

Strangers in the Land of their Birth: Concepts of Social Integration in Portrayals of the Malay in Malaysian Novels in English

Chuah Guat Eng

(Based on a paper presented at the International Seminar, “Fictions and Factions in the Malay World” held at Goethe University, Frankfurt, on November 11-12, 2010, this is the original version of the essay published as Chapter XII in Mohamad Rashidi M. Pakri & Arndt Graf, eds. *Fiction and Faction in the Malay World: Volume 1*, 209-238. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.)

Since 1971, Malaysia has pursued a national literature policy defined by a hierarchy of languages. Only literature written in Malay is classified as “national” literature. Writings in other indigenous languages are classified as “regional” literature, and writings in non-indigenous languages (principally English, Chinese, and Tamil) as “sectional” or “communal” literature (*sastera sukuan*). The term *sastera sukuan* implies that the writers concern themselves only with communal issues, not national ones. At the time the policy was proposed, the explanation given was that English-language writers – then predominantly non-Malay, middle-class, urban, and university-educated – belong to a tiny elite with no experience of the country’s social reality, namely, the world of the rural Malay.¹ Underlying this explanation was a part-ideological, part-emotional assumption that in using the English language, writers betray an allegiance to the old colonial master and not to the young nation. In short, these writers were regarded as strangers in the land of their birth.

Today, the image of the deracinated, nationally un-integrated Anglophone writer continues to haunt the discourse on Malaysian literature in English (MLIE). The recent surge in novels by diasporic Malaysians has raised new issues. Should they be regarded as Malaysian writers, or as foreign writers who happen to use Malaysia as their fictional setting? Alternatively, should MLIE writings *in toto* be classified as “diasporic” since they belong linguistically to the pool of world literatures in

¹ See a historical overview and critical discussion in S. C. Tham, “The Politics of Literary Development in Malaysia,” in *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*, eds. Mohammad A. Quayum and Peter C. Wicks (Petaling Jaya: Longman, 2001), 38-66..

English?² In this paper, we interrogate this positioning of MLIE writers by examining their novelistic portrayals of Malays and the Malay world.

Past studies of the Malay character in MLIE

To date, there are only two studies of novelistic portrayals of Malay characters: *Malay Characters in Malaysian Novels in English* (1988) by Zawiah Yahya, and *Malay in Malaysian and Singapore Literature in English: An Annotated Bibliography* (2006) by Rosli Talif et al. Yahya's pioneering study covers the period 1949-1984, encompassing several changes in Peninsular Malaysia's political identity: British Malaya, post-Independence Malaya, Malaysia with Singapore, and Malaysia without Singapore. Writing at a time when the Malaysian novel in English was seen as "ailing and it won't be long before its fate is sealed,"³ Yahya nevertheless established parameters that have influenced subsequent MLIE studies. For instance, due to the small number of novels available at the time, she included fictionalized biographies and autobiographies in her study. More significantly, by including prose narratives by Malayan-born writers who later became Singapore citizens she set the precedent for the current classification of works by Malaysian-born Britons, Americans, and Australians as "Malaysian literature."

More pertinent to our present purpose are Yahya's aim, approach, methodology, and conclusions. Her aim is first to "reconstruct" the "Malay image" that emerges from the fictional portrayals and then to "authenticate the Malay elements" in them. Her approach is to "combine the literary analysis of characterisation with a sociological analysis of Malay society,"⁴ and the standard she uses for authentication is that fictional portrayals "should mirror reality as accurately as is possible."⁵ Using E. M. Forster's delineation of "round" and "flat" characters⁶, she divides the characters into "major" (round) and "minor" (flat). The minor characters are then divided by gender and further subdivided by their occupations before their narrative functions and fidelity to reality are discussed. She finds the Malay population in the novels "incredibly small and mostly flat in character."⁷ To her, they reflect a social

² Noritah Omar, "Malaysian Poetic Licence: Writing Home and Away," in *Regenerative Spirit Volume 1: Polarities of Home and Away, Encounters and Diasporas, in Post-colonial Literatures*, eds. Nena Bierbaum, Syd Harrex and Sue Hosking (Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2003), 105-117.

³ Yahya, *Malay Characters in Malaysian Novels in English*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (UK: Pelican, 1996), 75-85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

reality that existed “between the Japanese Occupation and the period after Independence” because they are mainly poor fisherfolk, *padi*-planters, lowly government and domestic servants, midwives and prostitutes. She notes that even novels written during the 1970s and 1980s fail to represent the contemporary Malay society with its large, urbanised, English-educated Malay middle class, its “new breed” of professional women, its new privileged class of Malay leaders in the public and private sectors, and the changing life style and occupations of rural Malays.

With regard to personality traits, she remarks on the predominance of negative types and stereotypes; among them, the lazy Malay, the alcoholic schoolteacher, poker-playing chauffeurs, and corrupt, bullying, or incompetent police constables and soldiers. She notes that the Malay is frequently depicted as being ruled by passion rather than reason, and as having “a penchant for the melodramatic.”⁸ She does not dismiss these negative portrayals as inauthentic, but questions whether they are based on the novelists’ faulty assumptions or prejudice. However, she does single out as inauthentic Mohd Tajuddin Samsuddin’s portrayal of a young Malay guerrilla fighter as a man given to public criticism of his leader’s decisions and actions. In her view, the confrontational style “does not seem to fit into the Malay world.”⁹

The annotated bibliography by Talif et al. lists novels, short stories, poetry, drama, non-fiction, and anthologies from Malaysia and Singapore. The lists are not comprehensive; for instance, only 13 novels in English are listed, of which three are translations of Malay novels. However, the list of novels originally written in English includes nine that were first published between 1993 and 2003. Of interest to us is the Introduction, which explains that the bibliography is the product of a research project aimed at understanding how local literature in English “is used as a means to constructing and representing Malays and Malay culture.”¹⁰ One objective of the research is to examine whether negative constructions of the Malays – especially the “Orientalist or colonialist” stereotype of the Malays as prone to living a life of “decadence, sensuality, laziness, mendacity, irrationality, violence and disorder” – continue to “pervade” Malaysian and Singaporean literature, “particularly in works written in English.”¹¹ Another objective is to ascertain whether such literary

⁸ Ibid., 85.

⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰ Talif et al, *Malay in Malaysian and Singapore Literature in English*, vii.

¹¹ Ibid., vii-ix.

representations “are in any way ethnically or politically biased.”¹² Thus, the annotations are concerned mainly with whether the novels feature Malay characters and show them interacting with non-Malays, and whether they are presented in a sympathetic or negative light.

It may be noted without prejudice that both studies are motivated by a Malay-centric desire to separate positive portrayals of the Malay from negative ones. While understandable, this motivation results in a tendency to judge positive or sympathetic portrayals as being more representative of the “real” or “authentic” Malay, and to connect negative portrayals to colonialist stereotypes and “myths.” This tendency gives rise to philosophical and literary-critical issues. To attempt to classify fictional portrayals as either “authentic” or “myth” is to imply that in empirical reality, there is a monolithic, unchanging, “authentic” Malayness against which to measure the verisimilitude of fictional portrayals. Inevitably, Yahya’s judgment of a Malay character’s confrontational style as not fitting the Malay world raises the question, “Do Malays in the real world never have confrontational exchanges?” A similar question arises in the case of the “myth of the lazy native.” Are there no lazy Malays in the real world? These questions point to a normative tendency in the scholars’ evaluation of MLIE portrayals of the Malay, and one wonders if their concepts of the “real” Malay are not just as mythical, stereotypical and thus as fictional as they deem the negative Malay characters in novels to be. Further, the connection made between negative portrayals in MLIE and colonialist myths suggests that the image of the English-language writer as a mentally colonised subject is very much present in the Malay scholars’ minds. One is inclined to ask whether the scholars are not as “ethnically and politically biased” as they suspect some MLIE writers to be.

