Intimating the Sacred

Religion in English-Language Malaysian Fiction

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Introduction

Jamie S. Scott's assertion that "every literary history includes a tradition of religious writings" seems especially relevant to anglophone Malaysian fiction.[1] Although the phrase "religious writings" is inaccurate in this context, it is undeniable that despite its relatively recent history, Malaysian fiction written in English has always gestured towards religion or the religious. As such, I share Chelva Kanaganayakam's comment that even though "religion does not permeate the work of Malaysian writers … it remains a constitutive aspect of their work and undergirds the social and cultural life of the fictional characters they create",[2] although I disagree somewhat with the first clause of his statement. Religion does permeate the work of Malaysian authors who write in English although its presence may sometimes take oblique dimensions. This has partly to do with the issue of "sensitivity" that writers must take care not to transgress because of certain laws and policies in the country, which in turn have to do with the historical and political development of the nation. Hence, for us to understand the place and function of religion in contemporary anglophone Malaysian fiction, it is important to contextualize my study in terms of Malaysia's colonial heritage, its current socio-political situation and the way it impinges on cultural, religious and artistic establishments, and the state of anglophone Malaysian writing as what Deleuze and Guattari would term "minor literature" in contemporary Malaysia.[3]

This introductory chapter provides a brief outline of the development of anglophone Malaysian literature in the last forty years. What is obvious is that this "minor literature" continues to exist despite political odds that prescribe marginality to it. Although small in number,

anglophone Malaysian writings offer a powerful reference point to the cultural memory of the nation, and the vicissitudes the country has undergone. Often subtly critical of the status quo, these writings enable interesting glimpses into the everyday realities of the Malaysian people who refuse submission to the homogenizing ideologies of the state apparatus. One such reality is the practice of multireligiosity despite the Muslim-majority government's ongoing, if surreptitious, movement to Islamize the nation. The writers who have worked (and, to some extent, continue to work) under these somewhat repressive conditions have produced vital documents of the nation's history that parallel but do not echo the official version. As I will elaborate later, their stories are interested in "the people", and not so much the nation. In this chapter, I also discuss the theoretical framework within which this study manoeuvres. Veering away from the sociological and anthropological models that have dominated literary criticisms of anglophone Malaysian literature (because their primary interests in these narratives are the depiction of race politics and the idea of the nation), I privilege instead a psychoanalytical framework that is carefully interrelated with theories such as postcolonialism, feminism and poststructuralism to stake my interpretations. This is largely guided by my interest in how religion as represented in narratives is sometimes apprehended and negotiated at unconscious levels (be it private or public) and what interpretive consequences are derivable from this.

The Problem of a Literary Legacy

One of the contentions often encountered by postcolonial nations is what to do with their colonial legacies, especially language and its permeating effects, which have directly and indirectly filtered into various ideological apparatuses of imperialism such as education and law to coerce (subtly and transparently) the subordination of the "natives". In the case of the English language, the authors of the now classic *Empire Writes Back* note that:

> It can be argued that the study of English and the growth of the Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other, both at the level of simple utility

> (propaganda for instance) and at the unconscious level (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc.) which, conversely, established "savagery", "native", "primitive", as their antitheses and as the object of a reforming zeal.[4]

English, in other words, became the tool to propagate imperialism's civilizing agenda in the way it proscribed lack onto its colonized other — a tool which, because of its intrinsic relation to the socio-political and economic fabric of everyday life in the empire, penetrated almost every aspect of this fabric. When the empire was dissolved, and many colonized nations declared independence in the twentieth century, this legacy became a problem: to maintain it was, to an extent, encouraging a kind of neo-colonialism which would continue to undermine the newly formed nation's sense of identity and separation. This is a view held by some postcolonial thinkers such as Fanon and Ngugi, who both "have reiterated the importance of abrogating the imperial language for restoring and revitalizing the native cultures".[5] But the problem with this recommendation is that it would mean an overhauling of an entire socio-ideological structure which could lead to chaos.

A middle-ground approach is perhaps more constructive: to gradually reinstate native language(s) and culture(s) but without disowning the legacy of imperialism altogether. In other words, the systematic restoration of pre-colonial heritages should be performed concomitantly with the slow weeding of the undesirable residues of imperialism while ensuring the retention of what is good and useful. India and Ireland, for example, rather than dismissing the English language, have successfully appropriated it as another of their languages, producing some of the best writers and thinkers in that language today. In some cases where pre-colonial heritages are no longer a possible recourse, such as in the case of certain languages which have become "lost" or "forgotten" in the long process of colonization, the legacy of the colonizers may be the only means by which certain postcolonial nations can shape their identities. Or in the case of multiethnic postcolonial nations such as Malaysia and Singapore with their divergent languages, English is perhaps one of the very few common grounds through which cross-cultural relations can be fostered.

