# Colony, Nation, and Globalisation

## Not at Home in Singaporean and Malaysian Literature

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# Introduction

This book is about the condition of anxiety. It explores literary works that articulate a pervasive uneasiness that attends to the notion of home. It concerns the condition of being deracinated, deculturalised, and displaced, of being neither here nor there—not at home where one should be. We are interested in the realisation that identity markers and cultural signs are perpetually under contestation even within a defined geographical terrain. This book seeks to give a name to these conditions and a history one can trace in Anglophone literary works of Malaya and those of post-independence Singapore and Malaysia.

Home is a physical space; it is also the location of the self, a symbolic terrain invested with social, political, and cultural meanings. To be at home is to identify an image of the self in prevalent ideological discourses; hence, if one is not at home, one is at odds with prevailing social and political conditions. By engaging with debates pertaining to colonialism, nation formation, and globalisation, I argue that Anglophone literary works about colonial Malaya and independent Singapore and Malaysia are projects that invariably narrate a condition wherein one is not at home.

There are five permutations to the condition of not being at home as narrated through the works considered in this book. The first involves geographical dislocation. This condition applied to many, of course, but we are interested in its effect upon British colonial administrators and women who wrote of Malaya in the nineteenth century. In their colonial narratives about Malaya, there is an attempt to create an environment hospitable to the colonial enterprise. This was a response to the condition of not being at home. The second sense of this condition is found in portrayals of Malaya during its period of rapid decolonisation after the Second World War. As nationalist thought and sentiment emerged, Malaya was no longer tenable as a site of mystery, exoticism, and colonial adventure; it could no longer be cast as a home away from home for the British who were stationed there. We find the third sense of not being at home during the post-independence era. It involves writers at

odds with the political landscapes of their own countries, as in the case of writers in contemporary Malaysia and Singapore whose work overtly criticises their national ideologies. The fourth sense of not being at home involves expatriates who are or have been temporarily away from their countries of birth or long-term residence. In response, they often seek to recreate Malaya, Malaysia, and Singapore through novelistic experiments. The fifth sense of not being at home, finally, has to do with globalisation. Given transnational flows of capital, labour, and media images, the boundaries of home and one's sense of belonging may need to be redefined, and this, too, is articulated in literary work.

An historical trajectory runs through these five iterations of not-at-homeness, beginning with the Pangkor Treaty in 1874, whereby British Residents were appointed to various states in what is now Peninsular Malaysia. This residential system in British Malaya was based on the policy of indirect rule devised after the Indian "Mutiny". While Residents were officially advisors to the Sultans, their advice was seldom unheeded. As T. N. Harper argues, "strictly speaking, the British presence was not a state at all, or rather it worked on the pretence that it was not a state" (18). With the subtle installation of colonial institutions, combined with literary portrayals of the inhabitants of Malaya by colonial administrators and authors such as Frank Athelstane Swettenham (1850–1946) and Hugh Charles Clifford (1866–1941) as well as by travel writers such as Isabella Lucy Bird (1831–1904), Malaya was transformed politically and depicted in writing as a quasi-domestic space within the British Empire. The arrival of the British is often narrated in tandem with the humanist ideals of European Enlightenment. The rule of law and the attendant institutions of colonialism were often mapped onto a Malaya portrayed as pre-modern. Inhabitants were hence rendered as unhomely and backward figures who needed to be brought forward into a colonial modernity. In this respect, while Malaya was rendered homely for British administrators and for readers back in England, the inhabitants of Malaya were depicted as figures alienated from their immediate surroundings.

The dismantling of the empire, naturally enough, caused considerable uncertainty among colonial administrators. After the British surrender to the Japanese during the Second World War, the prevailing sentiment in Malaya was that they were no longer legitimate rulers. Subsequently, the anti-colonial battle cry of "*Merdeka*", meaning "freedom" or "independence", led to a new chapter in the history of Malaya. Malaya no longer seemed like the home it once had been to the British sailors, soldiers, policemen, teachers, administrators, and their *memsahibs* stationed there. This sentiment is captured poignantly in Anthony Burgess' novels *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959), works known together as *The Malayan Trilogy*. For the author and lawyer Lee Kok Liang (1927–92), who was studying law in London in the 1950s, the centre would no longer hold, we may say. The eloquent title of his posthumously published

novel *London Does Not Belong to Me* (2003) signalled a sense of disaffection with the imperial centre as well as hope for the postcolonial future of Malaya.

With the separation of Singapore and Malaysia in 1965, the two nations diverged, each pursuing a variant form of nationalism. Nationalism, broadly speaking, is a set of statist discourses that seeks to create a sense of allegiance and belonging, so turning the nation-state into a home for its citizens. In the case of Singapore, the government pursued what may be called a pragmatic mode of nationalism that privileged economic and capitalist considerations above all else. Various labels have been used to describe Singapore's political economy, ranging from "communitarian" (Chua Beng-Huat) to "authoritarian" (Garry Rodan). Debates pertaining to democracy, political freedom, and civil society were often regarded by the government to be of secondary importance compared with the state of the economy. Not surprisingly, literary works have emerged to show that there are those who are not at home within the government's paternal and quasi-authoritarian approach to governance. Not-at-homeness takes the form of political critique and resistance in these works. Lau Siew Mei's *Playing Madame Mao* (2000), which makes comparisons between Lee Kuan Yew and Mao, is a case in point. Given that Lau has emigrated to Australia; one may speculate that, like the protagonist in her novel, she was not at home with Singapore's mode of governance.

Malaysia's nationalism has been said to privilege a major ethnicity at the expense of others. The New Economic Policy, implemented in 1970, sought to address the economic disparity between the new nation's Chinese minority and Malay majority. While, as a policy, it has officially ended in 1990, it remains the dominant state ideology. Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1944–) and Ee Tiang Hong (1933–90), both Malaysian Chinese, were the most prominent authors who left as a result of what they perceived as discriminatory policies. In this respect, the Malaysian nation is no longer home for those who are not regarded as *bumiputeras*, "sons of the soil", a term that underscores the Malay claim to be the indigenous ethnic group. There are those, among them the lawyer, journalist and author Karim Raslan (1963–) who sought to articulate in their work—short stories in Karim's case—their uneasiness with Malaysia as their national home. The novels of K. S. Maniam (1942–) narrate a post-diasporic condition as a response to being marginalised by the prevailing nationalist discourse in Malaysia.

If globalisation implies the interpenetration of cultures facilitated by rapid transnational flows of capital, labour, and commodities, then the boundaries of home and one's sense of belonging to a specific locality and national home may need to be redefined. Can one still consider the nation and its associated locality as determinants of home? This question is particularly relevant when we consider work by authors whose readerships (or who themselves) traverse national boundaries. Hwee Hwee Tan (1974–) is a case in point. She was born in Singapore, lived for a period in the Netherlands, and was educated in the United Kingdom and America. Her novel,

*Mammon Inc.* (2001), narrates the experience of a young Singaporean faced with various career opportunities in Oxford and New York. Given that authors such as Tan may identify with more than one locality and nation, can one say that work devoted to narrating these experiences are re-imagining the idea of what constitutes home? Or is home to be recast in a reflexive manner, to be recalled even as one admits that memory is fallible? Perhaps such is the case with Tash Aw's (1971–) *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005), a novel that presents three overlapping (and at times incompatible) points of view of 1940s Malaya.