The questions raised here relate to the issues of MLIE writers’ relationship to the world of which they write, and of where their writings fit in the landscape of Malaysian literature. MLIE writers are often reminded that their “role and responsibilities are connected to the nation” and that they must represent a true picture of its multicultural reality.¹³ Today, the social reality of Malaysia is no longer the traditional world of the rural Malay, but a multicultural society increasingly urbanised, industrialised and globalised. Nevertheless, the Malays are still the dominant ethnic

¹² *Ibid.*, vii.

¹³ Raihanah Mohd. Mydin, “Malaysia and the Author: Face-to-face with the Challenges of Multiculturalism,” *The International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 5.2 (2009), 44

group (at least on the peninsula); and if the writers' inclusion of their ethnic "others" is to be a measure of their nation-consciousness, we must address the issue of whether and how MLIE novelists portray Malays in their fictional realities and vice versa.¹⁴

Herein lies a problem. Given that in any multicultural society ethnic sensitivities will exist, how realistically can novelists portray ethnic alterity? Suppose that in his real life, a non-Malay writer has dealings with a Malay man who fits the ethnic stereotype of the lazy Malay to a T, can he transfer this person from his real to his fictional world without being suspected of political or ethnic bias? Extrapolating on this point, is it possible that non-Malay MLIE writers avoid having Malay characters in their fiction because they wish to avoid attracting this type of suspicion? Would it then be fair to assume that the absence of Malay characters in their fiction is a sign that they are ignorant of the land of their birth, fail to integrate with the Malays, or lack interest in the nation and its aspirations? It is with the intention of finding non-ethnocentric answers to such questions that the research project¹⁵, of which this paper is the initial part, is being undertaken.

Towards a new paradigm: aims and basic approach

The national literature policy of 1971 was instituted to instil a stronger sense of national identity and unity by promoting the use of the national language for literature. However, it has had a divisive effect. Many non-Malay scholars and writers perceive it as Malay cultural hegemony,¹⁶ while their Malay counterparts feel obliged to defend it as the logical consequence of the national language policy.¹⁷ As a result, the issues of ethnic origin, religion, language, and culture that dominate the national discourse frequently form the framework of academic discourse on MLIE. According to social anthropologist Shamsul A. B., such "ethnicization of knowledge" would "further contribute towards the perpetuation of ethnic division in Malaysia."¹⁸

¹⁴ For discussions of how Malay-language writers portray non-Malays, see Washima Che Dan and Noritah Omar, "Bahasa dan Identiti Nasional dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu Moden dan Kesusasteraan Malaysia Berbahasa Inggeris," in *Penyelidikan Linguistik dan Pembudayaan Bahasa Melayu*, eds. Zaitul Azma Zainon Hamzah et al (2008), and Lisbeth Littrup, "National Identity in Malay Literature," in *A View of Our Own: Ethnocentric Perspectives in Literature*, eds. Fadillah Merican et al (2006), 469.

¹⁵ The research project, funded by Universiti Putra Malaysia under the Post-doctoral Research Fellowship Scheme, is aimed at developing a non-ethnocentric, sociology-based paradigm for MLIE studies.

¹⁶ See Wong Phui Nam's review of *An Anthology of Contemporary Malaysian Literature* edited by Muhammad Haji Salleh, in *Asiatic* 4.1 (2010), 102.

¹⁷ See Nurul Fathehah Aziz and Mohammad A. Quayum, "An Interview with Anwar Ridhwan: A Malaysian National Laureate," in *Asiatic* 4.1 (2010): 87.

¹⁸ Shamsul A. B., "Debating about Identity in Malaysia: A Discourse Analysis," in *Cultural Contestations: Mediating Identities in a Changing Malaysian Society*, ed. Zawawi Ibrahim (London: ASEAN Academic Press, 1998), 35.

In this paper, I present a sociology-based (as opposed to an ideology- or ethnicity-based) approach to the study of MLIE. The approach introduces the idea that in any multi-ethnic society, ethnic differences must loom large in everyday life. Ethnicized and even ethnocentric perspectives should be expected and accepted as part of the society's formal and informal discourses (including its literature). The presence of such discourses does not mean that the society is disintegrating. Rather, it means that the society is engaging in the healthy process of negotiating concepts of social integration. Negotiating concepts of social integration involves asking the question, "What can/must be done to hold society together?" Ultimately, the question is linked to the discourse on national unity, which asks the question, "What does it take for citizens to think or act in a united way in matters of national importance?" Therefore, in literature, negative or absent representations of an ethnic "other" should not be interpreted forthwith as indications of the novelists' ethnocentric animosity. Instead, they should be studied as attempts to negotiate ethnic alterity through the exploration of a spectrum of concepts of social integration ranging from total assimilation on one end to total rejection on the other. Based on these assumptions, the proposed approach involves both a sociological and a literary analysis of texts. The desired outcome is a sociology-based theoretical framework for de-ethnicized reading and discussion of MLIE.

For this particular study, the working definition of the term "Malaysian novels in English" (henceforth "MLIE novels") is based on the original language of composition, the authors' perceptions of their relationship to Malaysia, and the date of first publication. I include only novels originally written in English first published between 1965 and 2010. The year 1965 is selected as the starting point because it marks Singapore's political separation from Malaysia and, arguably, the separate development of the two countries' literature in English. I include novelists who regard Malaysia as either their "only" or their "original" home country, but divide them into "home-based" and "diasporic." "Home-based" writers are defined as Malaysian citizens domiciled in Malaysia at the time the novels were written and published. "Diasporic" writers are those domiciled in other countries, regardless of whether they retain their Malaysian citizenship.¹⁹ The study is based thus on 45 novels published by

¹⁹ Place of domicile is given precedence over citizenship status in the case of "diasporic" writers because in this study, I am more concerned with the writers' perceptions of their relationship to Malaysia, and assume that their perceptions of the relationship will be affected by geographical distance.

28 writers over a period of 45 years: 26 by 17 home-based novelists and 19 by 11 diasporic novelists (see Appendix).

The Malay world in MLIE novels, 1965-2010: a survey

I begin my study by grouping the authors according to their ethnicity, domicile, and number of novels published, to get an overview of each group's contribution to the novel genre (Table 1).

Table 1: MLIE novelists: Overview of ethnicity, gender, domicile, and productivity, 1965-2010

Ethnicity	No. of Novelists	Gender		Domicile		No. of novels
		Men	Women	Home-based	Diasporic	
Malays	7	5	2	6	1	9
Chinese	11	5	6	4	7	16
S. Asian	10	3	7	7	3	20
Total	28	13	15	17	11	45

The table shows that Malays writing in English are poorly represented in the novel genre, relative to their population size (about 55 percent).²⁰ Novelists of South Asian (i.e. Indian and Sri Lankan) origin are the most prolific in relation to their population size (about 10 percent), having contributed 50 percent of the novels. Ethnic Chinese novelists follow with 36 percent of total novels. Two facts that do not show up in the table have to be noted. First, at the point of writing there is only one home-based ethnic Chinese novelist writing, the others having either died or stopped writing. Secondly, diasporic and women novelists came on the scene only in the mid-1990s. The high figures for these two groups are an indication of a high rate of productivity over a relatively short period. Women novelists, for example, accounted for 26 (68%) of the 38 novels published between 1992 and 2010.

In terms of whether the novels have Malaysian settings and major Malay characters (see Table 2), a high proportion (38 out of 45, or 84%) of the novels are set

²⁰ Many Malays write in English, but their preferred genres are journalistic articles, memoirs, poetry, short stories, stage plays, and screenplays.

either in Malaya-Singapore or in present-day Malaysia, with the incidence being higher in home-based novels than in diasporic ones. However, only 22 novels (49%) feature Malay characters with major roles, of which a mere four are by diasporic writers.

Table 2: Incidence of home-based and diasporic novels with Malaysian setting and major Malay characters, 1965-2010

	Total novels		Malaysian setting		Major Malay characters	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
All novels	45	100	38	84	22	49
Home-based	26	100	24	92	18	73
Diasporic	19	100	14	74	4	21

Table 3 is an analysis of whether the novelists' ethnicity, gender, and domicile have any bearing on their propensity (or non-propensity) to include Malays in their fictional worlds.