This, of course, does not mean that practitioners of the language, especially creative writers, should adopt unthinkingly the ideological

dimensions embedded within the language itself. This would be unenviable. Much of the cultural baggage of the English language is unsuitable for expressing local concerns and consciousness, especially due to "the implicit body of assumptions to which English was attached, its aesthetic and social values, the formal and historically limited constraints of genre, and the oppressive political and cultural assertion of metropolitan dominance of center over margin".[6] As Lloyd Fernando, an anglophone Malaysian writer and critic, contemplated in 1969 with regard to the feasibility of English to the literary development of the nation:

> What is quite certain is that if Malaysian (and possibly Asian) literature in English is ever to go beyond a certain praiseworthy competence and become something to be reckoned with, to be read not only by interested readers in other countries but in Asian countries as well, writers must now examine whether the language will adapt to their bones as it has so far adapted to their thought.[7]

Fernando's concern is that the adoption of English linguistic and literary strategies to articulate Malaysianess will compromise the authenticity of the latter, thus robbing it of its local textures and definitions. To resist this, the writer must carefully negotiate between his medium of expression and the realities of his society, constantly "infus[ing] 'local blood' into the language and attun[ing] it to the local context … suit[ing] the medium to the native color, verve, shades and consciousness".[8] This endeavour to make English bear the burden of local experiences is certainly not an easy task. The writer must adopt a bifocal approach to his world, constantly shuttling between the language adopted and the veracity of his experiences in the bid to (re)inscribe his multiple realities. There is of course the presupposition that such a constant and vigilant process of "translation" inevitably results in something becoming lost, but as Salman Rushdie strongly asserts, "I cling obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained".[9] He predicates this belief by arguing that, "Those of us who use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures, within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free".[10]

In the context of Malaysia, Rushdie's declaration seems apt in describing the "politics" of anglophone Malaysian literature: seven years after expressing his concern over the feasibility of the English language to represent Malaysian literature, Fernando wrote his first novel possibly in response to the country's 1969 racial riots. *Scorpion Orchid* remains one of the most important narratives in Malaysian literature, a searching reflection of a nation fragmented by ethnic and religious divisions, and a powerful evaluation of the status quo policies that continue to erect linguistic and cultural boundaries along racial lines. Although unstated, it can be assumed that the poverty of the national language (that is, the Malay language) to encourage a more collective outlook on the state of the nation has compelled Fernando to turn to English to critically reflect on "other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles within cultures, within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies".

But such a promising future for anglophone Malaysian literature, however, was largely stymied as the 1970s and early-80s unfolded. The increased politicization of everyday life, including the place of language, made literature written in English (and languages other than Malay) a valueless cultural product, thus frustrating many talented writers. To understand the state of contemporary anglophone Malaysian literature, it is useful to take a look, albeit briefly, at its development (or lack thereof) in the last forty years.

The State of Anglophone Malaysian Literature: A Brief Overview

In 1967, the Malay language was made the national language by the Constitution in Malaysia. But it is, as Tham Seong Chee acknowledges, the years between 1969 and 1971 which constituted "the watershed in language and literary development in several senses".[11] The racial riot that erupted in 1969 pushed for subsequent national security and economic policies that would culminate in the supremacy of the Malays (who would later appropriate the title *bumiputra*s, or "sons of the soil", to consolidate their claim) and the minoritization of the Chinese and the Indians. What was known as the New Economic Policy (NEP) was thereafter launched (1971) allegedly in order to redress the

socio-economic imbalance amongst the different ethnic groups, and to put into place affirmative action to alleviate poverty, promote nationalism through the consolidation of various signifiers of the nation (language, the national ideology [*Rukunegara*, or "Articles of Faith of the State"] and establish the notion of *bumiputra* rights and privileges) which would directly place "the Malays as the dominant group, while assuring that minority groups' rights, beliefs and ways of life remain unthreatened".[12] In reality however, the NEP, over a period of the next twenty years, increasingly infiltrated every facet of Malaysian life, directly and indirectly threatening precisely those "rights, beliefs and ways of life" of the minority groups which the policy was meant to protect in the first place. *Bumiputra*s (especially the Malays, for although the indigenous people of Malaysia are also subsumed under this category, they are also largely marginalized unless they adopt the Malay way of life and convert to Islam) were privileged in divergent ways to the extent that the peripheral status of minority groups became actual expressions of repression: these include, among others, a university admission quota system which guaranteed that fifty-five percent of admission to any public universities were devoted to *bumiputra* students (a system that remains in place), the enforcement of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in national schools,[13] subsidized housing, government contracts to firms owned by *bumiputra*s.[14] Although the NEP was officially abolished in 1990 (it was replaced by the New Development Policy), it remains an irrefutable fact that the policies introduced by the NEP continue to inform the socio-economic ethos of Malaysia even up until today.

One of the moves to further strengthen *bumiputra*-Malay dominance by the NEP was the passing of the Constitutional Amendment Act in 1971 which made it illegal to question the status of the national language. A year before this, the government-sponsored Federation of National Writers (Gabungan Penulis Nasional, or GAPENA) was formed, and one of its primary aims was to initiate and enhance the development of literary and cultural activities in Malaysia, especially the development of Malay literature and culture as the basis for the establishment of a national culture. These concerted moves by the government resulted in two related consequences: first, languages other than Malay were (and still are) relegated to secondary status; and

second, in line with the establishment of the national language and development of Malay literature, the notion of a "national literature" was instituted with only works written in the Malay language qualifying for such an honour. In other words, "national literature" must *always* be literature written in Malay, while work written in other languages was considered sectional, or minority, literature.[15] Writers who persisted in crafting in English — many of whom were non-Malays and non-*bumiputra*s — had to be prepared to have their creative productions sidelined in terms of public and academic interest, limited in readership, and unrecognized as legitimate creative expressions of national worth. Such writers, as Rajeev Patke argues, are forced into a "diasporic" condition within their homeland,[16] and their work subscribed to being "written in virtual absence of a local audience and with little more than a small body of sympathetic commentary supporting it in belated fashion from outside" (notably Australian scholars).[17]