The central concern of this book resonates with other recent works on the cultures and literatures of Singapore and Malaysia. In *Occidentalism in Novels of Malaysia and Singapore* (2005), Tamara S. Wagner examines how Anglophone literatures of Singapore and Malaysia continually "reimagin[e] 'the West' … vis-à-vis the impact of its imported literary traditions on English literature" (25). There is a need, then, to acknowledge that the "local" literary traditions of Singapore and Malaysia are always influenced, if they are not engendered, by English literary traditions. Robbie B. H. Goh's *Contours of Culture* (2005) analyses spatial, social, and cultural demarcations in Singapore. Goh makes the salient point that in modern Singapore, "[p]ostcolonial voices … are [undermined] by global communications, which often pose threats of neo-colonial influences and cultural imperialisms" (22). The implication here is that the processes of globalisation may bring about a return of colonial ideological structures. C. J. W.-L. Wee's *The Asian Modern* (2007), which examines Singapore's cultural modernity, hypothesises that as part of Singapore's nation-building project, immigrant culture was "deterritorialise[d]" so as to "further the loss of culture in relation to social and geographical territory". He argues that there was subsequently an "attempt at *reterritorialising* the city-state" so as to inscribe "Confucian" and "Asian" values onto the dominant social discourse during the 1980s and mid-1990s [emphasis in original] (8–9). Wee is arguing that as part of nation building, organic and indigenous culture may have already been eradicated and replaced with cultural values consonant with nationalist ideology.

One common point between these recent critical works and mine lies in the acknowledgement that in the case of Singapore, one can no longer speak of such a thing as an "authentic" or "pure" culture. Indeed, among Wee's crucial points is that "Singapore is a case study of original authenticity being given up and of various versions of both the 'West' and 'Asia' being used to reterritorialise the cultural space" (11). There is no "outside" then. To encounter the unhomely is to encounter the difference within the self. I extend this point by mapping in literary works the topoi of colony, nation, and globalisation and their attendant motifs, so as to bring into relief the impossibility of envisioning a home that is free from incursions from the "outside".

## Postcolonialism and Commonwealth literary studies

Much of the critical vocabulary of this book derives from the fields of Commonwealth literary studies as well as postcolonialism, though it has to be said that the final portion of the book extends its critical reach so as to explore issues pertaining to the transnational and the global. As we may recall, Commonwealth literary studies was inaugurated in 1964 at the School of English at the University of Leeds, where the first Conference on Commonwealth Literature was held; the proceedings were subsequently collected in John Press's *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture* (1965).

The label "Commonwealth literature" has drawn criticism from various quarters. As Meenakshi Mukherjee argues, the term reinstates the centrality of the English literary canon ("Interrogating Post-colonialism" 6). Salman Rushdie in his 1983 polemical essay "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" makes the point that the label is indicative of the formation of an "exclusive ghetto" (63). Yet we must recognise that Rushdie's success may be due in part to the endeavours of scholars working in the field of Commonwealth literature (as well as postcolonial literary studies). Furthermore, Rushdie may have overstated his point, since those working in Commonwealth literature are acutely aware of the potential problems of identifying too readily with the label, as Mukherjee's argument makes plain.

The heterogeneity of the field of Commonwealth literary studies is also evident in the way its scholars respond to postcolonial theory and criticism. Indeed, the essay collections *Postcolonizing the Commonwealth* (2000) edited by Roland Smith and *Interrogating Post-colonialism* (1996) edited by Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee provide a measure of the extent of exchanges between scholars in these two fields. Arun P. Mukherjee, in particular, is sceptical of subsuming Commonwealth literary studies under the aegis of postcolonialism. He argues that the danger of postcolonial theory is that "homegrown oppressors" might be misconstrued as "'the oppressed' who get all the postcolonialist's sympathy for their suffering at the hands of the colonizer" ("Some Uneasy Conjectures" 17).

While Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire anticipated the scope of postcolonial studies even before the term "postcolonialism" gained currency, it was Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and other postcolonial critics and theorists who re-conceptualised the discourses of colonialism, ethnicity, nationality, and culture through their affiliations with French cultural theory. The emergence of postcolonial studies in the late 1970s may be traced to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which argued that European scholarship consistently represents cultures of the Middle East as inferior, backward, and unsophisticated, while Europe is cast as the centre of enlightenment, progress, and civilisation. Said extended this argument in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) through its examination of a variety of European texts to

uncover the binary oppositions between the centre and the periphery, First World and Third World, coloniser and colonised. Theorists such as Spivak and Bhabha have extended Said's inauguration of the field. Spivak's concerns, including the status of the subaltern, the relationship between Third World and First World feminism, and caste identities in India broaden the scope of postcolonial studies in her insistence that there are various conditions of oppression that demand acknowledgement. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (1990) explore cultural issues raised by race, migration, and the relationship between the discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism. Together, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak form what Robert J. C. Young calls "the Holy Trinity of colonial-discourse analysis" (*Colonial Desire* 163).

Postcolonial theory and criticism initiated by critics working within metropolitan academies tend to privilege contrapuntal texts such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). The former is read as a contrapuntal narrative to *Jane Eyre* and the latter as a subversive re-visioning of *Robinson Crusoe*. While *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are works that challenge their respective literary predecessors, paradoxically, what occurs is that the prominence and centrality of colonial writing tend to be reinforced and revisited under the aegis of postcolonial theory and criticism. Aijaz Ahmad draws our attention to this polarised dynamic when he observes that "It is in the metropolitan country … that a literary text is first designated a Third World text … and then globally redistributed with that aura attached to it" (45). As he points out, there is a certain kind of text favoured by critics in metropolitan institutions, specifically those amenable to "critical positions [that] are framed by the cultural dominance of postmodernism" (125). He points to the work of Fredric Jameson as symptomatic, with its resulting tendency of "identification of 'Third World literature' with 'naive' realism" (125–126).

The overlapping fields of postcolonial studies and Commonwealth literature are fraught with contestations and consist of a variety of critical positions and methodologies. While they are not the primary focus of this book, I draw attention to them as they form the theoretical setting for my discussions of literary texts. Despite the caveats just noted, the critical concepts and theoretical insights developed in the fields of postcolonial studies and Commonwealth literary studies are relevant for a study that seeks to address the trajectories of literary narratives extending from British Malaya to contemporary Malaysia and Singapore. This is because much of postcolonial studies involves reading against the grain of colonial ideology, and this is particularly important in the case of colonial-era writings. The work of Frantz Fanon is crucial to our reading of Swettenham, just as Bill Ashcroft's elaboration of dis-identification is relevant to our understanding of how Lee Kok Liang's writings represent an expression of resistance against the metropolitan discourse. Likewise, the thematics of nationhood and nationalism are informed by debates pertaining to

decolonisation within Commonwealth literary studies. This is especially so when we are considering how the contours of national life are shaped by political elites in contemporary Singapore and Malaysia. When we take up works written under the aegis of diaspora, globalisation and transnationalism, we reference notions of cultural displacement that have also developed within postcolonial studies.

Also, one may argue that there is a transactional and transnational representation at work in Anglophone literature by writers born in Singapore and Malaysia and who live and work in these two countries. This is evidenced especially in the bibliographic classifications of Singapore and Malaysian literatures. Ismail S. Talib has made the point that while Anglophone literatures in Singapore and Malaysia have taken on distinctive trajectories after Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965, "a discussion of either Singapore or Malaysian literature quite often depends on knowledge of the other, and it may be useful to discuss the two literatures together" (72).

Given the history and geographic proximity of the two countries, some writers elude classification by way of national categories. Talib cites several instances wherein authors such as Marie Gerrina Louise, who are more suitably identified as Malaysian, have been included in bibliographies of Singaporean literature (73). The reverse is true in the case of Colin Cheong and Stella Kon (Talib 73). One may also cite the case of Suchen Christine Lim, the first winner of the Singapore Literature Prize for her novel, *Fistful of Colours* (1993). Born in Malaysia and currently based in Singapore, her novels make important statements about the social and political conditions of Singapore, as in *Fistful of Colours,* and the recent history of Peninsula Malaysia, as in *A Bit of Earth* (2001). It is not surprising, therefore, to find her name listed in the bibliographic categories of both Singapore and Malaysia.