Table 3: Authors' ethnicity, gender, domicile in relation to Malay presence in MLIE novels, 1965-2010

Authors' ethnicity, gender	Home-based novels		Diasporic novels	
	Strong Malay presence	Weak/No Malay presence	Strong Malay presence	Weak/No Malay presence
Malay (M)	4	0	2	0
Malay (F)	3	0	-	-
Chinese (M)	3	1	1	2
Chinese (F)	2	0	1	6
S. Asian (M)	6	0	-	-
S. Asian (F)	0	7	0	7
Total novels	18	8	4	15

The figures show a strong Malay presence in all novels by Malays, regardless of the authors' gender and domicile. Among ethnic Chinese authors, domicile appears to be a key factor; novels by home-based writers are more likely to have Malay characters than novels by diasporic writers. Among novelists of South Asian origin, on the other hand, the key factor is gender. The novels by men, all home-based, have strong Malay presence; but the novels by women, regardless of domicile, have few or no Malay characters. Overall, the table shows that diasporic, non-Malay novelists are less likely to portray Malays in their fictional worlds.

An important sociological point, which does not show up in the table, has to be noted here. Most of the non-Malay writers who accord Malay characters a strong presence in their novels were born no later than 1945, while most of the writers whose novels have minimal Malay presence were born in the 1960s and later. The difference in age points to a difference in the two groups' experience of multiethnic living. Generally, the older generation has had experience of Malayan-Malaysian society as pluralistic²¹, pluralism being the preferred way of managing the various ethnic groups during the colonial and post-Independence period up to the so-called "race riots" of May 1969. The younger generation's experience of multiethnic living, on the other hand, would be profoundly coloured by policies instituted after the riots to restore order and redress societal imbalances. We shall now consider the development of the MLIE novel and novelistic portrayals of Malays in the light of these policies.

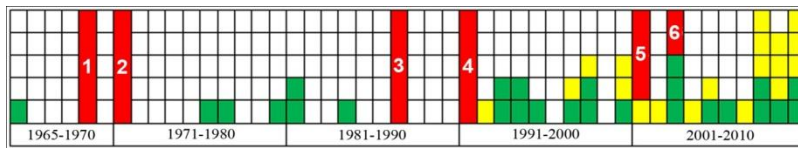
Politics and the development of the MLIE novel

Between 1965 and 2010, the novel genre in MLIE grew slowly and sporadically, and did not begin to show signs of viability until the mid-1990s. Table 4 below shows the relationship between political events and the output pattern of novels in those 45 years. The pattern that emerges suggests that political unrest and government measures to suppress dissent had the effect of "silencing"²² novelists, while signs of political liberalisation resulted in a rise in the publication of their works.

²¹ In sociology, the term "pluralistic" describes societies where people of different ethnicities live "side by side but separately, within the same political unit" and where each group "holds its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways" J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1948), 304-5.

²² By "silencing," I do not mean that writers stop writing. I surmise that publishers would be reluctant to publish their works in times of political uncertainty because of the Printing Presses and Publications Act, first instituted by the British in 1948, and revised by the Malaysian government in 1972 and 1984, each time with more restrictions.

Table 4: Impact of politics on output of MLIE novels, 1965-1990



- Home-based novels
■ Diasporic novels
■ Significant political events:
 1. 1969: Race riots.
 2. 1971: New Economic Policy; language & literature policies; Islamic resurgence.
 3. 1987: "Operation *Lalang*" repressive action.
 4. 1991: Vision 2020; "Bangsa Malaysia".
 5. 2001: PM declares Malaysia an Islamic state.
 6. 2003: Reinstatement of English for teaching mathematics & science.

It is notable that the 10-year hiatus in the publication of novels between 1965 and 1976 coincides with the socio-political unrest leading up to the 1969 race riots (red column 1), and following the 1971 implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the national language and national literature policies (red column 2). The 8-year hiatus between 1984 and 1993 coincides with the socio-political unrest of the mid-1980s that culminated in the so-called "Operation *Lalang*" in 1987 (red column 3), a series of repressive actions that saw the arrest and detention without trial of more than 100 opposition leaders and political activists, and the revoking of the publishing licenses of several newspapers.

Conversely, the surge in literary production during the 1990s coincides with the announcement made in early 1991 (red column 4) by the then Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, of the "Vision 2020" and "Bangsa Malaysia" policies, part of his plan to drive Malaysia towards "developed nation" status by 2020. The policies' implied promise of a more liberalised, more outward looking, and less racially discriminatory mode of government was affirmed in 1996 in *The Asian Renaissance* by Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, then Deputy Prime Minister. These policies may have encouraged international publishers to pay attention to the writings of Malaysians living abroad, for there has been a steady stream of diasporic novels since 1997. The overall response to the "Vision 2020" was particularly strong from women. In that decade, Malaysian women novelists made an impactful debut, accounting for seven of the nine home-based novels, and three of the five diasporic novels published between 1992 and 2000.

The break in the publication of home-based novels in 2001 and 2002 may be related to Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's controversial declaration on 29 September

2001, less than three weeks after the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, that Malaysia is an Islamic state²³ (red column 5). However, publication of home-based novels resumed after 2003, when the government decided to revert to using English as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science in schools²⁴ (red column 6). Particularly noticeable is the increase in the number of MLIE novels by Malays after this partial reversal of the national language policy. In the 40 years between 1965 and 2005, only three novels by two home-based Malays were published. However, in the four years between 2006 and 2010, four home-based Malay novelists made their debut. Three of them were born either before or during the 1941-1945 Japanese Occupation, and their novels are based wholly or partly on their experiences of the colonial education system. This seems to suggest that until 2003, older Malays had anxieties about writing creatively in English²⁵ and probably felt as marginalised by the national language policy as their non-Malay counterparts, if not more so. The most significant finding, then, is that political events and government policies very likely had a major impact on the output of MLIE novels.

Politics and the portrayal of Malays in MLIE novels

The second most significant finding is that two aspects of post-1969 politics very likely had an inhibitory effect on MLIE novelists' portrayal of Malays and the Malay world. The first aspect relates to the legislations curbing freedom of expression in the years following the 1969 riots. The most potent of these legislations is the one criminalising the raising of "sensitive issues" – most potent because the term "sensitive issues" has never been defined clearly but, through usage by Malay nationalists and politicians, has come to mean anything deemed critical of the Malays.²⁶ The second aspect relates to the Islamic resurgence that began in the mid-1970s, resulting in an intricately bound relationship between state and religion and, most significantly, a government ruling in 1989 prohibiting non-Muslims from using

²³ This declaration has been contested as unconstitutional by constitutional lawyers and opposition leaders, including the leader of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). See Tommy Thomas, "Is Malaysia an Islamic State?" *The Malaysian Bar*, http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/constitutional_law/is_malaysia_an_islamic_state_.html.

²⁴ At the time of writing this paper, the policy is in the process of being dismantled; from 2012, children starting school will again be taught mathematics and science in the national language.

²⁵ It is a well-known fact that after 1971, some Malay writers who had been writing in English, such as the poet Muhammad Haji Salleh and the dramatist Syed Alwi, stopped writing in English and wrote in Malay instead.

²⁶ For a recent example, see the article "Lee Kuan Yew Should Not Raise Sensitive Issues on Malaysia: Zahid" in *New Straits Times*, 17 September 2010, http://www.nst.com.my/nst/articles/LeeKuanYewshouldnotraisesensitiveissuesonMalaysia_Zahid/Article/.