Such a "politicization of literary development" in the postcolonial history of Malaysia has had considerable effect on the nation's cultural landscape.[18] Despite GAPENA's objective to encourage literary endeavours that sought to promote national unity and understanding, the fact that only Malay writings were given consideration severely undermined such a laudable aim. Furthermore, it was primarily Malay writers who would excel in this language, but these writers, especially in the early years of Malaysian independence, remained locked in communal mentality.[19] As Tham astutely observes:

> [W]hat then are the possibilities for writing creative works which touch on the different cultures in Malaysia? The structural difficulties are complicated by the non-structural factors — the chief of which is the fact that writers in the national language are by and large Malays of rural background and educated in the Malay-medium schools. Their writings therefore exemplify a set of values or a *weltanschauung* reflective of rural Malay sensitivities and experience.[20]

The reverse was also true of non-Malay literary works. With the lack of emphasis shown to such creative expressions, non-Malay writings tended to also focus on ethnic and communal matters that largely elided or refused attempts at cross-cultural understanding. The result was the deepening of suspicion among the various ethnic groups

fuelled by literatures which pandered to racial stereotypes, communal solidarity and a disregard for otherness. The only common language shared by Malaysians was English, but as a colonial legacy which must be carefully weeded in order for the nation to establish a separate, independent identity, it had to be "replaced" by the national language, "an act not altogether surprising as the principle was predicated on a patriotic nationalist sentiment that was instrumental in resisting the imperial hegemony and restoring the consciousness of the 'disadvantaged' people".[21] Unlike postcolonial nations such as Ireland and India whose literatures deterritorialized the dominant language by appropriating it for "strange and minor uses" that consequently encouraged "a whole *other* story [that] is vibrating within" the officially sanctioned one,[22] Malaysia repudiated such an option by denying the possibility of English as a "subversive strategy for reconstituting national history and identity".[23] Literature written in English (or Chinese, or Tamil), as articulated by Professor Ismail Hussein, a fierce advocate of Malay literature as "national literature", was considered foreign, or "aimless",[24] and therefore served no purpose in the formation of national unity and identity.

Thus, the political climate of Malaysia in the 1970s and early 80s considerably hindered the development of anglophone Malaysian writings. As Mohammad Quayum laments, when compared to "the postcolonial writings of other newly emergent nations such as India, South Africa, West Indies or even neighboring Singapore, the quantum of [anglophone] writing [in Malaysia] seems puny, if not downright negligible".[25] Many promising creative practitioners in English during this period found that their "freedom to write is suddenly a dubious right in view of the formidable [ideological] barriers in place".[26] Frustrated by such repressive conditions, some have chosen either to temporarily abandon writing (such as Lloyd Fernando, whose two novels were separated by a period of seventeen years) or "to migrate and live in 'voluntary exile'" (such as the poets Ee Tiang Hong and Shirley Lim).[27] Arguably however, even those who remained are, as Edward Said would term them, "metaphorical exiles" whose loyalty to another language plotted them as liminal within their own discursive spaces.[28] This is evident in the case of writer K. S. Maniam, whose oeuvre spans over forty years, but who is only recently getting

the critical recognition he deserves. And, if the writer is Malay, the dilemma is further complicated, for in choosing to write in the English language, he is already implying an ambivalent adherence to his ethnic identity and heritage. According to the Malaysian Constitution, one of the signifiers of Malayness is the predominant use of the Malay language. As such, in the political climate of Malaysia, for a Malay to write in a language other than the national one is tantamount to compromising his or her own ethnic identity, and by curious extension, his or her religious one as well. This is because religion and race are powerfully and symbiotically yoked in Malaysia, and to be Malay is *ipso facto* to be Muslim. This interrelationship guarantees for the Malays certain socio-economic privileges and rights which many are, of course, wont to renounce. Thus, race, religion and language are complementary components that identify the individual in the complex socio-ideological landscape of the nation, each reinforcing the other. It is therefore unsurprising that there were very few Malay anglophone writers during this period. Those who did write in English often hailed from middle-class backgrounds, whom poet Salleh ben Joned terms "bumigeois", and were Western-educated (and therefore more critical of the nation's existing socio-political ideologies).

One such writer is the scatological and irreverent Salleh ben Joned. His poetry and essays are evidently acts of defiance that pithily question Malay supremacy and the country's political corruption.[29] For him, "national literature" is, to say the least, a preposterous notion, for "[to] insist on a 'National Literature' is to betray a fundamental lack of understanding of what literature is all about".[30] Challenging existing national policies on language and education, Salleh fiercely defends the place of English in the Malaysian socio-cultural landscape. Arguing against the myopic view that only the national language can articulate the "soul" of the people (as expressed in the popular motto *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*), he avers that:

> A language belongs to those who speak it. It's as simple as that. Given this fact, and that language communicates experience and is capable of transcending the boundaries of the culture of its origin — given all this, then the English we speak in Malaysia today belongs to us. It's *our* English; along with B[ahasa] M[alaysia] [Malay language] it expresses our "soul", with all its

> contradictions, and confusions, as much as our social and material needs.[31]

