which 'Malay' in Melaka-Johor had developed into much more than a river-based identity does not evoke specifically 'racial' thinking. The phrase 'Malay ways' (reported by Europeans early in the sixteenth century), and

the mention in *kerajaan* writings of 'Malay customs', 'Malay dress', 'Malay music' and so forth, suggest 'Malay' had begun to be understood more as a culture, or perhaps more accurately, a civilization.

If we perceive the *bangsa Melayu* as having been localized in the sense of being made into a civilizational rather than a racial concept, then light is thrown on a number of issues. It is understandable that Ismail Hussein should insist that Malaysians have tended to take a 'cultural', not a 'racist' stance on 'Malay' issues. It helps us explain as well why the definition of 'Malay' in the constitution of Malaysia actually 'makes no mention of race'. Understood in civilizational terms, the *bangsa* is of course persistently open to redefinition. The extraordinary talent for top-down ideological leadership, which has been stressed time and again in my survey of 'the Malays' and their history, makes good sense in this context: it could be seen to be in the nature of such a civilizational community that it receive constant ideological attention. The apparent switching between or layering of identities that is often said to occur also becomes more comprehensible: being 'Malay' as well as 'Arab' or 'Melanau' need not be viewed as contradictory if we cease to think of 'Malay' as an ethnicity. No wonder (to use Judith Nagata's expression) that the people said to be "switching" showed not "the remotest symptoms of personal insecurity or marginality". Also, the "annoyance" caused by questions about whether a person is 'Malay' or 'Javanese' or 'Arab' – the anxiety that such questioning could "split the community" – is easier to interpret if we understand interviewees as being engaged in building a 'Malay' civilization encompassing members from a range of 'ethnic' backgrounds.

The prominence of the theme of 'Malayization' – and the seeming ease of that process – is again less surprising when we consider (as 'Malays' themselves have in some instances declared they do) the people concerned as having entered a civilization rather than an ethnicity. Then there is the fear of losing 'Malays'. That 'the Malays' could 'disappear from the face of this world' (or 'break up') is logically possible if we think in terms of a civilization. The novelist Ishak Haji Muhammad understood the threat, as did Mohd. Eunos Abdullah and perhaps Munshi Abdullah in earlier years. Ishak expressed the anxiety in reference to groups of "young people" who "in reality are no longer Malays because their way of life is really divorced from the ways and characteristics of Malays" (Hooker 2000: 213). In Sri Lanka we noted the worry that the "slogan of the indivisibility of Islam" might "hurry the Malays on their journey to extinction". In discussing the 'Malay World' movement, I quoted Clive Kessler's view that it reflected the persistent 'Malay' "longing to be something in the world": he cited here Hang Tuah's defiant statement about "never disappearing", and called this

"the central motivating slogan of modern Malay nationalism". In my view Kessler is right about the power of the slogan, but the tone seems to me to be more defensive than he suggests. Are we speaking primarily of a longing to "be something in the world", or rather the fear of 'disappearing from this world' – of 'being nothing'?

Despite this anxiety, however, understanding the *bangsa Melayu* as a civilization – admitting the relatively minimal importance of descent in the concept – does not, if my analysis is correct, necessarily mean that it must be essentially weak or loose. Just as cultural bonds (including *adat*) can make the village or family tight, so do civilizational bonds have the capacity to make the *bangsa Melayu* a powerful form of community and identity – and we have noted that in fact a strong communitarianism has been a feature of 'Malay' societies. Presumably, it depends very much on leadership as to whether the concept of 'Malay' is made strong: in this respect I raised questions in the last chapter about how the engineers of 'Malayness' might respond to some seemingly serious new challenges from both the 'nation state' and Islam. I have as well left open the intriguing issue of whether the Malaysia-led 'Malay World' movement may one day make a contribution to a post-colonial-state restructuring of the Archipelago.

Is There No 'Malay' Essence?

The main concern I have in thinking about the 'Malay people' primarily in a civilizational way – and in particular in emphasizing just how much the content of that civilization is debated, redefined and seemingly vulnerable to almost any top-down, ideological initiative – is that I run the risk of presenting the idea of 'Malay' as being ultimately empty, of having no fixed signification whatsoever. It is undeniable that the term 'Malay' retains a genuine degree of potency: it still summons up images of Archipelago pirates, a sophisticated sultanate civilization admired in its time, a Southeast Asian Islamic tradition, and a talent for diplomacy (exhibited even in recent times in the region-building of ASEAN), and many more. For all the ideological refashioning, it is also true that the idea of 'Malay' continues to be associated with a cluster of symbols and styles – the *keris* (which is regularly brandished at the General Assembly of Malaysia's UMNO party to invoke the 'Malay' cause), the sumptuous *songket* textiles, the scattered arrangement of houses (and the ever-present coconut trees) in a Malay *kampong*, the valuing of refined (*halus*) manners, the sensitivity about insulting words, and a persistent concern about reputation.