Due to the ease with which authors and the themes of their work are able to cross over into each other's national space, Malaysian writers are in some ways already living abroad with respect to Singapore, and the reverse is also true. Just as Malaysian literature is always already transnational with respect to Singapore, the same is true of Singapore literature. Thus, the categories "Singapore Literature" and "Malaysian Literature", while useful as geographical and national markers, sometimes conceal rather than reveal the complexities of literary production and reception, such that an absolute insistence on these labels becomes problematic. In the case of colonial writings this problem of demarcation is retrospective, rendering exclusivist national markers problematic: Should the Malayan works of Frank Swettenham, Hugh Clifford, W. Somerset Maugham, and Anthony Burgess now be studied under the category of "English Literature" or "Singapore and Malaysian Literature"? In this respect, I find it useful to examine the literatures of Malaya, Singapore, and Malaysia alongside one another.

## Choice of texts

I have selected texts that are useful in engaging the themes of home and belonging as these relate to a broader range of debates taking place within the fields of Commonwealth literary studies, postcolonialism, and transnational cultural studies. The order in which they are discussed is chronological so as to trace the two themes through history. The first group of texts were written during the colonial period of Malaya, the second group arose out of the nationalist period in Singapore and Malaysia, and the final group have diasporic and transnational settings.

The texts to be discussed were chosen for a number of reasons. First, some are of historical significance. The works of Frank Swettenham, Isabella Bird, Emily Innes, and Florence Caddy are important literary representations of Malaya. Swettenham's writings, especially their deployment of the trope of natives running amok, are informed by the colonial will to govern, while we find in the works of the women writers the ways in which the colonial landscape of Malaya is constructed through gendered writing. The works of Bird, Innes, and Caddy will be considered alongside Sara Mill's argument in her book *Discourses of Difference* (1991) that the colonial voice is a masculine voice which female writers cannot adopt easily. In contrast, the works of W. Somerset Maugham and Anthony Burgess represent a significant turn in colonial narratives in that they allow us to explore the exhaustion of colonial romance.

Second, some of these texts were chosen because their themes are of political significance to contemporary Singapore and Malaysia. They allow us to examine literary responses to nation and nationalism. With Lee Kok Liang's less frequently studied novel, *London Does Not Belong to Me,* and his short story "Return to Malaya", we can continue to examine the themes of home and belonging by way of work that is contrapuntal to colonial narratives. Lee's work is important in that it documents the postcolonial hope of a Malayan nation. It has been said that Edwin Thumboo (1933–) "is the closest Singapore has to a poet laureate" (Shirley Lim *Against the Grain* 22). His poem, "Ulysses by the Merlion", cannot be ignored when we consider the relationship between literature and the nation-building project. Likewise, Alfian bin Sa'at (1977–) is regarded as an anti-establishment poet, short-story writer, and playwright whose work engages directly with Singapore's national ideology. A reading of Thumboo's poem and Alfian's poem "The Merlion" provides a starting point from which one is able to critique the state's ideological construction of the Singaporean nation as home. While Lee Tzu Pheng's (1946–) poem "My Country and My People" is certainly a useful counterfoil to Thumboo's poem (Goh "Imagining the Nation" 31), a comparison of poems by Thumboo and Sa'at allows one to foreground the iconography of the Merlion as a national symbol. In a similar vein, Philip Jeyaretnam's *Abraham's Promise* (1995) and Gopal Baratham's *A Candle or the Sun* (1991) are significant because they offer overt critiques of Singapore's state ideology.

Third, certain other texts are chosen because they are narratives that feature various forms of dislocation. Contemporary post-diasporic novels such as those written by K. S. Maniam are examined in relation to nation building in Malaysia. These novels offer alternative narratives that constitute a reaction against Malaysia's ethnic-based state ideology as it turns the nation into an unhomely space for non-Malays. The choice of Karim Raslan's short story "Hero" exemplifies my argument that those who are narrated by Malaysia's nationalist ideology as being at home within the nation are in fact not at home with the dominant state ideology.

Fourth, certain texts are chosen because they enable us to examine the trope of home and belonging in transnational and diasporic settings. Simon Tay's travelogue, *Alien Asian: A Singaporean in America* (1997) and Tan's novel *Mammon Inc.*, both set in America, are two very different narratives that seek to negotiate between the social and cultural spaces of Singapore and America. They are valuable in helping us understand how one's sense of home and belonging is affected by globalisation as the latter induces increased mobility and interconnections between different national and cultural spaces.

Finally, I have chosen certain texts because they are by a relatively younger group of writers whose non-realist mode of writing is a consequence of their different responses to the exigencies of nation building. Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory*, Vyvyane Loh's *Breaking the Tongue* (2004) and Lau's *Playing Madame Mao* are narratives of home written outside the space of the nation in that the authors are based outside of Singapore and Malaysia and are writing back to their home countries. The first two novels recuperate the sense of home by reworking the history of colonialism and national independence, while the last centres on political events in Singapore in the late 1980s and distances itself from its national home as an act of political critique. Reading these three novels together allows us to examine the act of reconstituting home from memory and history.

The ethnicity of some of the authors mentioned above examined cannot be overlooked, especially when considered in the context of nationhood in Malaysia and Singapore. The ethnic-nationalist climate of Malaysia in the 1960s and 1970s was such that Chinese Malaysian writers such as Shirley Lim and Ee Tiang Hong opted to emigrate. As I have argued elsewhere, there is a tendency for anthologists to assume that Malaysian literary works of merit are written only in the Malay language (Tay 294). The Anglophone writer Karim Raslan, as we shall see in Chapter 5, recognises that his privileged position as a Malay lawyer, business owner and writer is due in part to the 1970s and 1980s economic and political climate of Malaysia, which brought about the rise of a Malay middle-class while marginalising other ethnic communities. In this respect, the multicultural Malayan nationhood envisioned in Lee's "Return to Malaya" was interrupted from the 1960s onward by a nationalism that privileges a single ethnic group. Maniam's novels, considered in Chapter 7, attest to the difficulties faced by those of South Asian descent as they lay claim to a Malaysia shaped by Malay nationalism.

In the case of Singapore, multicultural as well as meritocratic policies supposedly ensure that the concerns of its minorities are represented, to the extent that Thumboo, who is of South Asian and Chinese parentage, is able to fuse the theme of multicultural harmony with a narrative of Singapore's modernity in poems such as "Ulysses by the Merlion" and "Conversation with My Friend Kwang Min at Loong Kwang of Outram Park". There are indeed authors in Singapore who write in Tamil, Malay, and Chinese and who are highly regarded within their ethnic communities. Yet it is the Anglophone writers who are more prominently featured by the English-language media as well as in highly regarded online Anglophone literary journals such as the *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*. Poets such as Alvin Pang, Toh Hsien Min, and Cyril Wong, among others, have been invited to showcase their works at international literary festivals. Nonetheless, there are moments when ethnic anxieties are made manifest in literary works. For instance, in Alfian's poem "The Last Kampung", from the collection *One Fierce Hour* (1998), the poetic persona laments that the traditional Malay way of life has been written out of Singapore's modern landscape. Also, in poems such as "A Visit to a Relative's House in Malaysia" and "Train Ride to Malaysia", we detect the fissuring of Malay ethnicities by the nationalist discourses of Singapore and Malaysia.