Salleh's view reinvests the English language with its unifying, cross-cultural possibilities. As a writer speaking from the position of the politically privileged, and one fluent in both languages, Salleh's promotion of English is refreshingly optimistic and, I suspect, has paved the way for a group of younger Malay writers to experiment creatively in this medium beginning in the 1990s. But while writers like Rehman Rashid, Dina Zaman and Amir Muhammad continue in the vein of Salleh's critical strategy against the status quo, there is a sense that these writers *also* choose English because of their conscientious embrace of modernity which has made them more amenable to writing outside their ethnic-linguistic borders in order to reach a wider, more global audience.[32] This attempt to attain greater readership has, in my view, an important objective. It is to break Malay writings and philosophy from their insularity. If before, only non-Malay writers' works, with often non-Malay concerns, could have an international bearing in the literary market, with the emergence of these Malay writers, "Malayness" from the perspectives of everyday Malays (and not academics and researchers of the Malay community who are usually Westerners) can now establish an articulation which could help correct certain misconceptions about this community and introduce a way of life to more readers. In the words of writer Che Husna Azhari, it is "looking at literature from our own perspective, that it can be an ideology in itself.[33] For example, her stories, specifically centered on the Kelantanese people (long popular with Western anthropologists), provide a more nuanced view on their customs, sexuality and religiosity than any scholarly treatise. In the case of Malay women writers who write in English (such as Che Husna Azhari, Dina Zaman and Ellina Majid), there is, claims critic Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, an added objective: the experimental freedom to write about sexuality and the female body which are otherwise taboo in Malay literature.[34] But I would argue that this freedom is not afforded to women writers alone. A male writer like Karim Raslan, for example, could deal with homosexuality in his narratives, often with rather graphic descriptions of sexual intercourse, which is unconventional in Malaysian literature, Malay or otherwise.[35]

When considering the development of anglophone Malaysian literature in the last twenty years, it is certain that the 1990s have been conducive for the reinstatement of English as a viable and necessary aesthetical medium. Recognition of English as "vital for keeping up with the advancement of knowledge and the transfer of technology" and an important agent of globalization in the mid-1980s has resulted in several government measures to ensure its "resuscitation".[36] The effect, if not immediate, is soon evident, and the literary scene indirectly benefited from such an incentive. Many writers who ceased writing due to the repressive conditions in the 1970s and 80s started publishing again (such as Fernando and Lee Kok Liang), while new writers began to emerge.[37] Akin to the repressed in Freudian psychoanalysis, the English language (and by extension, literature written in English) has always existed ambiguously alongside and within the socio-cultural landscape, despite the various attempts by nationally-sponsored policies to exorcise it. As with many paradoxes of colonial legacies, the inheritance of English, despite its impetus to further fragment the Malaysian society, has curiously also the potential to bring about unity, and defuse otherness and suspicion to forge a spirit of hospitality and mutual belonging. Although dormant and lacklustre due to the political climate in the 1970s and 80s, English nevertheless remained a fundamental "source of much creative cultural production in Malaysia's ethnically and linguistically fragmented society" due to its "relatively lengthy educational, institutional and literary tradition in the country", and its service as "an important site for negotiating the colonial past and configuring the political community without respect to ethnic and cultural difference".[38] However, the rehabilitation of English in Malaysia today certainly holds promises for an "ethnically plural society and cultural environment" to "search for a national self and political community" especially since "the national language has been ethnicized in keeping with the politics of the ruling elite".[39]

Minor Literature and the Idea of the "Nation"

Mandal's evaluation of the English language's efficacy for promoting racial integration in contemporary Malaysia may be a hopeful one, but his pegging of this to a "search for a national self" remains

contentious, especially since — with the advent of globalization, Benedict Anderson's notion of "communities" as fantastical constructions, and poststructuralist criticisms of hegemonies — the idea of the "nation" is increasingly "losing its force with the world entering a post-national phase, giving rise to a global or *inter*-national culture".[40] Certainly, a quick survey of English-language literature by Malaysian writers, apart from Fernando, would show that many of them are less interested in "nationalism" and more interested in the people who make up this imagined community — their day-to-day struggles, their personal embrace of cultures, and their private religious beliefs.[41] One evident characteristic in a number of anglophone Malaysian works however (again, with the exception of Fernando's two novels) is that they are often "communal" in the sense that these writers tend to stay within their ethnic boundaries for their creative scopes. One writer, K. S. Maniam, justifies this communal approach to his writing in this way:

> [My] stories, novel and play portray the Indian community in Malaysia. Being of Malaysian Indian origin myself, it seems only natural that I write about my own community. It is commonly accepted that a writer writes about what he knows best. That material would stem from his immediate family background, society outside his family and his educational background.[42]

What tacit assertion can be derived from this statement? Maniam's adherence to a "community" when he is living in a supposedly multi-ethnic country already suggests the persistent polarization between races that haunts Malaysia even after decades of independence. That he writes primarily about the Indian community *because* he knows it "best" demonstrates either a refusal to engage, or anxiety about engaging, with other ethnic groups because of the ambivalent racial relations that continue to problematize national identity. The worry that one may unwittingly "offend" another from a different race has resulted in anglophone Malaysian literature largely revolving around themes and concerns that reflect the writer's ethnic background.[43]