Much that was important in past centuries, of course, is simply less relevant today. I have explained how even the royal courts eventually discarded

most of the '*kerajaan* system', choosing to present sultans in a modern context, including as 'symbols' of 'Malayness'. As Henk Maier suggested, "ancient stories" are now treated not as "knowledge" but as "beliefs and superstitions"; and it is also the case that ceremonial fabrics and royal rituals simply cannot have the meaning in contemporary society that they once possessed. Yet the ceremony and costumes still to be encountered, for instance, at the sultan of Perak's birthday celebrations – the measured dignity with which the sultan and his consort walk the length of the audience hall toward the throne, to the haunting rhythms of the *nobat* band – are even today treated with earnest seriousness by the many people present, "seated according to rank". To give another example of 'residue' from an earlier era, Mahathir's successor as prime minister (Abdullah Badawi) and his former powerful opponent (Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah) have both been praised in the Malaysian press recently for their "soft and gentle" manner – just as successful leaders often were in the old literature of the royal courts. Two centuries ago Valentijn called the 'Malays' the "politest people of the whole East". In some cases this 'Malay characteristic' has been explicitly denigrated – for instance, by Munshi Abdullah and Mahathir Mohamed – but whether portrayed negatively or positively, it continues to be a 'reference point' of 'Malayness'.

Motifs and themes associated with 'Malayness' have been gathered together over the centuries – accumulated in different periods in the historical development of the peoples who were eventually to consider themselves members of the 'Malay *bangsa*'. I have suggested (in Chapter 7) that entrepreneurialism is another area where elements of the '*kerajaan* system' – elements likely today to be labelled merely 'Malay feudal tradition' – have a continuing significance. In discussing Patricia Sloane's work, I wondered about the influence of centuries of experience in the intermeshing of commercial and political action, and of giving priority to 'social reputation' over commercial rewards. I asked whether *nama* ('reputation') might continue to be a driver in modern society. Wazir Jahan Karim thinks this is so: a Malay without *maruah* (a 'sense of honour') or *nama* ('social recognition'), she says, "is a social outcast within his or her community and may be stigmatized for life" (1992: 7; 1990: 16–17). Nik Aziz Nik Mat (prominent leader of the Islamic party, PAS) is quoted as making a similar observation when speaking to a Kelantan audience about a statement in the Qu'ran. He expressed sadness for those who live their life "without a story to tell", who are "worn and mute" and who "possess no *nama*" (Farish 2003: 212, 230). We noticed as well (in Chapter 5) the comment by a 'Malay' historian of the 1920s that the concept of *nama* highlighted a critical distinction between 'Malays' and 'Chinese'. While 'Chinese' devote themselves to industry, he suggested, 'Malays' tended to be concerned about 'the search for *nama*'.

Wishing to know how 'Malays' behave as members of the proletariat (working on a plantation), I cited Wan Zawawi's observation that the protection of the worker's *maruah* ('dignity') – a concept closely allied to *nama* – was a priority of vital concern for management, just as it had been in a royal court and other social situations over previous centuries. Despite the stress placed on business activity in modern Malaysia – Sloane has described well the sense of moral rather than commercial wellbeing that is associated with entrepreneurialism – it is also true that for many people work in the public service still possesses prestige. Serving the government – called *kerajaan* in Malaysia – has a degree of attractiveness for some 'Malays' that is reminiscent of the personal fulfilment once offered by service to a raja.

A prominent feature of modern Malaysia which would seem to be at least partly a product of the heritage of ideas from the age of the *kerajaan* polities is the 'plural society'. This concept – of two or more communities living 'side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit' – has often been seen by scholars as characterizing well the structure of modern Malaysia, and tends to be attributed most of all to developments occurring under colonial rule. On the basis of my discussion of '*kerajaan* economics' in Chapter 3, however, I would suggest that the fundamentals of the 'plural society' structure – particularly the 'Chinese' domination of the commercial sphere – were put in place well before the colonial era. The rulers' attitude toward commercial activity on the part of their subjects (at least as private traders) led to a situation where foreign entrepreneurs enjoyed an advantage. So long as they remained outside the particular hierarchical formation of the sultanate (focused on the ruler), they had the opportunity to accumulate independent wealth. Inside the system, wealth had to be aligned with status. There was not a private economic sphere. The extent to which 'Chinese' did indeed tend to hold themselves apart is suggested by descriptions of towns in which there were distinct and separate 'Chinese' districts – and, again, to view this as merely an indication of discrimination or hostility would be to ignore the working concepts that guided the royal elite (Milner 2003). Equally, one might ask today whether the continuing entanglement of politics in 'Malay' business activity – recall Sloane's suggestion (cited in the last chapter) that the workings of 'Malay' entrepreneurship provide the opportunity for the UMNO government to reward political loyalty – is at least partly a result of longstanding habits of 'political' thought. Is 'Malay' commercial endeavour still perceived in political terms?