42 Arabic-Malay words relating to Islamic theology and practice; among them *Allah* (God)²⁷, *salat* (liturgical prayer), and *Ka'bah* (the holy shrine in Mecca).²⁸ In this discussion, I shall use the term “Malay-Muslim Policies” to mean specifically the exclusivist policies and legislations resulting from the convergence of Malay- and Muslim-centred ideologies, partly because they are intertwined, and partly because in the minds of many Malaysians, political Islamisation is “little more than a guise for Malay political-cultural-social dominance.”²⁹

The inhibitory effect of Malay-Muslim Policies on the portrayal of Malays in English-language novels becomes evident when we compare the Malay characters in pre- and post-1969 novels in English. The 1965 novel, *Run Tiger Run*, depicts a Malay schoolteacher, Sobri, with a “bohemian life-style” who “spends his free time getting drunk in cabarets and bars and out in the streets.”³⁰ Such an explicit portrayal of “un-Islamic” Malay behaviour is not to be found in any novel written after 1969. The character that comes closest, in terms of his liking for women, is Inspector Hashim in Lee Kok Liang’s *Flowers in the Sky* (1981). However, the narrative function of this characterisation is to establish that Hashim has a positive attitude towards women because he has a healthy attitude towards sex, in contrast to the non-Malay male characters, whose misogyny and gynophobia are attributed to their physically or psychologically caused sexual dysfunctions.

Presumably, portrayal of a Malay profligate is permissible if the character is a villain; but there are few Malay villains in home-based MLIE novels. Characters of dubious morality with Malay names appear in two novels published in the 1990s; but in both cases, it is established that they are not “really” Malays. Panglima, the out-and-out villain in Lloyd Fernando’s *Green is the Colour* (1993) has his origins in an unspecified non-Muslim country in mainland Southeast Asia. The character who confesses to a murder in Chuah Guat Eng’s *Echoes of Silence* (1994) is a Muslim

²⁷ One repercussion of the ban was the so-called “Allah controversy” of 2009–2010. It began in 2008, when the government banned the Roman Catholic Church from using the word “Allah” to translate the word “God” in its Malay-language newsletter intended for Malay-literate Christians from Sabah and Sarawak. The Archbishop in Malaysia challenged the ban and on 31 December 2009, the High Court decided in favour of the church, which led to much heated debate and social turmoil. For a contemporary report of events and a discussion of their political implications, see Amrita Mahli, “Identity Politics,” *Inside Story*, last modified 20 January 2010, <http://inside.org.au/identity-politics>.

²⁸ Ahmad F. Yousif, “Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: An Islamic Response to Non-Muslim Concerns.” Paper presented at the International Association for the History of Religions, Yogyakarta, 27 September–3 October, 2004, http://i-epistemology.net/attachments/850_Ajiss21-4%20-%20Yousif%20-%20Islamic%20Revivalism%20in%20Malaysia.pdf, 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁰ Yahya, *Malay Characters in Malaysian Novels in English*, 48.

convert of uncertain ethnic origin, and the reader is left with the impression that the confession is false. Villains who are “real” Malays have appeared only in the novels published in the last few years, and they conform to the types that have long been a standard feature in Malay-language fiction: a corrupt politician in Brian Gomez’ *Devil’s Place* (2008); a corrupt government official in Rozlan Mohd. Noor’s *21 Immortals: Inspector Mislán and the Yee Sang Murders* (2010); and the head of a corporation linked to a corrupt politician in Chuah’s *Days of Change* (2010).

The inhibitory effect of Malay-Muslim Policies on home-based novelists is also evident in the way they resort to techniques of indirection to express their concerns about the sociological impact of the Policies. One technique is to set the novel in the historical past (although not all novels set in the past deal with Malay-Muslim Policies). In Fernando’s *Scorpion Orchid* (1976), his exploration of Malaysia’s post-1969 race relations is set in 1950s Singapore. A second technique is to be ambiguous about the time in which the narrative is set. In *Green is the Colour*, the indications of the time of the fictional events are so vague and confusing that scholars tend to locate their discussions of the novel in the post-1969 scenario of *Scorpion Orchid*,³¹ even though there is ample textual evidence that the issues explored in the novel relate to the Islamic resurgence and the socio-political controversies culminating in the 1987 Operation *Lalang*. A third technique is to use emblems or symbols. In K. S. Maniam’s *In a Far Country* (1993), the noble/savage ambivalence of the tiger, described by the major Malay character as “the oldest symbol of [Malay] civilisation,” is used to explore and communicate feelings of anxiety and ambivalence about Malay-Muslim Policies.

Malay writers have generally avoided using their portrayals of their Malay characters to contest or problematise Malay-Muslim Policies. In Ellina Abdul Majid’s first novel, *Perhaps in Paradise* (1997) the narrator’s memory of her childhood in Kuala Lumpur at the time of the 1969 riots is merely a frame for a contemporary story about marital abuse in an upper middle class Malay family. Religious issues arising from an interethnic marriage are touched upon in her second novel, *Khairunissa: A Good Woman* (1998), but the book cover declares this to be a “romantic novel.” Of the four novels published after 2006, Adibah Amin’s *This Side of the Rainbow* (2006)

³¹ For instance, see Mohammad A. Quayum, “Imagining ‘Bangsa Malaysia’: Race, Religion and Gender in Lloyd Fernando’s *Green is the Colour*,” in *Reclaiming Place and Space: Issues in New Literatures*, eds. Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Ganakumaran Subramaniam (2003), 179-194.

is based on her life as a university student in Singapore. Shahriza Hussein's *Legacy* (2008) is a historical novel set mainly in British Malaya. Shaari Isa's *Kirkby: the Life and the Loves* (2009) is a fictionalised account of his experiences in a teacher training college in Britain in the 1950s. Noor's *21 Immortals: The Yee Sang Murders* is a police-crime story. The one exception, to be discussed later, is Samsuddin's *The Price Has Been High* (1984)³².

We have noted that novels by home-based South Asian women show little Malay presence and tend to centre on the authors' own communities. At first glance, this seems to corroborate the observation made by an Islamic scholar that because of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia, "non-Muslims have become more conscious of their own particular ethno-religious identity vis-a-vis Muslims."³³ However, closer reading of the novels shows that although the novels revolve around South Asian characters, their fictional worlds are by no means mono-ethnic. Most of the stories are set in contemporary, multicultural, urban centres, and the plots often involve strong bonds of friendship or love between South Asian, Chinese, and other non-Malay characters. In Uma Mahendran's *The Twice Born* (1998), the main character, a doctor of Sri Lankan ancestry, has a thirty-year friendship with a Chinese doctor, and his daughter is married to a non-Indian. Marie G. Louis's first novel, *The Road to Chandibole* (1994) features a romance between an Indian woman and a Chinese-Dutch Eurasian man; and her third novel, *The Eleventh Finger* (2000), has three narrators, two of whom are Chinese and the third a Chinese-English Eurasian. Frequent references to aspects of Chinese life are made in Aneeta Sundararaj's *The Banana Leaf Men* (2003), a wittily written critique of the ethnocentric prejudices prevailing among upper middle class Indian Malaysians. In Shoba Mano's *Love's Treacherous Terrain* (2003), the main characters are an Indian man, his Chinese fiancée, a young Indian woman, and her Chinese best friend.

With such evidence, it cannot be said that South Asian women novelists have turned inward into themselves. Nor can it be said that they have turned away from the Malays. As pointed out in Talif's annotated bibliography, although there is "no direct mention of the Malays in any part" of *Love's Treacherous Terrain*, there are a "few subtle references ... pertaining to the Islamic society and authority, which is to a

³² This is the first Malay-authored novel in the period under study. Further research will have to be done to ascertain if it is the first-ever in Malaysian history.

³³ Yousif, "Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia," 34.

certain extent an implicit reference to the Malays” (italics added).³⁴ The question begging to be asked is why references to the Malays have to be “subtle” and “implicit.” A possible answer is the abovementioned ruling prohibiting non-Muslims from using certain words relating to Islam.