A reader may perhaps point to omissions of certain texts and authors. But this book makes no claim to engaging with the entire canon of Malayan, Singaporean, and Malaysian literature. Rather, it positions itself alongside a considerable body of studies of literary works of the region. The works chosen here engage with the themes of home and belonging, or the lack thereof. These are themes germane to colonial and postcolonial narratives of displacement, nationhood, and diaspora. Discussions of certain texts and authors are omitted because they have been thoroughly explored by others working in postcolonial and Commonwealth literary studies. With regard to the colonial period, the works of Joseph Conrad are omitted, though we consider his influence on writers such as Maugham and Burgess in Chapter 3. Those interested in Conrad's Malaya might wish to consult J. H. Stape's "Conrad's 'Unreal City': Singapore in 'The End of the Tether'" in the volume *Conrad's Cities*, edited by Gene M. Moore and published in 1992. Important discussions of racial politics in Conrad's Malayan novels may be found in Agnes Yeow's "'Here comes the Nazarene': Conrad's Treatment of the Serani and the Racial Politics of Empire" in the journal *Conradiana* as well as "Conrad and the Straits Chinese: The Politics of Chinese Enterprise and Identity in the Colonial State" in the journal *The Conradian*. For a discussion of early university writings in Malaya which brought together writers such as Edwin Thumboo, Wong Phui Nam, Ee Tiang Hong and Wang Gungwu, see Anne Brewster's *Towards a Semiotic of Postcolonial Discourse: University Writing in Singapore and Malaysia* (1989) as well as Shirley Lim's "Finding a Native Voice: Singapore Literature in English" in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Kuo Pao Kun's play, *The Coffin is Too*

*Big for the Hole* (1984), is important as an allegory that investigates Singapore's political landscape. It is excluded from our discussion because many of the issues it raises overlap with the discussions of Baratham's and Jeyaretnam's novels.

## Overview

This book is divided into three parts. Part I explores literature written during the colonial era. The first chapter begins with a discussion of colonialism as it was in British Malaya, and this is followed by an analysis of the theme of "amok" in the writings of Swettenham, who renders the phenomenon as unhomely—as external to the political economy of Malaya so as to legitimise the colonial presence. But amok is a trope that continues to trouble Swettenham's colonialist narrative. The image of the Malay running amok, I argue, represents the return of the repressed that haunts colonialist writings on Malaya.

In the second chapter, I examine representations of Malaya in the writings of Bird, Innes, and Caddy, who were in Malaya for different periods of time between 1879 and 1888. Following Sara Mills, I attempt to read their works as "discourses of differences" that nonetheless reinforce colonialist attitudes about Malaya and its people. The next chapter examines representations of Englishness and the empire in the writings of Maugham and Burgess. The former arrived in Malaya in the 1920s in search of material for his stories, while the latter arrived in the 1950s as a colonial education officer. Unlike the writings of those that came before him, Maugham's representation of Europeans in Malaya is troubled by a reservation expressed in the work as to the authority of Englishness. In the case of Burgess, his work, set in the period of imperial decline, harbours an anxiety as to the role of the Englishman in the tropics. In the productions of both of these authors, we see a Malaya that is gradually becoming socially and politically uninhabitable to its colonial occupants.

Part II of the book examines how literary works articulate a nation against colonialist and state-sponsored nationalist projects. Chapter 4 examines the postcolonial project of "writing back" against metropolitan representations of Malaya as evidenced in the works of Lee. In this respect, Lee narrates his disenchantment with London and reclaims Malaya as his home. The next two chapters address the question of whether nationalism in either its Singaporean or Malaysian variant gives the citizens of two new countries congenial national homes. Chapter 5 begins with a consideration of the discourses of nationalism in Singapore and Malaysia. The chapter examines Thumboo's "Ulysses by the Merlion", Alfian's "The Merlion" and Karim's short story "Heroes" so as to explore the consequences of nationalism on literary representations of Singapore and Malaysia. The notion of responsibility to the state is explored in the next chapter, which examines two novels by Singaporean authors. Given that the official version of nationalism in Singapore tilts towards

economic pragmatism and the maintenance of the state, how does a writer then assume the responsibility of political critique if this critique amounts to opposition against the state itself? This question is addressed in the chapter with reference to Baratham's *A Candle or the Sun* and Jeyaretnam's *Abraham's Promise*.

The final part of this study engages debates pertaining to diaspora, globalisation, and transnationalism. Here our concern is with subjectivities outside of "home". Chapter 7 examines the novels of K. S. Maniam. It focuses his articulation of a post-diasporic consciousness against the ethnic nationalism expressed in the New Economic Policy. In Chapter 8, I examine representations of America and Singapore in Tan's *Mammon Inc.* and Tay's travelogue, *Alien Asian*. The chapter argues that in so far as globalisation fosters a subjectivity predicated on a dense network of interdependencies and connections with different localities, it also commodifies these subjectivities. The last chapter, with reference to Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory*, Loh's *Breaking the Tongue* and Lau's *Playing Madame Mao*, explores how a reworking of cultural memory may provide a way out of this commodification.

This study is not an attempt at creating a canon out of Malayan, Singaporean, and Malaysian literary works. It offers a chronology, but not a teleology that presents the evolution of Singaporean and Malaysian subjectivities as emerging from the primordial soup of the pre-colonial era, passing through a troubled infancy with colonialism, reaching a rebellious adolescence with nationalism, and, finally, attaining an enlightened state in the present era of globalisation. I envision this project as a reminder that the topoi of colony, nation, and globalisation are not to be regarded as internally coherent discourses. Home, identity and one's sense of belonging are characterised not by continuity and constancy but by discontinuities and disruption. In this respect, one can never be completely at home. Given the changes in socio-political conditions through time, the contending claims of history, and the multiplicity of cultural localities and affiliations, the topoi of colony, nation, and globalisation are seen here as a series of projects, comprising acts of representation and counter-representation, erasures and appropriations, avowals and disavowals.

# 1

# Amok and Arrogation:
## Frank Swettenham's 'Real Malay'

In *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia*, Anthony Reid draws attention to the efficacy of the term "early modern" as opposed to "such older terms as Renaissance, Reformation, or Age of Discovery" (6). He makes the point that "it has the advantage of being less culture-bound to a European schema, less laden with triumphalist values" (6). In doing so, he urges us to recognise that the work of history, in particular Southeast Asian history, has to be dissociated from colonialist historiography, as the latter conflates modernity with colonialism. In European historiography, colonial modernity is a signifier that distinguishes the pre-historical from the historical, the pre-modern from the modern, and so the pre-colonial from the colonial. In the writings of many colonial administrators, the histories of colonies were written in such a way as to collapse these three binary oppositions into a single Manichean dynamic, made manifest in colonialist representations of Malaya.

Such a conflation conveys the impression that before attaining political sovereignty as nation-states, the histories of Singapore and Malaysia began with the history of imperialism. This suppression of pre-colonial history creates the fallacious notion that the price of modernity in Singapore and Malaysia was colonial rule. As we will now establish, Frank Athelstane Swettenham and others who wrote of Malaya represented pre-colonial history in such a way as to allow it to be supplanted by colonial history. Through this process, indigenous subjectivity was construed as inferior to that of Europeans. This is the core of colonialist ideology, for a home without its own history, and which is portrayed without the benefit of its inhabitant's collective memories, is a home that can be easily appropriated by others.

The second part of this chapter draws inspiration from Philip Holden's "Love, Death and Nation: Representing Amok in British Malaya", a 1997 article that explores the significance of the trope of amok in British Malayan colonialist discourse with reference to Hugh Clifford's *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya* (1926) and Henri Fauconnier's *The Soul of Malaya* (1930). This chapter examines the unhomely image of Malay subjects who run amok. With reference to the writings of

Swettenham, it looks at how amok as a trope is deployed in his writings. Amok as a colonialist motif is a response to the condition of not being at home; it is a trope that seeks to create an environment hospitable to the colonial enterprise. However, as we shall see, this trope is often unstable in its range of signification, to the extent that it exceeds its colonialist framing of Malaya.