The relative strength of the executive in Malaysian government has also been portrayed as an inheritance from the sultan-focused, pre-colonial polity (Johnson and Milner 2005). Clive Kessler, however, having

considered carefully the dynamics of the ruler–subject (raja–*rakyat*) relationship in the *kerajaan*, has proposed that the key to modern Malay political culture is not "absolutism or domination" but rather "followership". It is "not a culture of blind obedience but a culture of deference – a culture, if one is to survive, of necessary, often ambivalent, and at times even dissimulating deference" (1992: 147–148; Chandra 1974; Shaharuddin 1984). There is a reflection of this analysis – countered, of course, in Mahathir's ideal of the 'New Malay' – in a comment by the Riau intellectual Al azhar on the fate of the 'Malays' under Jakarta's rule. That they chose, he said in 1997, to "be silent in all those things, showed that the traditional idea of how to behave toward the ruler persisted". They displayed 'loyalty', not insubordination (*derhaka*) (1997: 768). Another dimension of the culture of followership is the way actual 'followings' are created. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was said that the moment a 'Malay' obtained money "he entertained as many attendants as he could"; and in a recent report on Yala in South Thailand we again see gifts, loans, entertaining and employment being used to build personal followings (Cornish 1997: 64).

It is tempting to go on listing possible influences from the past on current patterns of behaviour. The last element I wish to cite – one given particular emphasis in this book – is that of strong, top-down ideological leadership. Such leadership was present in early experimentation with Indian concepts and institutions, then in the process of Islamization, and again in the constituting (in Melaka) of the 'ways of Melayu'. We saw plenty of such leadership in the colonial period, especially in the making of 'the Malays', and in more recent times during the extraordinary Mahathir government in Malaysia. In calling for the creation of 'New Malays', or for the rigorous implementation of Islamic law and values, there have been attempts to transform radically the concept of 'Malay'. Stressing this ideological engineering has of course a double value. While adding a further and critical example of the continuing influence of a heritage of ideas, it is also a powerful reminder of the flexibility and vulnerability of 'Malayness'. Noting the capacity of top-down ideological work to recast radically 'Malay' society underlines that 'being Malay' has by no means meant the same thing in different periods, or different locations. It has been a civilization in process, and we cannot be certain about its form and its prospects in the future.

The concept of 'Malay' has collected around it a cluster of motifs and styles – many associated with the golden age of the sultanates. Reference points for 'Malayness' rather than permanent content, they may be influential in one situation, rejected in another. We cannot speak of a coherent, stable 'Malay essence'. These reference points, however, are elements in a heritage of ideas with which modern 'Malays' are in dialogue. Outsiders

can of course also gain entry to that conversation, delving into 'Malay' experience partly for its own sake, and partly for what it might contribute to our understanding of humankind at a more general level. Certain anthropologists cited in the last chapter appear to have gained new understandings – for instance, of kinship and the social significance of 'politeness' and 'custom' – from their encounter with 'Malay' communities. Work underway on literature in Malay has raised conceptual issues about genre, the implications of aural–oral style and the role of 'words' in so-called political and social life. My own interrogation of Malay writings, as will be obvious by now, has been driven in part by a desire to learn more about the possible ways in which 'community' and 'self' can be conceptualized.

Considering 'the history of Malayness' – beginning, in particular with 'the ways of Melaka' – has made me wonder whether, not just in the 'Malay' but in many other cases as well, we should be thinking more about 'civilization' than 'ethnicity'. A decade ago the idea of 'civilization' was given prominence as a result of an agenda-forging book by the political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) – though he was criticized in part for giving 'civilizations' an unnecessary rigidity. In my view, the concept of 'civilization' has the advantage of communicating a dynamism that the terms 'ethnicity' and 'race' do not so readily convey. 'Civilization' refers to states of mind, and to representations. It carries as well a notion of 'structure' – and structures are expected to be undergoing change, or at least to be susceptible to rebuilding. They are also based on principles – 'logics' – that have the potential to be transferred to, or learned by, others.

Finally, and importantly, employing 'civilization' provides a vantage point from which to think more sharply about 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Contemplating how being 'Malay', 'Japanese', 'German' or 'Australian' has undergone change over the last century, it seems to me that using 'ethnicity' or 'race' as our key concepts can obscure what has actually been taking place. Among other benefits, thinking in civilizational terms may help to decipher more precisely how nineteenth-century ideas about 'race' influenced one situation as against another. The differing ways in which these ideas have been 'localized' – and the dynamics of that process – are certainly central to the 'history of Malayness'.

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