Further research is needed to ascertain whether and to what extent the weak Malay presence in the novels of home-based, South Asian women may be attributed to Malay-Muslim Policies. However, it is worth noting that their diasporic counterparts do not seem to feel the need to be “subtle” when making their few references to the Malay world. In Rani Manicka’s *The Rice Mother* (2002), Minah, a minor character, is described in warm tones by the main narrator. Preeta Samarasan’s novel, *Evening is the Whole Day* (2008), centres on an unsolved mystery in the Rajasekharan family; but in the narration of events that occur in the 1960s and thereafter, we find frankly critical presentations of issues relating to Malay-Muslim Policies, among them the claim of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay sovereign right). Shamini Flint’s novel, *Inspector Singh Investigates: a Most Peculiar Malaysian Mystery* (2009), is based on the notion that a Chinese man’s decision to convert himself to Islam so that he can get incontestable custody of his children and at the same time marry his Muslim mistress could be cause for murder.

The few Malay characters that appear in diasporic novels tend to be one-dimensional. Mostly, they appear only now and again like spectral dots on the country’s landscape. In Tash Aw’s *Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), they are roadside fruit sellers, who appear to one of the main characters as indistinguishable from one another.³⁵ In Tan Twan Eng’s *The Gift of Rain* (2007), set mainly in British Penang, they are boatmen providing silent service to the Chinese-English Eurasian Philip Hutton. On the rare occasions Malays are seen close to, and speak, as in Samarasan’s *Evening is the Whole Day* and Shirley Lim’s *Joss and Gold* (2001), they are caricatures of supporters of Malay-Muslim Policies, chiding the non-Malay characters in fractured English for not speaking the national language.

The third most significant finding then, is that portrayals of Malays in diasporic novels are discernibly different from those in home-based novels. To illustrate this point, I shall briefly compare portrayals of Malays in three pairs of home-based and

³⁴ Talif et al., *Malay in Malaysian and Singapore Literature in English*, 17.

³⁵ In Tash Aw’s second novel, *Map of the Invisible World* (London: HarperCollins Fourth Estate, 2009), Adam, the Indonesian Eurasian protagonist, has a Malay half brother, Johan, who lives in Malaysia and who likes fast cars.

diasporic novels. The pairings are based on the comparability of the novels' themes or settings.

The first pair is *In a Far Country* by home-based K. S. Maniam and *Dark Demon Rising* (1997) by diasporic Tunku Halim Abdullah. In both novels, the world of the rural, traditional Malay is depicted as inhabited by characters with some kind of mystical connection to the land and its unseen forces. Maniam uses this mystical connection to problematise the non-Malay's quest for recognition as an equal citizen and a sense of belonging. Abdullah uses the mystery of Malay magic to confirm the Kiplingesque (or Malay-Muslim Political) idea that the Malay world is incomprehensible and inaccessible to westerners (or non-Malays).

The second pair is home-based Chuah's *Echoes of Silence* and diasporic Beth Yahp's *Crocodile Fury* (1992). Both novels deal with the Chinese Malaysian's fear of the Malays following the 1969 riots. In Chuah's novel, the traumatised narrator returns home to find her fears allayed and her prejudices proven baseless through her encounters with Malays in a small town where she is a stranger. In Yahp's novel, the fearful anxiety that infuses the fugue-like recollections of the unnamed narrator, her mother, and her grandmother is amplified by the repeated reference to "natives" who are faceless and nameless throughout.

The third pair is home-based Fernando's *Green is the Colour* and diasporic Lim's *Joss and Gold*, two novels that look critically at the 1969 riots and the impact of post-1969 policies and politics on the Malays from the perspective of the 1980s. In Fernando's novel, the Malay world is made up of Malay-Muslims with various socio-economic backgrounds, educational experiences, religious values, political views, and concepts of social integration. Through this portrayal of a heterogeneous society in flux, Fernando problematises issues important to nation building during the 1970s and 1980s: the Constitution's definition of Malay identity³⁶, the divisive forces unleashed by those who use Malay-Muslim Policies for selfish ends, and the inability of Malay-Muslims who value more inclusive and egalitarian concepts of social integration to neutralise the divisive forces. In Lim's novel, such nuances are absent. The few Malay characters in the novel are seen from two viewpoints: that of a diasporic Chinese

³⁶ Article 160 of the Malaysian Constitution defines "Malay" as "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person." *Constitution of Malaysia*, <http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/malaysia.pdf>, 131

Malaysian who has settled in Singapore, and that of an American revisiting Malaysia after a decade-long absence. They are also seen in two timeframes: 1969, when they are politically engaged university students, and 1981, when they have become successful entrepreneurs and professionals. However, they are seen consistently as Malay-Muslim nationalists, whose concept of national identity and unity is based on total assimilation through conversion to Islam and adoption of Malay culture.

These comparisons show up a difference in the way the diasporic and the home-based novelists relate to Malaysia. What stands out in the diasporic novels is the psychologically distant and distancing way the Malay characters are portrayed and their “otherness” emphasised, communicating implicitly or explicitly the impossibility of social integration between non-Malays and Malays.³⁷ In contrast, the home-based novels show that despite legal and cultural restrictions, the authors are prepared to engage with the Malay world in order to problematise Malay-Muslim Policies and explore alternative concepts of social integration.

Some concepts of social integration in home-based portrayals of the Malay

To uncover the concepts of social integration embedded in home-based portrayals of the Malay world, I shall focus on a few novels in which the alterity of Malay-Muslim Policies is being challenged from identifiable ideological standpoints. Here I look at four standpoints: Islamic, Hindu Tamil, “Leftist-Intellectual” and “global”. Although different in detail, these four standpoints represent concepts of social integration based on ethical governance, non-racism, and social justice.

An Islamic challenge to Malay-Muslim Policies is discernible in Samsuddin’s *The Price Has Been High*. The novel, a story of guerrilla warfare during the Japanese Occupation, has been described as “out of step with its time.”³⁸ However, when one reads it in the socio-political context of the years preceding its publication, one becomes aware that it addresses a major concern among Muslim intellectuals since the 1970s; namely, the “underdeveloped” leadership quality of the Malay elites, who are perceived as “suppressing the proper understanding of Islamic values amongst the Malays”³⁹ with feudalistic and racially discriminating ideas.

³⁷ This is not to suggest that diasporic novels should be labelled “non-Malaysian,” but rather that they should be studied as representing types of sociological and literary responses to Malay-Muslim Policies.

³⁸ Yahya, *Malay Characters in Malaysian Novels in English*, 22.

³⁹ Shahrudin Maaruf, *Concept of the Hero in Malay Society* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1982), 120.

Samsuddin's novel can thus be understood as a didactic discourse on Islamic values, and the portrayal of the characters a working out of Islamic ideals of how to conduct oneself with justice and honour in one's dealings with invaders, oppressors, fellow Muslims, and non-Muslims. The two main characters, Rahim and Hassan, seem too good to be true because they exemplify the Islamic concepts of a good follower and a good leader respectively. Rahim's public criticism of Hassan is uncharacteristic of Malay behaviour because the Islamic imperative to speak up against wrongdoings is being valorised, not Malay feudal custom or *adat*. Although the main characters are Malay, there are sufficient portrayals of good and honourable non-Malays and non-Muslims (including a Japanese colonel) to suggest that Tajuddin's preferred concept of social integration is based on Islamic ideals of moral integrity, social justice, non-racism, and religious pluralism. The concept is summed up in an episode where a Malay guerrilla fighter prays at the mass burial of the multiethnic victims of war: "... Bahar's prayers were for every one of them, Muslims and non-Muslims. They were, after all, the children of God."⁴⁰

The Hindu Tamil challenge to Malay-Muslim Policies is explicit in the novels of K. S. Maniam. Nearly all his narrators are local-born descendants of Hindu Tamils brought to the country during colonial times to provide manual labour for the rubber plantations and public works. This narrative technique gives his novels their communally centred flavour. As a result, his Malay characters frequently come across as the adversarial "other" with whom the narrators engage in a two-fold conflict over issues arising from Malay-Muslim Policies; one fold relating to the Hindu Tamils' right to a sense of belonging and stake-holding in the land of their birth, and the other fold to the erosion of their ethnic identity and their cultural and historical heritage. Despite these ethnocentric concerns, the Indian characters are often shown surrounded by friends of various ethnicities, including Malays, with whom they have friendly and mutually supportive relationships. The narrators' conflicts are thus not with Malays as an ethnic group, but with a socio-political system that discriminates against underprivileged Hindu Tamils.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Mohd. Tajuddin Samsuddin, *The Price Has Been High* (Kuala Lumpur: Arenabuku, 1984), 254.