The significance of Swettenham to the colonialist historiography of Malaya cannot be overemphasised. Swettenham's career as a colonial administrator and his reputation as an expert on all matters related to British Malaya spanned a significant period of the British presence in Malaya. He arrived in Malaya as a cadet in 1871 and became assistant resident in Selangor (1874–76), assistant colonial secretary for native states (1876–82), resident in Selangor (1882–89), resident in Perak (1889–95), and resident-general to the federation (1896–1901). He was one of the key figures present at the signing of the Pangkor Treaty of 1874, which marked the formal beginning of British control over the administration and economy of the Malay States. Fluent in Malay, he possessed an intimate understanding of Malay culture and forged close relations with prominent members of the Malay ruling class. Apart from *British Malaya* (1906), a personal account of the history of the period, his other writings include essays and short stories in *Malay Sketches* (1895), *The Real Malay* (1900) and his memoirs, *Footprints in Malaya* (1942). As Susan Morgan points out, Swettenham was "the great hero of British imperial historiography about nineteenth-century British intervention in the Peninsula" (141–142). In the biography *Swettenham* (1995), H.S. Barlow likewise writes that Swettenham's *British Malaya* had been, until the 1960s, "the only authoritative account available of the period" (699). When one considers the range of Swettenham's output—consisting of short stories, sketches, memoirs, essays, a history of British Malaya and articles to British newspapers—alongside the roles he had played in the Pangkor Treaty, in the building of railway lines, and in various tin-mining and rubber enterprises, it is plain that his writing was among the many ways he contributed to the creation of British Malaya as a political entity, an extractive enterprise, and as an imagined community.

## Arrogation: Colonialism and the beginning of history

Prior to the writing of colonial history, the earliest records of the geographic terrain that was to become modern Singapore and Malaysia were at best fragmentary. Historians have noted this lacuna in the history of Singapore. The history of Singapore before Stamford Raffles' arrival in 1819 is regarded as "incomplete, vague or contradictory, imprecise in dating and in description of events or locations … [It is] difficult to separate historical event from legend" (Arthur Lim 3). Albert Lau points out that "Practically nothing certain is known about the Singapore past before

1819 and the little that can be known must be based on textual references which are, unfortunately, difficult to interpret" (42). Indeed, historians of Singapore often discuss its pre-colonial history in terms of myth. C. M. Turnbull's *A History of Singapore, 1819–1988* alludes to a third century account by a Chinese envoy who wrote of the island as inhabited by "primitive cannibals with tails 5 or 6 inches long" (1).

The *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), the earliest account and a key text of Malay history in the region, is also mentioned by Turnbull in relation to two incidents (2–3). The first is an account of how the Indian prince Raja Chulan, encamped on the island while on his way to conquer China, encountered a ship manned by a crew of old men. The ship, with its cargo of rusty needles and trees, is purported to be a ruse concocted by the Chinese emperor so as to convey the impression that China is so far away as to be out of reach. The men have been instructed to tell Raja Chulan that they have started out on their trip as young men, with the ship carrying seeds and iron bars for trade, and that they have since aged, the seeds having matured into trees, and the iron bars having rusted away into needles. Raja Chulan is thus deceived into giving up his enterprise (Leyden *Malay Annals* 13–15). The second account concerned the prince Sang Nila Utama, the son of Raja Chulan, who sailed into a storm on his way to an island. It is only after discarding everything from the ship, including his crown, that the storm abated. On the island, he encounters a beast that is described as possessing a red body, a black head, and a white breast, which he mistakes for a lion, thus naming the island "Singa-pura", Lion City (Leyden 42–43).

Recent work focusing on pre-colonial Singapore, best represented by John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek's *Early Singapore, 1330s–1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts* (2004), has uncovered a vibrant history dating from the fourteenth century. But for the colonials arriving in the nineteenth century, as a result of the scarcity of historical records, it was easy to conflate the historical beginnings of Singapore with a colonial imperative that relegated pre-colonial narratives to the vanishing horizon of history—into myth, hearsay, and legend. As myth and history in the *Malay Annals* are inseparable, the text is easily shifted onto the ground of the pre-modern, thus enabling the history of Singapore and of the region to be written over by historians sympathetic to the colonial cause. Swettenham's *British Malaya* is a case in point. Swettenham likens the *Malay Annals* to "the ramblings of the insane, who jumble up fact with fiction, [although] there is truth in this record" (*British Malaya* 12). Even though there is "small means of winnowing the wheat from the chaff", he proceeds to do so, taking it upon himself to separate truth from fiction in writing the history of British Malayan history (Swettenham *British Malaya* 12). After referring to various sources, Swettenham notes that there is a scarcity of records in the case of Singapore. Regarding this lacuna of six hundred years, Swettenham has this to say:

> So the ancient Singapura disappeared … Now again, after six hundred years, Singapore rises from its ashes and draws to itself the trade of all rivals within a thousand miles … What is strange is that, in those six hundred years, there should have been no Portuguese, no Hollander, no Englishman, with curiosity and application enough to make himself acquainted with the ancient history of Singapore, and prescience enough to realize that the existence, which had been suddenly and violently stifled, would revive in a new and far more vigorous life the moment it was carefully and intelligently treated. *The opportunity was there always, but the hand to seize it, to make the most of it, was wanting.* [emphasis added] (Swettenham *British Malaya* 31–32)

Colonialism does not take place on the material and economic plane alone. The colonisation of a physical terrain occurs alongside the colonisation of its history. In the above passage, the lacuna of six hundred years is written over with colonial desire; the absence of history is for Swettenham a point of lamentation not so much for the lack of history but for the lack of colonial history, thus laying bare the imperial will-to-power. We must bear in mind Nicholas Thomas's point in *Colonialism's Culture* that "[d]epiction and documentation … did not merely create representations that were secondary to practices and realities, but constituted political actualities in themselves" (111–112). Having written of the lacuna of pre-modern history in the language of possession, trade and colonial power, one need only lament the lack of prescience, care and intelligence, and raise the need to rectify this through actual colonial enterprise—Singapore, as physical landscape and as historical entity, had to wait six hundred years for its history to arrive in 1819.

And so, colonial modernity arrived in Singapore in the figure of Stamford Raffles. The signing of the treaty between Raffles and the Temenggong Abdul Rahman was motivated by a combination of political ambition, commercial interest, and personal aspiration on the part of Raffles. Raffles was recalled in humiliation to England in 1816, when Java was ceded to the Dutch, the East India Company having sustained heavy financial losses as a result of ineffectual administration under his charge. As he puts it afterward, "I was not unconscious that errors in judgement might be found in the complicated and extensive administration with which I was entrusted" (Raffles 22). At that moment, Britain was in the process of resigning its interests in Southeast Asia; there were plans to restore Penang to the Netherlands, as well (Turnbull 6). In Java and later in Singapore, Raffles was motivated by a civilising mission. As he claims in the case of Singapore, "the interests of science and literature have been no less attended to than the moral improvement of the people" (Raffles 68). He was also apprehensive about Dutch expansion in Sumatra and its consequences for the British Empire and was therefore interested in establishing a port in the region so as to allow the British "the means of supporting and defending [their] commercial intercourse with the Malay States, and which, by its contiguity

to the seat of the Dutch power, might enable [them] to watch the march of [Dutch] policy, and when necessary to counteract its influence" (Raffles 54).

Other scholars suggest that the publication of John Leyden's translation of the *Malay Annals* was initiated by Raffles as part of his strategy for convincing the directors of the Company of the viability of establishing a British station in Singapore, for it was depicted in the text that Singapore was the site of an ancient and flourishing trading emporium under the rule of Sang Nila Utama and his descendents (Hooker 43–46). Thus, pre-colonial history had been pressed into service of colonial modernity. Robert Young's statement that European imperialism appropriates the other into its history finds resonance in this instance, for the pre-colonial history of Singapore as presented in the *Malay Annals* was cited when it was convenient to do so (*White Mythologies* 35).