But if Maniam's statement is read in light of my view that anglophone Malaysian writers are interested in the "people", his communal approach to literature may then be his way of speaking for a people who would otherwise have little recourse to representation, and in a language that will reach other ethnic groups, even encompassing

a wider, global audience. In this sense, rather than a literature that remains ethnically and culturally bounded, anglophone Malaysian writings become what Deleuze and Guattari envision for minor literature: that is, literature which mirrors "*the people's concern*",[44] rather than that of the nation's. Although puny in output, these writings take on a "collective value" whose objective is to mobilize a common action of resisting conformity to a monolithic state ideology (that has become recast as "nationalism") that privileges a particular ethno-religious class over others, by creatively reifying the socio-cultural realities and unique contributions of the divergent peoples in the national imagination. In emphasizing "the people" from the grassroots in narratives, writers provide a sensitive, intimate look at the complex socio-cultural landscape of Malaysia in its vibrant multiplicity that official, homogeneous metanarratives (such as "history" or "nationalism") often fail to capture. To an extent, these writers seem to confirm what Homi Bhabha observes about "the people": "The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to the contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population".[45] For Bhabha, if I understand him correctly, nationalism is an all-consuming concept that seeks to contain "the people" within a single ideological hegemony, but which, in a rather Foucauldian sense, is always resisted, reconditioned and even modified by this very people itself. It is the people who function as the vital conduit between "the totalizing powers" and the "forces" that attend to the "contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population", thereby negotiating the borderlines — both physical and psychical — of the modern state. If nationalism is, analogically, a kind of narrative, then the people are its most important readers. Bhabha further qualifies his argument by elaborating on how the people are both products of their "national" history (they are "the historical 'objects' of a national pedagogy")[46] and determiners of their nation's present and future destinies through a process of resignifying and/or reproducing the past and present.

But this liminal status of the people is decidedly a vexed position to inhabit because national ideologies are sometimes difficult to dismantle, and the danger of ideological false consciousness due to fear

or complacency is insidious. Often too, as is the case with Malaysia, astute readers of the nation would find themselves in compromised situations: the ability to critically assess the nation is unequally yoked with a sense of powerlessness because these same readers are often also marginalized or minoritized. And if a marginal reader is also an impassioned writer, the situation is more acute: how can she consolidate her spatial and historical rootedness with the hostile ideological environment that seeks to silence the conscientious critic? "After all", as playwright Kee Thuan Chye lamented in the 1990s, "in Malaysia, a writer stands alone. Which, therefore, makes him all the more vulnerable".[47] He continues:

> In Malaysia, despite the lip service being paid to democratic principles, censorship is still a handy instrument. We are often told that it is necessary in order to safeguard the nation's peace and stability.… After a while, censorship inevitably breeds self-censorship. People become conditioned to saying only what they are allowed to say; what is outside of the permissible is best left unsaid.[48]

Such a "culture of fear" instigated during Mahathir Mohammad's term as Malaysia's prime minister was indeed pervasive and far-reaching, so much so that even in the last fifteen years, when Malaysian literature in English has made a significant comeback, writers continue to shy away from overt political references or cross-cultural themes, bringing us back to Maniam's rather guarded defence of the privileged status he gives to the Indian community in his narratives.[49] Or, to quote further from Kee:

> A writer of any race communicating to such a variegated society is apt to be viewed with misgiving by some quarters. He can hardly take a stand on any issue without drawing ire or suspicion. We do not have as yet a developed Malaysian consciousness to which a writer can address his views with sanguinity; the consciousness of race subverts such a covenant between writers and audience.[50]

Still, such a tense socio-political landscape cannot completely paralyze the development of anglophone Malaysian writings. Conscientious writers continue to channel their energy towards creatively reimagining a people of Malaysia and refuse to admit any political orientations. But this strategy, rather than implying a reluctance to engage with the

political "realities" of contemporary Malaysia is, in my view, actually a deeply political one. As Deleuze and Guattari have demonstrated, "everything" in minor literature "is political … Its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified".[51] Thus, by emphasizing the story of an ordinary Chinese monk and Ceylonese physician (Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the Sky*, 1981), or the lives of dispossessed Indian immigrants (Maniam), or Malaysian-Chinese women under Confucian patriarchy (Shirley Lim), or Kelantanese folks and their customs (Che Husna Azhari) or middle-class Malay hypocrisy (Karim Raslan), Malaysian writers are writing the people of Malaysia *into life*, into a reality that has often little to do with the grand narrative of nationalism. It is "minority history" which these writers aim to document in fiction, one of the few available avenues allowed for the expression of their "struggle for inclusion and representation".[52] As such, I disagree with Wong Phui Nam's assessment of the state of anglophone Malaysian literature when he writes that "without access to a meaningful tradition or claim to even a disintegrating one, the Malaysian writer in English brings, as it were, to his work a naked and orphaned psyche".[53] I see two problems with such a perspective. First, it seems that Wong considers "tradition" a historical fixity which provides definition for group identity, forgetting that tradition can also be what that group has constructed as a self-reflective attempt to define itself. Hence what Wong means by "a meaningful tradition" remains a moot point. For example, should a "meaningful tradition" for a Chinese migrant always be tied to his ancestral past and his adherence to Confucian beliefs? Could not his profound experience as a diasporic individual be counted as a "meaningful tradition" in itself, however recent? And is "meaningful tradition" the only determinant for self or collective definition? Are there no other criteria, such as historical memory and immediate socio-ideological consciousness that can equally enable a writer to stake his sustenance "of a vital communal life in the new land"?[54] This leads me to my second contention: if we consider criteria other than "meaningful tradition", it is certainly untrue that the Malaysian writer in English is working on "barren ground",[55] and thus brings to "his work a naked and orphaned psyche". On the contrary, the vexed, contested memories of the people

of Malaysia provide a fertile foundation from which powerful literature can spring.