⁴¹ In Maniam's short stories, those who discriminate against the underprivileged Tamils include wealthy Indians and bigoted Chinese. See, for example, "The Eagles" and "Removal in Pasir Panjang," in K. S. Maniam, *Haunting the Tiger* (London: Skoob Books Publishing, 1996).

In exploring the conflicts, Maniam writes with a strong sense of social injustice from the perspective and in the voice of an economically and ethnically marginalised minority; and he offers no concept of social integration that might be considered a compromise with the ideologies of Malay-Muslim Policies. Instead, he offers combat, either implicitly through the plot or explicitly through his characters. In *In a Far Country*, the combat is worked out through the plot. The adversary is the Malay, Zul, who identifies with the indigenous Malayan tiger to justify his exclusive claim to the land and repeatedly reminds the Indian narrator, Rajan, that he can see the tiger he seeks only if he changes his essential self. In post-1969 political terms, this means that Rajan has to become a Malay-Muslim to enjoy the same privileges as Zul. Rajan finds the prospect of giving up his religious and ethnic identity unacceptable, but does not question or dispute Zul's claim. He merely returns to his own community to live in pluralistic co-existence with people of other ethnicities. However, through the plot, Zul's self-image as being strong and noble like the tiger is first undermined and then dealt a fatal blow. Despite their government-sponsored privileges, Zul and his son fail to make progress while unprivileged non-Malays around them prosper. Then Zul's son runs amok, an act of irrational violence that exposes the ironic ambivalence of the Malay's identification with the savage/noble tiger, and leaves open for interrogation his (the Malay's) very nature.

In *Between Lives* (2003), the adversary is the government, which is determined to evict Sellamma, an old Indian woman, from the land on which she has lived all her life. The main narrator is Sumitra, a young, westernised social worker sent to persuade Sellamma to give up her efforts to resist eviction. Through her encounters with Sellamma, she rediscovers her ethnic roots and her historically determined social responsibilities, and ends up identifying with Sellamma and her cause. Together with her multiethnic friends, Sumitra uses the Internet to wage a war against social injustice, a war that must continue—she declares as the novel ends—until the marginalised “return from our exile.” The word “exile” reveals how keenly Maniam feels the injustice of Malay-Muslim Policies. From this and the descriptions of his narrators' relationship with their friends of other ethnicities, we infer that his preferred concept of social integration is based primarily on non-discrimination, equal opportunities, and religious-cultural pluralism.

A more compromising approach to the alterity of Malay-Muslim Policies is found in the novels of Fernando, Lee, and Chuah, who are here labelled “Leftist

Intellectuals” because their concept of social integration resembles that of the pre-Independence, nationalist Leftist English-Speaking Intellectuals (LESI)⁴². The LESI believed in the need to have Malay as the national language, to identify with the rural Malays, and to debunk colonialist myths and other ideologies.⁴³ Conscious that their education had cut them off from their own ethnic roots, they saw themselves as having a special role to play in “helping towards unity” because they were “forerunners of people drawn together from the different communities”⁴⁴ by a common language that is acquired and not their mother tongue. The LESI’s approach to national unity is a form of acculturative amalgamation, a process by which unity in a multiethnic society is achieved through the people’s willingness to know, adapt to, and adopt aspects of one another’s culture without altogether losing their ethnic identity. Several features common to the novels of Fernando, Lee, and Chuah suggest that they subscribe to the same view and approach.

First, nearly all their main characters are English-educated individuals of various ethnicities, who are depicted as being out of touch with the country and its people. In *Scorpion Orchid*, Guan Kheng, the ethnic Chinese, describes himself as “in reality a stranger who had never understood the people among whom he had been born, or the land in which he had spent his whole life,”⁴⁵ while the Malay, Sabran, is reminded by a Malay prostitute that his English education has made him irrelevant in her world of the hardcore rural poor.⁴⁶ In *Green is the Colour*, the westernised Malays, Sara and Dahlan, fall victim to the unscrupulous Panglima because of their ignorance of the realities of power play in local politics. In *Flowers in the Sky*, Mr. K, a surgeon of Sri Lankan origin, observes without self-reflection that his Indian wife’s English education has left her with “a general distaste for the stupidity [sic] of the non-English educated.”⁴⁷ In *Echoes of Silence*, the Chinese Malaysian, Ai Lian, confesses that she “was more of a stranger” in her own land than her English lover.⁴⁸ In *Days of*

⁴² The non-Malay left-wing English-speaking intellectuals (LESI) were politically active from about 1948 to the mid-1960s. See James Puthucheary, *No Cowardly Past: Writings, Poems, Commentaries*, eds. Dominic Puthucheary and Jomo K. S. (Kuala Lumpur: Insan, 1998). See also Poh Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee and Koh Kay Yew, eds., *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club and the Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore* (Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya, 2010).

⁴³ Puthucheary, *No Cowardly Past*, 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁵ Lloyd Fernando, *Scorpion Orchid* (Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1992), 84.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁷ Lee, *Flowers in the Sky* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1981), 30.

⁴⁸ Chuah, *Echoes of Silence* (Kuala Lumpur: Holograms, 2009), 9.

Change, the economically successful, westernised Malay, Hafiz, has grown remote from his hometown and lost his identity, a state of affairs symbolised by his amnesia.

Secondly, in the political and thematic structures of their novels, the central Malay characters are always placed in social and situational positions where their leadership qualities are required to bring the fictional conflict to a harmonious resolution. If they are the “heroes,” they are shown to be good people, although with human weaknesses; and the trials and tribulations they go through are journeys to the discovery of the leadership potential within themselves. Sabran in *Scorpion Orchid* has to learn that his bilingualism is needed to build cultural bridges between the non-English speaking Malay majority and the non-Malay speaking minorities.⁴⁹ Inspector Hashim, the crowd control specialist in *Flowers in the Sky*, must understand that to prevent a conflict among Indians from escalating into violence, he has to give up his personal ambitions temporarily and let an Indian politician take the credit for his work of reconciliation. In *Days of Change*, Hafiz must live up to his name (which means “the preserver”) by taking steps to protect his family, his land, and the ecology of his home district from a politically connected corporation intent on flooding the district’s valley for a Disneyland-type theme park.

Lastly, these novelists’ portrayals of the Malays are frequently drawn from the “inside.” They use narrative techniques such as free indirect discourse, partial stream-of-consciousness, and (in Chuah’s case) first-person narration to take the reader into the minds of their Malay characters and to present the world through their eyes. These techniques reduce the psychic distance between the Malay world and the reader, enabling the novelists to dismantle essentialist and absolutist ideologies, expose the corruption and hypocrisy of those who use such ideologies to wield oppressive power, and reveal the heterogeneous, multi-voiced, and conflict-ridden reality of Malay-Muslim society.