At points where pre-modern history draws attention to its incommensurability with colonial modernity, it would have to be removed. An instance of this occurred with the discovery of a stone at the mouth of Singapore River. An eyewitness account provided by Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir described it as follows:

> The rock was smooth, about six feet wide, square in shape, and its face was covered with a chiselled inscription. But although it had writing this was illegible because of extensive scouring by water. Allah alone knows how many thousands of years old it may have been. After its discovery crowds of all races came to see it. The Indians declared that the writing was Hindu but they were unable to read it. The Chinese claimed that it was in Chinese characters … It was Mr. Raffles's opinion that the writing must be Hindu because the Hindus were the oldest of all immigrant races in the East ... It remained where it was until the time when Mr. Bonham was Governor of the three settlements of Singapore, Penang and Malacca. Mr. Coleman was then engineer in Singapore and it was he who broke up the stone ... He destroyed the rock because he did not realize its importance. (165–166)

The relic may be the only supporting evidence of the existence of an ancient civilisation presided over by Sang Nila Utama and his descendents from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Or it might be a remnant of the Javanese empire of Majapahit, which attacked and claimed the island in the fourteenth century (Arthur Lim 9). It might be the only evidence substantiating in part the narrative of the *Malay Annals*. The artillery officer Peter James Begbie points out in his book *The Malayan Peninsula*, an early account of Malayan history, published in 1834, that there were three instances in the *Malay Annals* in which a stone of that size was mentioned (355–360). While the first two were mythical, involving human beings transformed into stone, the last instance had to do with the story of a Malay warrior who, as a test of strength, lifted the stone and hurled it onto the mouth of the river.

The inscriptions on the stone were made after his death as a record of his deeds and heroic exploits.

The stone was recognised by the populace as a relic bearing a link to ancient history. It was the lynchpin with which people projected their collective speculations regarding ethnic and ancestral claims to the land. The Hindus said the inscriptions on the rock were Hindu, the Chinese said they were Chinese, and Abdullah claimed them to be Arabic even though, as he mentions, no one could actually read it. As Ban Kah Choon points out, "The stone touches upon and raises at a critical moment in Singapore's founding those thorny questions of the hermeneutics of origin and tradition" (11). The stone bore evidence that there was an earlier claim on the island, thus suggesting that there was a history prior to colonial modernity. The matter came to an end when Robert Coleman, the colonial engineer, blew up the stone. As Ban points out, "what is extraneous and, therefore potentially unruly, is removed" (9). Only three pieces of the stone remain to this day, two of which are at a museum in Calcutta, and the third, referred to as the "Singapore Stone", is in the National Museum of Singapore (Arthur Lim 9).

Thus, even though there may be evidence that dates the pre-colonial history of Singapore back to the fourteenth century, most of the history of Singapore as we know it today is a history that begins with colonialism. In this sense, Singapore has no pre-colonial history to speak of. Kwa Chong Guan notes that this is indeed "the conventional and dominant view of Singapore's past" (137). Yet one may see this absence of pre-1819 history as arising out of a disregard of history so as to install colonial modernity as the only form of modernity. It has also often been consequently said that Singapore, both as a colony and later as a nation-state, is an invention and thus a testimony to the ingenuity of colonialism not only as a territorial enterprise but also as a capitalist enterprise, and this is an enterprise subsequently inherited by the government of Lee Kuan Yew. As Kwa points out, a perspective that casts Raffles as a "'great man' of history" who possessed prescience and foresight and who "founded" Singapore privileges a Eurocentric version of history, for it views "Southeast Asian history through the eyes of the European actors rather than the Asian actors" (137–138). This meta-narrative of Singapore having emerged *from nowhere* and *from nothing*, as something invented out of colonial governmental enterprise, is constitutive of modernity mapped from above.

As with the case of the pre-colonial history of Singapore, that of Malaya is likewise intertwined with colonial history. On the first page of *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883), the Victorian travel writer Isabella Bird characterises the Malay Peninsula as "somewhat of a *terra incognita*" with "no legitimate claim to an ancient history" (1). The characterisation of land *incognita* is a familiar colonialist strategy, whereby the claim of discovery is synonymous with the assertion of rights to a territorial claim. Having attributed the first mention of the peninsula as the Golden Chersonese to Ptolemy's *Aurea Chersonesus* and Milton's

*Paradise Lost*, Bird goes on to write of Malacca as having been "rediscovered in 1513 by the Portuguese" (*Chersonese* 2). The history of Malaya, then, cannot but begin with European colonialism. In Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, the archangel Michael shows Adam from "a hill / Of Paradise the highest" a panoramic view of "all earth's kingdoms and their glory" beginning with

> Cambalu, seat of Cathaian khan
> And Samarchand by Oxus, Temir's throne,
> To Paquin of Sinaean kings, and thence
> To Agra and Lahor of great mogul
> Down to the golden Chersonese, or where
> The Persian in Ecbatan sat, or since
> In Hispahan, or where the Russian czar
> In Mosco, or the sultan in Bizance,
> Turchestan-born …
>
> (Milton 581–583)

The passage is part of a grand historical outline of the world as Milton knew it. As G. K. Hunter points out, the symmetrical structure of the epic is such that while the first two books of *Paradise Lost* deal with the establishment of the Kingdom of Hell in its fallen state, the last two deal with the future establishment of the kingdoms of the human world (151). Given that it provides Adam with a view of the future kingdoms of humankind, it is a divine prophecy, and Chersonese is the only kingdom without a ruler—and thus awaits colonial conquest. This is all the more significant when we consider that part of *Paradise Lost* was composed under the regime of Oliver Cromwell, whose interests in furthering the domain of the East India Company led to the first of three Anglo-Dutch Wars in 1652. As the second of three wars was fought based on issues related to colonies in West Africa, it would not have escaped the notice of the English that the Dutch had already established a presence in Asia by that time. The Dutch East India Company was founded in as early as 1602, and Batavia (now Jakarta) had, since 1619, become the central office from which the Dutch commandeered various outposts scattered in different port cities of Asia (Andaya 71–72).

Thus, from the beginning of the world as described in the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, the sovereignty of Malacca (and by extension the Malay Peninsula) was an absence, a political vacuum awaiting a colonial presence. When Isabella Bird wrote of the Malay Peninsula as having no claim to ancient history, she meant that there was no claim to history until the arrival of European colonialism. Just as Milton was reconstituting world history from his point of view during the period of the Glorious Revolution and of Cromwell's regime, Isabella Bird was reconstituting Malayan history from her point of view in the early period of colonial modernity. As such, Malaya has always been thought of as British Malaya and never was otherwise.

## Running amok

In the economy of racial representation in colonialist portrayals of British Malaya, Malays are presented as lacking in cultural accomplishments. Swettenham described them as possessing "very few writings which can be dignified by the name of literature" (*British Malaya* 167). While he mentions classical Malay texts such as the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (The Adventures of Hang Tuah) and *Hikayat Abdullah* (The Story of Abdullah), he says of the last that the "style is far from classic, and his biography is not much read outside the Straits Settlements Colony" (Swettenham *British Malaya* 168). He provides an example of Malay literature by quoting Malay *pantuns*,which he calls "love ditties", explaining that Malays "are given to the writing of verses, like love-sick damsels and swains", thus implying that they are given to sentimental excess (*British Malaya* 168).

Equally, Swettenham portrays Malays as backward and unencumbered by the legacy of the European Enlightenment:

> It may seem curious that … the ordinary Malay man should be extraordinarily sensitive in regard to any real or fancied affront, and yet that was, and is, characteristic of the people … when the Malay feels that a slight or insult has been put upon him which, for any reason, he cannot resent, he broods over his trouble till, in a fit of madness, he suddenly seizes a weapon and strikes out blindly at every one he sees—man, woman, or child—often beginning with those of his own family. This is the *âmok*, the furious attack in which the madman hopes to find death and an end to his intolerable feeling of injury and dishonour. There can be little doubt that, except in rare instances, those who are suddenly seized by this fury to destroy are homicidal maniacs … (*British Malaya* 143–144)

The depiction of the native who runs amok and attacks the members of his own family becomes a testimony to the native's irrationality; it is the psychological portrait of the Other of the European Enlightenment. It is the antithesis of European subjectivity, a condition by which familial and rational bonds find no hold on the individual. The above passage conveys implicitly the point that the colonisers are there to save the natives from themselves.