This study considers the narratives of the following writers: Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang, K. S. Maniam, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Che Husna Azhari and Karim Raslan. My choice of these writers and their texts at the expense of others is not an arbitrary one. Because my focus is on the way religion and religiosity are depicted, only narratives which gesture at this theme are considered. The first four writers are important because of their recognizable status today as "canon" writers in anglophone Malaysian literature. What they have in common (save, perhaps, Lim who is well known as an Asian-American scholar and writer), however, is that their writings are only recently coming into critical importance in scholarship. The politicizing of literature in Malaysia has resulted in little national support to promote these writers, and as a result, has hindered for a long time both their creative expressions and the dissemination of their writings. This is further compounded by the fact that academic interest in postcolonial Asian literatures has consistently focused on writings from South Asia, ignoring the histories and productions of anglophone literature from other postcolonial nations such as Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines.[56] What this demonstrates is that as much as national policies have resulted in the marginalization of Malaysian writers in English, the "politics" of scholarship and academic publishing has also significantly contributed to their "invisibility", further appending the implication of "lesser value" to their work as opposed to, say, the narratives of Salman Rushdie and Michael Ondaatje. This point is made not in disparagement of such noteworthy postcolonial writers, whose literary merits have proven themselves and remain undisputed. But it cannot be denied that the consistent and conscientious promotions of these writers have obscured not just the merit but the very "existence" of other writers. The pitiful amount of scholarship generated by both local and international academics on anglophone Malaysian literature is also an important factor contributing to the puny literary output in the country. My focus on the remaining two "emerging" authors, whose works are gradually becoming noticed in the local literary scene, is largely influenced by limitations. There are very few Malay writers who write fiction in English, and fewer still

whose works have received critical acclaim. Che Husna Azhari and Karim Raslan are two such writers. Moreover, their work often evokes religion in subtle, ironic ways, which provides interesting insights into the dynamics of the Malay-Muslim identity.

As such, an important aim of this study is to critically introduce anglophone Malaysian literature, specifically fiction, to a wider readership. In the following pages, I have deliberately chosen to focus much of my discussion on writers who, in my view, have had recognition long overdue to them. Of the writers I am analyzing, Lloyd Fernando and Lee Kok Liang are no longer with us. Lee passed away suddenly in 1996, shortly after the publication of his second collection of stories (ironically entitled *Death Is a Ceremony and Other Stories*, 1992, and Fernando left us early in 2008 after a long battle with illness). Both of them were important writers and advocates of English-language literature in Malaysia, but their works have unfortunately suffered considerable neglect and are only coming to attention of late (two local presses, Silverfish and Maya, recently reissued many of their writings which have long been out of print). K. S. Maniam, Malaysia's most prolific anglophone writer (in terms of output), is also perhaps the most well known; although scholarly writings surrounding his work have increased notably in recent years, they tend to focus primarily on his first novel, *The Return* (1981) whilst his short stories and other two novels are usually given only passing consideration. The same could be said in general of Shirley Lim's literary writings. Her prominence as an Asian-American scholar and the acclaim of her memoir *Among the White Moonfaces* (1996) have resulted in almost a complete critical neglect of her fiction and poetry which sensitively portray Malaysia and its people.

In the last ten years, the success of Malaysian writers such as Tash Aw (*The Harmony Silk Factory*, 2005), Rani Manicka (*The Rice Mother*, 2002) and Tan Twan Eng (*The Gift of Rain*, 2007) in the international literary scene has placed Malaysian literature on the map. This is an encouraging sign that Malaysian writers and writings are finally coming to maturity, and has thus directly resulted in a renewed interest in the anglophone literature of this region. However, the danger that these writers, because they belong to internationally renowned publishing houses, would end up obscuring other praiseworthy local

writers who may not have, or desire, such a privilege, is undeniable. This is another reason which has compelled my choice of writers for this study. For example, in my conclusion, I have chosen to focus on emerging but lesser known Malaysian writers such as Che Husna Azhari and Karim Raslan precisely because these writers not only provide invaluable "cultural memories" in their stories but are fine writers whose works, because they are locally or regionally published, may not attract the same amount of critical attention as their more globally recognized fellow authors.

Indeed, the writings of Lloyd Fernando, Lee Kok Liang, Shirley Lim, K. S. Maniam and several emerging Malay writers who compose primarily in English, showcase, in my opinion, a rich and variegated history of experiences and everyday realities which culminate, in the process, into a "meaningful tradition" that is at once uniquely Chinese, or Indian, or Malay (or whatever the ethnic identity) *and* uniquely Malaysian. These writings continue to celebrate the pluralistic identity of this country, however fraught and unstable, revealing in the process a deep awareness of Malaysianess that transcends state-informed boundaries. And one of the ways in which these writings encourage such awareness is through their depiction of religion and how it operates on personal, communal and cross-cultural levels.