It should be pointed out that all the novelists discussed so far in this section were born either before or during the Japanese Occupation. In the works of younger writers, we do not find the same preoccupation with the need to transcend ethnic differences. In *Devil’s Place* and *21 Immortals*, topical socio-political issues and Malay characters have important narrative and thematic functions; but Malaysians of all ethnicities are

⁴⁹ Chuah Guat Eng, “The Translator as Agent of Nation Building: Lloyd Fernando’s *Scorpion Orchid* Revisited” (paper presented at Found in Translation: A Common Voice in a Multicultural World Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 23-25 July, 2010), <http://english.um.edu.my/anuvaada/PAPERS/CHUAH.pdf>

shown living, loving, suffering, and working together to combat crime, corruption, and injustice. National unity is taken for granted. Social integration is seen not in terms of transcending ethnic differences, but in terms of embracing diversity in all its forms.⁵⁰ The underlying concept of social integration in these two novels may thus be described as “global.” The authors’ fictional worlds are populated by characters that literary scholars may consider stereotypes (e.g. the Malay police officer, the corrupt politician and his cronies, the Chinese triad leader and his mistresses, and the Eurasian guitar-playing singer-songwriter dreaming of international success) or unacceptably non-conformist (e.g. the long-haired Malay who owns a pub). Yet who is to say that such characters are not part and parcel of the writers’ reality?

The fact is that the world experienced by the Malaysian novelist writing in English today is radically different from any world that could have been conceived by national literature policy makers in 1970. It is a world in which news of events involving international terrorism and domestic skulduggery are transmitted instantaneously, and with such immediacy, that they tend to inform and shape novelistic structure and plot.⁵¹ It is a world influenced by borderless concepts of social integration bearing little resemblance or relation to the ethnicity-based concepts of national unity constructed by politicians past and present. It is, above all, a world where the information flow is so copious and unending that no one can claim to know everything there is to know about anything, not even the land of his/her birth. So, the question to be asked is not whether the English-language writer is a stranger in the land of his birth, but whether that question should even be asked in contemporary literary scholarship.

Conclusion

At first glance, the view that the Malaysian Anglophone writer is ignorant of the Malay world and uninterested in national issues seems to be supported by the relative absence of Malay characters in MLIE novels. This paper’s non-ethnocentric,

⁵⁰ The non-ethnicized call to embrace difference and non-conformity is particularly marked in recent MLIE short stories, which frequently speak up on behalf of women, children, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals, transvestites, sex-workers, those living with AIDS, and migrant workers.

⁵¹ In *Devil’s Place*, the fear of international terrorism sets off the novel’s tragedy of errors and darkly comic manhunt. In *Days of Change*, news of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre, New York, sets the narrator on a quest for the roots of his faith in a fondly and vividly remembered Malay village that probably does not exist. In Shamini Flint’s *Inspector Singh Investigates: a Bali Conspiracy Most Foul* (2009), the Bali Bombing sets the Hercule Poirot-like Inspector Singh on his second adventure as an ace Singapore detective.

sociology-based study of novelistic portrayals of Malay characters and the Malay world throws new light on the issue. The preliminary findings suggest that exclusivist and restrictive “Malay-Muslim Policies” (i.e.: legislations instituted since the combined resurgence of Malay- and Muslim-centric political consciousness during the 1970s) have influenced both the development of MLIE novels and MLIE portrayals of the Malay world. They may have caused home-based, South Asian women novelists, who first started writing in the 1990s, to avoid writing about the Malays, and diasporic novelists in general to distance themselves from both the Malay-Muslim Policies and the Malays. However, despite the imposition of legal and cultural restrictions, a number of older-generation, home-based novelists have consistently used portrayals of the Malay world to question and challenge the Malay-Muslim Policies, and to explore alternative concepts of social integration. Meanwhile, novels published in recent years by new and younger, home-based writers have shown a trend towards global integration, reflecting the social reality of the English-literate, globalised Malaysian – a reality in which the unity and multiethnic nature of the nation are taken for granted. The conclusion is that the question of whether English-language writers are strangers in the land of their birth is no longer a literary-critical issue because novelists today experience a reality and hold views of social integration radically different from the concepts of reality and national unity favoured by national literature policy makers in the past.

Biographical Note on the Author

Chuah Guat Eng is a novelist and postdoctoral fellow at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interest is in the analysis of fiction using a reading procedure based on Zen epistemology. Email: guateng7@gmail.com

Works Cited

Primary Sources

- Abdul Majid, Ellina. *Perhaps in Paradise*. Kuala Lumpur: The Written Word, 1997.
- . *Khairunnisa: A Good Woman*. Kuala Lumpur: The Written Word, 1998.
- Abdullah, Tunku Halim. *Dark Demon Rising*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1997.
- Amin, Adibah. *This End of the Rainbow*. Penang: Phoenix Press, 2006.
- Aw, Tash. *The Harmony Silk Factory*. London: HarperCollins Fourth Estate, 2005.
- . *Map of the Invisible World*. London: HarperCollins Fourth Estate, 2009.

- Chuah Guat Eng. *Echoes of Silence*. Kuala Lumpur: Holograms, 2009.
- . *Days of Change*. Kuala Lumpur: Holograms, 2010.
- Fernando, Lloyd. *Scorpion Orchid*. Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1992.
- . *Green is the Colour*. Singapore: Landmark Books, 1993.
- Flint, S. *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Most Peculiar Malaysian Murder*. London: Little, Brown & Co., 2009.
- . *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Bali Conspiracy Most Foul*. London: Little, Brown & Co., 2009.
- Gomez, Brian. *Devil's Place*. Kuala Lumpur: Idle Minds, 2008.
- Hussein, Shahriza. *Legacy*. Kuala Lumpur: Editions Didier-Millet, 2008.
- Isa, Shaari. *Kirkby: The Life and the Loves*. Auckland: The Right Connection, 2009.
- Lee, Kok Liang. *Flowers in the Sky*. Singapore: Federal Publications, 1981.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. *Joss and Gold*. New York: Feminist Press, 2001.
- Louis, Marie Gerrina. *The Road to Chandibole*. Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books Asia, 1994.
- . *The Eleventh Finger*. Singapore: SNP Editions, 2001.
- Mahendran, Uma. *The Twice Born*. Kuala Lumpur: Platinum Press, 1998.
- Maniam, K. S. *In a Far Country*. London: Skoob Books Publishing, 1993.
- . *Haunting the Tiger: Contemporary stories from Malaysia*. London: Skoob Books Publishing, 1996.
- . *Between Lives*. Petaling Jaya: Maya Press, 2003
- Manicka, Rani. *The Rice Mother*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002.
- Mano, Shoba. *Love's Treacherous Terrain*. Secunderabad: Om Paperbacks, 2003.
- Noor, Rozlan Mohd. *21 Immortals: Inspector Mislán and the Yee Sang Murders*. Kuala Lumpur: Silverfish, 2010.
- Ong, Johnny. *Run Tiger Run*. Kuala Lumpur: Eastern Universities Press, 1975.
- Samsuddin, Mohd. Tajuddin, *The Price Has Been High*. Kuala Lumpur: Arenabuku, 1984.
- Sundararaj, Aneeta. *The Banana Leaf Men*. Kuala Lumpur: Sensations Pro, 2003.
- Tan, Twan Eng, *The Gift of Rain*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Myrmidon Books, 2007.
- Yahp, Beth. *The Crocodile Fury*. Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development: 2003.