The real Malay, according to Swettenham, is a "good imitative learner", "makes a good mechanic", "lazy to a degree, is without method or order of any kind, knows no regularity … and considers time as of no importance. His house is untidy, even dirty" (*Malay Sketches* 3). We are told that

> A Malay is intolerant of insult or slight; it is something that to him should be wiped out in blood. He will brood over a real or fancied stain on his honour until he is possessed by the desire for revenge. If he cannot wreck it on the offender, he will strike out at the first

> human being that comes in his way, male or female, old or young. It is this state of blind fury, this vision of blood, that produces the *âmok*. (*Malay Sketches* 3–4)

As Homi Bhabha points out, "In the colonial discourse, that space of the other is always occupied by an *idée fixe*: despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, violence" (*Location* 101). In the case of British Malaya, that *idée fixe* is the figure of the *pengamok*, the person who runs amok. Swettenham's sketch entitled "Âmok" exemplifies how the Manichean dynamic of European narrative form and non-European content, narrator and narrated, institutional order and native chaos is established. The sketch is drawn from a government report by J. W. Brewster, assistant superintendent at Lower Perak. This particular incident as narrated by Swettenham has the effect of affirming the relationship between mental deficiency and the Malay race. Its prescriptive authority is made evident in John C. Spores' *Running Amok: An Historical Inquiry*, a 1988 monograph that looks to historical data for a broader understanding of the mental disorder; the monograph reproduces the same government report on which Swettenham's narrative is based. To be sure, amok is not entirely a colonial invention. Spores made the point that in India as well as in Malaya, it was an acceptable and honoured practice for warriors (28). In *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (The Adventures of Hang Tuah), a work of Malay literature set in the fifteenth century, an outbreak of amok becomes an occasion for heroism on the part of several youths who subdued the *pengamok* (Sheppard 30–34). Amok as depicted in indigenous narrative is a functional phenomenon that can be contained by heroic members of Malay society.

For Swettenham, however, amok becomes a justification for colonial governance. In his writings, amok as depicted via colonial rationality becomes unhomely in the sense that it is a phenomenon that needs to be eradicated from Malaya. Swettenham's sketch begins with a hypothesis, to be followed by an exemplum, and ends with the certification of truth. At the beginning, the reader is told that the term "amok" is

> used to describe the action of an individual who, suddenly and without apparent cause, seizes a weapon and strikes out blindly, killing and wounding all who come in his way, regardless of age or sex, whether they be friends, strangers, or his own nearest relatives. (*Malay Sketches* 38–39)

This is followed by the tale of Imam Mamat, who seeks the pardon of his wife and brother-in-law before stabbing them with a spear and a knife and chasing after his sister-in-law and her children, eventually killing them.

It is not the cause but the consequence of amok that is elaborated. An official list is quoted and reproduced in the sketch, tabulated according to those killed and wounded (*Malay Sketches* 42). Eventually apprehended, Imam dies from the loss of

blood. The surgeon's autopsy report quoted in the sketch certifies that the *pengamok* died "from haemorrhage from a wound" (*Malay Sketches* 43). Both the list and the autopsy report, as part of an institutionally sanctioned discourse, testify to the truth of amok. "In the colonial situation", writes Frantz Fanon in another context, "going to see the doctor [or] the administrator … are identical moves" (*Dying Colonialism* 120). As a violent and destructive form of behaviour, amok signifies the native's failure at what we may call the government of the self. The implication is that if the Malays are unable to govern themselves, then others would have to do it for them.

What then, is the cause of amok? While the sketch is silent on the events that may have caused it, the explanations offered in Swettenham's other writings ascribe the cause of amok to the psychology of the Malays. In a sketch entitled "Faulty Composition" (a title intended to suggest the flawed make-up of the Malay psyche), Swettenham appeals to the writings of the ethnologist James Richardson Logan. Amok, Swettenham writes,

> consists in a proneness to chronic disease of feeling, resulting from a want of moral elasticity, which leaves the mind a prey to the pain of grief, until it is filled with a malignant gloom and despair, and the whole horizon of existence is overcast with blackness … the great majority of *pĕng-âmoks* are monomaniacs … it is clear that such a condition of mind is inconsistent with a regard for consequences. (*The Real Malay* 245–246)

Once defined as a psychological condition, amok becomes an ailment to be treated. It is noted also that since the arrival of the British, the number of incidences of Malays running amok has decreased. As Swettenham tells us,

> A simple explanation is that, with hospitals, lunatic asylums, and a certain familiarity with European methods of treatment, the signs of insanity are better understood, and those who show them are put under restraint before they do serious damage. (*The Real Malay* 253)

This tendency to run amok on the part of the Malays requires a different form of colonial governance; one may suggest that amok is represented in such a way so that it coheres with the residential system in Malaya. The terms of the Pangkor Treaty specified that those named as residents were to be advisors to individual states. Amok therefore has necessitated a colonial governance that is not based on force. James Wheeler Woodford Birch, the first resident appointed in Perak, is described by Swettenham as someone who "knew very little of Malays and almost nothing of their language", and Birch's aggressive behaviour, combined with his unrelenting attempts to enforce order and introduce reforms in the state, met with opposition, suspicion, and bitterness (*Malay Sketches* 229). Accompanied by a party equipped with a number of firearms and other weapons, Birch pasted the proclamations of the Pangkor Treaty in a number of villages before he was speared

by the Malays in a fit of amok (Swettenham *Malay Sketches* 238–242). It was perhaps with this incident in mind that Swettenham wrote of the unique tasks of a colonial administrator in Malaya:

> The first requirement was to learn the language of the people to be ruled. I mean, to speak it and write it well. And the first use to make of this knowledge was to learn as much as possible about the people—their customs, traditions, characters, and idiosyncrasies. An officer who has his heart in his work will certainly gain the sympathies of those over whom he spends this trouble. (*The Real Malay* 32)

Particularly after the Indian "Mutiny", British Malaya was seen as an opportunity for the empire to redeem itself. Colonial rule in British Malaya was thus established not by military aggression but with compassion, not through force but through kindness and persuasion.

That the image of the colonised is constructed as inferior to the coloniser so as to justify imperialist ideology as a function of the Enlightenment project is a point many others have made. Chinua Achebe, in his reading of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, points out that "the image of Africa [is projected] as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization" (3). Likewise, Fanon argues thus in his characteristically strident terms:

> The feeling of the inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior* [emphasis in original]. (*Black Skin, White Masks* 93)

Fanon provides a clue as to how Swettenham's treatment of amok may be read against the grain. In Fanon's work, amok is portrayed as an outbreak of anti-colonial resistance:

> The Algerian gave the isolated European the impression of being in permanent contact with the revolutionary high command. He showed a kind of amplified self-assurance which assumed rather extraordinary forms. There were cases of real "running amuck".
>
> Individuals in a fit of aberration would lose control of themselves. They would be seen dashing down a street or into an isolated farm, unarmed, or waving a miserable jagged knife, shouting, "Long live independent Algeria! We've won!" (*A Dying Colonialism* 62)

The above passage provides an alternative reading of amok. While characterised as a psychopathological condition on the part of the colonised subject, it can also be an expression of anti-colonial sentiment that is brewing among the native community. Here, the scene is rendered through the point of view of the isolated European. (Perhaps no European is more isolated and not at home than when he or she is in

the empire—it is the ratio of the rulers to the ruled in the empire that renders the European vulnerable.) Here, amok is a source of anxiety for European colonisers:

> [The Europeans] would telephone to the nearest city, only to have it confirmed that nothing unusual had happened in the country. The European became aware of the fact that the life he had built on the agony of the colonized people was losing its assurance. (*A Dying Colonialism* 61–62)

What is interesting about this section of *A Dying Colonialism*, occurring in a chapter that examines the radio as an instrument of colonial rule and propaganda, is its suggestion that the psychopathology of the ruled engenders the psychopathology of their rulers:

> These hysterical cases were sometimes … given over to the police for questioning. The pathological nature of their behaviour would not be recognized, and the accused would be tortured for days … In the dominant group, likewise, there were cases of mental hysteria; people would be seized with a collective fear and panicky settlers were seen to seek an outlet in criminal acts. (*A Dying Colonialism* 62–63)

The amok of the colonised engenders the paranoia of the coloniser. Fanon is describing here the European paranoid reaction to amok. While he is not proposing a theory whereby the emergence of revolutionary consciousness may arise from amok, one may suggest nonetheless that this is a polemical moment in his writing whereby he dramatises amok as a possible nascent moment of anti-colonial revolution.