Religious Pluralism and the Malaysian Society

Before outlining the scope of this study, the multireligious makeup of Malaysia must first be considered to provide further context for this project. Islam is the principal religion in Malaysia, and the Malays, who form the largest ethnic group (sixty-five percent of the population),[57] are also constitutionally Muslims. This symbiotic relationship has persisted since the fourteenth century,[58] and was solidified during the British rule (beginning with the Pangkor Treaty in 1874) to pacify the Malay rulers with the promise that they would continue to remain religious leaders in their respective states.[59] But when Islam became the official religion in the Constitution of Malaya in 1957, the Islamization of the Malay people became law. As Azmi Aziz and A. B Shamsul deliberate:

> The Malaysian Constitution became the single most important modern institutional tool that molded and conditioned Malaysian Islam, thus defining its socio-political space in Malaysian government and politics. This delineation of the "Islamic/Muslim" socio-political space, as we observe today, into a rather special space, is rooted in a straightforward constitutional provision in which every Malay person is automatically defined as Muslim. In other words, religion (read Islam) became the ethnic identifier (read Malayness) for the Malays.[60]

It was, however, in the 1970s (again following the racial riots of 1969) that Islam took on an increasingly aggressive dimension, a resurgence that was largely influenced by a worldwide Islamic revival.[61] Although Islamic resurgent movements were not uncommon in the history of Malaysia, in the 1970s, these movements began to shift their focus from primarily religious and social concern, to political ones as well. As historians K. S. Jomo and Abdullah Shabery Cheek contend:

> The rejection of secular Western-oriented education and Western style modernization by young Muslim Malays began at a time when governments of Muslim nations began to assert themselves politically, following the first oil price shock of 1973. In the late 1970s, Islamic revival gained increased political momentum through a tacit alliance between the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) and the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, PAS) — the main Islamic opposition party.[62]

ABIM, then led by the charismatic Anwar Ibrahim, and PAS posed a significant threat to UMNO (United Malays National Organization), the principal Malay political party of the country, and a member of Barisan Nasional (or, the National Front, a coalition between UMNO, MCA [Malayan Chinese Association], MIC [Malayan Indian Congress] and other smaller parties). Their primary attack was focused on UMNO's laxity in matters of Islam and its pandering to the West. Soon, "diverse Islamic revivalist groups, collectively referred to as the *dakwah* (proselytizing) movement, began to develop among the kampong-born and educated Malays who had emerged as a new social force under the NEP". UMNO's position was significantly jeopardized, but in the 1980s, under Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, the party began a series of counteractions that would radically strengthen its position as *the* representative of Islam in the country.[63] Some of UMNO's

strategies included co-opting Anwar Ibrahim, professing a moderate Islamic stance compatible with modernization and a sensitivity towards other ethnic groups, and realigning Islam with "building an integrated, forward-looking and globally oriented nation embracing all ethnic groups".[64] Declaring its own "Islamization of the government machine" in 1984,[65] by the 1990s, "Islam has moved to a central position within [the government's] ideology".[66] In mobilizing Islam to form the backbone of the nation's governmentality, however, UMNO was not thinking of turning Malaysia into another Iran.[67] Under Mahathir's regime, Islam was seen as key to nationalism and modernization, and was as such unopposed to capitalism. As Ong notes, the political emphasis on Islam during this period "appears to be state control over Islamic law as an instrument of and a rationale for national growth and security".[68]

Such a concerted effort at raising the stakes of Islam was viewed, at best, with ambivalence by the other ethnic groups. In the country's "mosaic of religions, superimposed by the constitutional standing of Islam as the official religion", what resulted from this move by the government is the reduction of this mosaic "to two fields of contestation: the Muslim and the non-Muslims", and the discourse of religion invariably cutting into the discourse of race.[69] This contention continues. Today, race and religion in Malaysia have become interlinked, so much so that the profession of a religion is tantamount to belonging to a particular ethnic group. Unsurprisingly, this has led to various forms of intricate social vexation: Malays are not allowed to adopt any other faith — to do so would be to relinquish their *bumiputra* status and its attendant privileges, and in any case, under the *Syariah* law, conversion for the Malays is illegal.[70] A non-Malay who wishes to adopt Islam is viewed with disdain by his or her ethnic community because such an act is construed as a betrayal of his or her people. In the eyes of many ethnic Chinese and Indians, to "*masuk* Islam" (convert to Islam) is equivalent to "*masuk Melayu*" (become Malay). Converts to Islam are also viewed warily by their Malay brethren because there is always the unstated suspicion that the former want to enjoy the socio-economic privileges associated with being a Muslim. Moreover, a non-Malay Muslim is always considered a "*saudara baru*", or a newcomer to the faith, an appellation that implies subordination to his or her Malay

brethren, even if he or she has actually been a Muslim all his or her life.[71] Clearly, such a socio-political landscape is discriminatory, and reifies the Malay-Muslim exceptionalism.