Secondary Sources

- Aziz, Nurul Fathehah and Mohammad A. Quayum. "An Interview with Anwar Ridhwan: A Malaysian National Laureate." *Asiatic* 4.1 (2010): 87-98.
<http://asiatic.iium.edu.my/>
- Constitution of Malaysia. <http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/malaysia.pdf>.
- Che Dan, Washima and Noritah Omar. "Bahasa dan Identiti Nasional dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu Moden dan Kesusasteraan Malaysia Berbahasa Inggeris." In *Penyelidikan Linguistik dan Pembudayaan Bahasa Melayu*, edited by Zaitul Azma Zainon Hamzah et al. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2008.
- Chuah, Guat Eng. "The Translator as Agent of Nation Building: Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* Revisited." Paper presented at MACLALS Found in Translation: A Common Voice in a Multicultural World Conference, University of Malaya Kuala Lumpur, 23-25 July, 2010.
<http://english.um.edu.my/anuvaada/PAPERS/CHUAH.pdf>
- Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Hammondswoth, UK: Pelican, 1966.
- Furnivall, J. S. *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948.
- Ibrahim, Anwar. *The Asian Renaissance*. Singapore: Times Books International, 1996.
- Littrup, Lisbeth. "National Identity in Malay Literature." In *A View of Our Own: Ethnocentric Perspectives in Literature*, edited by Fadillah Merican et al., 469-482. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2006.
- Mahli, Amrita, "Identity Politics," *Inside Story*. Last modified 20 January 2010.
<http://inside.org.au/identity-politics>.
- Mydin, Raihanah Mohd. "Malaysia and the Author: Face-to-Face with the Challenges of Multiculturalism." *The International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 5.2 (2009), 43-63. [http://web.usm.my/ijaps/articles/3_malaysia_\(43-63\)2.pdf](http://web.usm.my/ijaps/articles/3_malaysia_(43-63)2.pdf)
- Omar, Noritah. "Malaysian Poetic Licence: Writing Home and Away." In *Regenerative Spirit Volume 1: Polarities of Home and Away, Encounters and Diasporas, in Post-colonial Literatures*, edited by Nena Bierbaum, Syd Harrex and Sue Hosking, 105-117. Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2003.
- Poh, Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee and Koh Kay Yew, eds. *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club and the Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore*. Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya, 2010.

- Puthucheary, James. *No Cowardly Past: Writings, Poems, Commentaries*. Edited by Dominic Puthucheary and Jomo K. S. Kuala Lumpur: Insan, 1998.
- Quayum, Mohammad A. "Imagining 'Bangsa Malaysia': Race, Religion and Gender in Lloyd Fernando's *Green is the Colour*." In *Reclaiming Place and Space: Issues in New Literatures*, edited by Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Ganakumaran Subramaniam, 179-194. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2003.
- Shamsul A. B. "Debating about Identity in Malaysia: A Discourse Analysis." In *Cultural Contestations: Mediating Identities in a Changing Malaysian Society*, edited by Zawawi Ibrahim. London: ASEAN Academic Press, 1998.
- Talif, Rosli, Noritah Omar and Washima Che Dan, eds. *Malay in Malaysian and Singapore Literature in English: An Annotated Bibliography*. Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia Press, 2006.
- Tham, S. C. "The Politics of Literary Development in Malaysia." In *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*, edited by Mohammad A. Quayum and Peter C. Wicks, 38-66. Petaling Jaya: Longman, 2001.
- Thomas, T. "Is Malaysia an Islamic State?" *The Malaysian Bar*. Last modified 17 November 2005.
http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/constitutional_law/is_malaysia_an_islamic_state_.html.
- Wong, Phui Nam. "Muhammad Haji Salleh, ed. *An Anthology of Contemporary Malaysian Literature*." Review of *An Anthology of Contemporary Malaysian Literature*, edited by Muhammad Haji Salleh. *Asiatic* 4.1 (2010): 102-110.
<http://asiatic.iium.edu.my/>
- Yahya, Zawiah. *Malay Characters in Malaysian Novels in English*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1988.
- Yousif, Ahmad F. "Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: An Islamic Response to Non-Muslim Concerns." Paper presented at the International Association for the History of Religions, Yogyakarta, 27 September–3 October, 2004. http://i-epistemology.net/attachments/850_Ajiss21-4%20-%20Yousif%20-%20Islamic%20Revivalism%20in%20Malaysia.pdf

APPENDIX

Malaysian Novels in English by Home-based and Diasporic Writers in Order of Year of First Publication: 1965-2010

Novels by Home-based Writers

1. Johnny Ong. *Run Tiger Run*. Isle of Man: Times Press, 1965.
2. Lloyd Fernando. *Scorpion Orchid*. Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books Asia, 1976.
3. Johnny Ong. *The Long White Sands*. Kuala Lumpur: Syarikat Pesaka, 1977.
4. Ewe Paik Leong. *Bandits!* Singapore: Times Books International, 1980.
5. Lee Kok Liang. *Flowers in the Sky*. Singapore: Federal Publications, 1981.
6. K. S. Maniam. *The Return*. Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Asia, 1981.
7. Mohd. Tajuddin Samsuddin. *The Price Has Been High*. Kuala Lumpur: Arenabuku, 1984.
8. K. S. Maniam. *In a Far Country*. London: Skoob Books Publishing, 1993.
9. Lloyd Fernando. *Green is the Colour*. Singapore: Landmark Books, 1993.
10. Chuah Guat Eng. *Echoes of Silence*. Kuala Lumpur: Holograms, 1994.
11. Marie Gerrina Louis. *The Road to Chandibole*. Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books Asia, 1994.
12. Marie Gerrina Louis. *Junos*. Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1995.
13. Ellina Abdul Majid. *Perhaps in Paradise*. Kuala Lumpur: The Written Word, 1997.
14. Ellina Abdul Majid. *Khairunnisa: A Good Woman*. Kuala Lumpur: The Written Word, 1998.
15. Uma Mahendran. *The Twice Born*. Kuala Lumpur: Platinum Press, 1998.
16. Marie Gerrina Louis. *The Eleventh Finger*. Singapore: SNP Editions, 2001.
17. Shoba Mano. *Love's Treacherous Terrain*. Secunderabad: Om Paperbacks, 2003.
18. Aneeta Sundararaj. *The Banana Leaf Men*. Kuala Lumpur: Sensations Pro, 2003.
19. K. S. Maniam. *Between Lives*. Petaling Jaya: Maya Press, 2003.
20. Shoba Mano. *Prodigal Child*. Sierra Vista, USA: Treble Hearts Books, 2005.
21. Adibah Amin. *This End of the Rainbow*. Penang: Phoenix Press, 2006.
22. Brian Gomez. *Devil's Place*. Kuala Lumpur: Idle Minds, 2008.

23. Shahriza Hussein. *Legacy*. Kuala Lumpur: Editions Didier-Millet, 2008.
24. Shaari Isa. *Kirkby: The Life and the Loves*. Auckland: The Right Connection, 2009.
25. Chuah Guat Eng. *Days of Change*. Kuala Lumpur: Holograms, 2010.
26. Mohd. Rozlan Noor. *21 Immortals: Inspector Mislán and the Yee Sang Murders*. Kuala Lumpur: Silverfish, 2010.

Novels by Diasporic Writers

1. Beth Yahp. *The Crocodile Fury*. Australia: HarperCollins, 1992.
2. Tunku Halim Abdullah. *Dark Demon Rising*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1997.
3. Yang-May Ooi. *The Flame Tree*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998.
4. Yang-May Ooi. *Mindgame*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000.
5. Tunku Halim Abdullah. *Vermillion Eye*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 2000.
6. Shirley Geok-lin Lim. *Joss and Gold*. New York: Feminist Press & Singapore: Times Book International, 2001.
7. Rani Manicka. *The Rice Mother*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002.
8. Rani Manicka. *Touching Earth*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005.
9. Tash Aw. *The Harmony Silk Factory*. London: HarperCollins Fourth Estate, 2005.
10. Shirley Geok-lin Lim. *Sister Swing*. Singapore/London: Marshall Cavendish, 2006.
11. Tan Twan Eng. *The Gift of Rain*. Newcastle-upon Tyne: Myrmidon Books, 2007.
12. Chiew-Siah Tei. *Little Hut of Leaping Fishes*. Picador, 2008.
13. Preeta Samarasan. *Evening is the Whole Day*. Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008.
14. Shamini Flint. *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Most Peculiar Malaysian Murder*. UK: Little, Brown & Co., 2009.
15. Shamini Flint. *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Bali Conspiracy Most Foul*. UK: Little, Brown & Co., 2009.
16. Tash Aw. *Map of the Invisible World*. London: HarperCollins Fourth Estate, 2009.
17. Chan Ling Yap. *Sweet Offerings*. Indepnpress Publishing Ltd, 2009.

18. Rani Manicka. *The Japanese Lover*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010.
19. Shamini Flint. *Inspector Singh Investigates: The Singapore School of Villainy*.
UK: Little, Brown & Co., 2010.