The appropriation of the other in colonialist writings is a function of the Manichean dynamic wherein binary oppositions were proposed between coloniser and colonised, administrators and natives, Europeans and non-Europeans. However, the colonisers as well as the colonised were both caught within this binary universe. If Fanon's writings concerning amok are brought to bear on Swettenham's, what emerges is the possibility of reading against the grain, such that the name of terror living in the heart of every colonial administrator in Malaya must be the *pengamok* who, with his jagged knife or *kris*, strikes at the walls of colonialism.

Amok is the return of the repressed; even as it dramatises the inferiority of indigenous subjectivity, it exceeds this colonialist portrayal, emerging as a phenomenon that engenders the coloniser's paranoia. One may also suggest that the dynamics of gender are at work in the representation of amok. Hence, amok becomes a trope that symbolises the violent and ungovernable manliness of the natives. The scene of amok almost invariably possesses a gendered economy. Those who run amok are always Malay men, armed with spears, or with *krisses* or knives ever ready at their belts. Birch, a victim of amok at Pâsir Sâlak, was in a

bathhouse when he was killed. The scene of his death is described as an invasion of domestic privacy:

> Pandak Indut cried out, "Here is Mr. Birch in the bath-house, come, let us kill him," and, followed by three or four others shouting *âmok*, *âmok*, they leapt on to the floating timbers and thrust their spears through the open space in front of the house". (*Malay Sketches* 242)

Swettenham was due to meet Birch soon afterward on that day, and when it became clear that a trap was being set for him, Swettenham's Malay companion, in preparation for the coming amok, "seized his kris and tightened his belt in readiness for instant trouble" (*Footprints* 58). It is hard to miss the masculine physicality of amok. Of course, by describing the killing of Birch as an instance of amok, Swettenham's narrative avoids considering the possibility that the attack on Birch might be indicative of an anti-colonial agency.

If we recognise in the trope of amok the "appropriation of the other as a form of knowledge within a totalizing system", then we may retrieve the trope from its essentialist category so as to critique Swettenham's discourse of arrogation (Young *White Mythologies* 35). In Swettenham's writings, amok is an essentialist category justifying colonial rule. However, amok is in actuality an ambivalent trope; it is a colonialist stereotype created out of the disavowed elements of the European self. Amok, as Swettenham himself admits at one point, is a suppressed phenomenon in Europe and America:

> If the asylums of Europe and America were closed, and the inmates returned to their relatives, it is more than probable that cases of … *âmok* … would not be confined to the natives of the Peninsula … (*The Real Malay* 253–254)

In Europe and America, amok is a symptom of insanity, and it is not to be found in ordinary people. However, in Malaya, it is represented as a general social phenomenon that occurs to ordinary Malays. Through disavowal and slippage, amok becomes an Orientalist projection that emerges as a colonialist stereotype. The ambivalent nature of amok can be located in an article by John Crawfurd, which Swettenham quoted at length:

> When the English infantry charged with the bayonet at Waterloo, a Malay might with propriety say the English ran a-muck; when the French charged over the bridge of Lodi, he might say the same thing. (Quoted in *The Real Malay* 233)

We may recall that the Battle of Lodi, on 10 May 1796, secured Napoleon's victory over Austrian forces, while the Battle of Waterloo, on 18 June 1815, marked the end of French ascendancy and brought an end to 750 years of Anglo-French conflict.

As Holden points out, this passage emphasises "the interchangeability of cultural systems, [it stresses] sameness, not difference, identity rather than alterity" ("Love, Death and Nation" 45). Amok is invested here with political agency in the European context, and it is by retrieving amok, as a form of political expression, from Swettenham's writings that we may call into question his discourse of arrogation.

It is no coincidence that Fanon, at a poignant moment in *A Dying Colonialism*, invokes amok as a function of anti-colonial agency. This is where amok is no longer a symptom of insanity but a signifier of political insurgency. In the slippage of the discourse of arrogation, we detect the colonial administrator's anxiety over the masculine ungovernability of Malaya. As soon as news of Birch's death spread, contingents from Hong Kong and India were sent, supported by a naval brigade, the force numbering, as Swettenham tells us, "about 1600 bayonets, with a battery and a half of Royal Artillery" (*Footprints* 64). That such a force was called upon to put down an uprising of fewer than 300 armed Malays testifies to the intensity of this colonial anxiety (Andaya 166). It is through the trope of amok that Swettenham established the inferiority of the Malays, and it is also through this trope that we are able to trace the coloniser's fear of their political and anti-colonial agency.

In the Malay-English dictionary they compiled, Hugh Clifford and Swettenham render the term as a signification of the Malay potential for violent revolt:

> To attack, to attack with fury, to make a charge, to assault furiously, to engage in furious conflict, to battle, to attack with desperate fury, to make an onslaught with the object of ruthless and indiscriminate slaughter, to run *âmok*, to dash against, to rush against; an attack, an assault, a charge. Âmok! Âmok! … Attack! Attack! The war cry of the Malays. (*Dictionary* 47)

The accretion of clauses through the use of synonyms in this entry undermines the linguistic project of the dictionary: In the process of (dis)placing colonial subjects into a pre-modern past that needs to be translated (by the colonial administrators) into the present of colonial modernity, the word "amok" erupts into a vision of self-directed action on the part of the Malays. Perhaps that is why the following note is included at the end of the dictionary entry, as if to reassure readers (and the writers themselves) of the unlikelihood of such an event: "The advance of civilization has done much to repress this peculiarity of the Malays, and *âmok* running is becoming yearly more rare" (Clifford *Dictionary* 48). Such a statement is possible because another set of narratives about Malaya is in place, and these narratives will be examined in the next chapter.

The discourse of arrogation had been played out in the historiography of Malaya and in the representation of its inhabitants. The invoking of the image of Malays running amok occurs in tandem with colonial domination. However, it bears remembering

that a discourse which seeks to dominate will contain fissures that will lead to its own undoing, for the colonialist trope of amok can be used against colonial empowerment. It is Fanon's incidental comments on amok that draw our attention to the possibility of reading the trope as representing the uncanny return of the repressed. In Swettenham's writings, even as amok is presented as testifying to the mental deficiencies of the Malays, rendering them into unhomely figures within the colonialist discourse and hence legitimising imperialism as a civilising mission, it exceeds this discursive frame, emerging as a trope that marks the coloniser's anxiety regarding the extent of control he has over the natives.

Amok is among the prominent tropes of British Malayan historiography. It has also to be said that British presence in Malaya also took form as a narrative of economic cooperation, wherein British capitalists, aided by enterprising Malay middlemen and diligent Chinese workers, were involved in the work of harnessing raw material from the land. This is a narrative one finds in Florence Caddy's travel writing, one of the three works about Malaya by women writers examined in the next chapter. Reconstituted as the enterprising intermediary between British capitalists and Chinese labour, the unhomely figure of the *pengamok* disappears.

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