But while much has been written about this intense politicizing of religion in the country's history, little has been documented with regard to how the other ethnic groups (primarily the Chinese and the Tamil-Indians who comprise roughly twenty-six and eight percent of the population respectively)[72] view this transformation. One such precious study is undertaken by Kikue Hamayotsu. According to Hamayotsu, Mahathir's anti-Western stance and his "Look-East" policy as the fundamentals for socio-economic development were able to channel "the target of Malay nationalism away from the non-Malays — the Chinese in particular — *within* the country to the West *outside*";[73] as such, "UMNO's vision of modernist Islam was, in fact, a quite attractive option for the non-Muslim minorities in Muslim-dominated Malaysia".[74] Following this view, the non-Muslims of Malaysia were quite happy to tolerate Mahathir's Islamist-motivated nation-building strategies as long as their interests were not directly affected. A contrary view, however, is proffered by Lee and Ackerman, who argue that UMNO's Islamization policies (in)directly contributed to the increased religiosity in the other racial groups as well.[75] This is in response, perhaps, to a growing sense of helplessness amongst these ethnic groups as they witnessed, essentially as "mute spectators … the drama of Islamic insurgence" which "ignored, threatened and transgressed" their rights.[76] Interesting as they may be, both these theories, however, are broad and general, and fail to capture the complex anxieties reflected in the non-Malay Muslims response to the country's intense Islamic reflowering. This is inevitable as studies of these kinds tend to privilege a sociological (or anthropological or historical) model, while psychological and aesthetical ones are often overlooked. Inevitably then, what are left out of such studies are the intangible effects of social-political transformations.

In her reading of Asian-American narratives from a psychoanalytical perspective, Ann Cheng astutely observes that it is a narrow definition of "material" (read tangible, observable) history which has resulted in the marginalization of literature and philosophy from serious consideration in research on racial relations.[77] Yet, as Cheng avers, it is in

these disciplines that the "pressing" matters of race and discrimination are most evident because "private desires … enmeshed in social relations" are powerfully foregrounded.[78] Literature, for example, provides the discursive space for the "materialization" of what official histories often deny, but which are nevertheless intricately related to social "realities". Cheng gives the example of trauma resulting from racial prejudice which, because it is often lodged in the psyche and as such is "intangible", is also often unnoticed in studies which are biased towards the material. This, as Cheng argues, is a radical shortcoming in the larger project of race relations because it dismisses one of its profound and fundamental dimensions from serious consideration just because it cannot be empirically recorded. Ultimately, it is a shortcoming premised on the dismissal of the fact that "the material world" is at once also "deeply implicated in a symbolic [and I would add emotional and psychic] realm[s]".[79] Cheng's insightful observation has crucial relevance to my project. In the case of Malaysia, the sociological, anthropological and/or sociological enquiries into the reactions of non-Malay Muslims to Islamic revivalism reflect merely an overall understanding of the situation, but do not begin to reveal the intricacies of race-relation and religious anxieties experienced on an everyday level. They do not tell us, for example, the *forms* such anxieties take, and how they affect the individual in his or her personal life and interpersonal relationships. They do not enable an appreciation of the mental and emotional complexities of this state of religious tension, or what a non-Malay, under such a regime, would confront should he or she wish to embrace Islam. They also do not reveal the level of cultural and ethical compromises and valences involved for a people fragmented by racial and religious division but who nevertheless sincerely desire friendship and unity.

This study, I hope, will go some way in filling the gaps left by sociological and anthropological interrogations into the state of the Malaysian people. My objective in focusing on literary works as the basis of my enquiry is precisely to unveil the "unspoken" aspects of tensions resulting from religious adherence on both personal and interpersonal levels. In these narratives, questions about what it means to be Hindu in an Islamic country, a modern Muslim, and a convert in this religiously fraught space, take on an immediate "reality" that is

both complicated and compelling, and force the reader — at least this reader — to reconsider his or her ethnic and religious position and, perhaps, be more amenable to otherness. But this is not all. I am also interested in the way writers (such as Maniam and Lee Kok Liang) harness the symbols of their religious traditions to rethink their ethnic and cultural particularity and how their narratives negotiate "categories of difference and power [to] indicate the degree to which ethnic traditions resist the homogenizing and functionalist strategies" of nationalism and historical imperatives.[80] As such, my study finds resonance in Peter Kerry Power's (passim John Berger) injunction that:

> the socially constructive power of religion [is] not so much in doctrines or theologies but in day-to-day practices, stories and rituals: ways of being in the world imaginatively and practically that orient human beings towards particular forms of actions. The stories and rituals that religion carry forward embody memories that allow cultures to both persist and adapt to change.[81]

As Malaysia continues to struggle with issues of racial unity and religious tolerance, perhaps the solution for consolidating them lies in something as simple and yet meaningful as reading good literature.

Religion and/in Anglophone Malaysian Literature

It must be qualified that the placement of the conjunction and preposition in the subheading of this section is to signal the twin concerns of this study (literature "and" religion) and its separation from a particular tradition (notably Western) of studying literature as the handmaiden to religion (Christianity). This tradition, possibly instantiated by T. S. Eliot's essay "Religion and Literature" (1935), is premised on the view that literature must always be read from a theological (or at least ethical) standpoint. Instead, my focus is on what the narratives I have selected for discussion tell us about religions as practised by the various ethnic groups at an intimate and communal level, and what their devotions mean to them (and to others). An important disclaimer that needs emphasizing is that I am not suggesting that these narratives are "representative" of the various ethnic identities and their particular religious concerns. Fiction does not claim such a grand objective, and the critic must therefore not impute to it such a vision. But fiction

does record cultural memories, including ritual and religious practices, and such memories do play the crucial function of preserving for a people an identity that is often too easily disintegrated by the forgetfulness of nationalistic concerns.[82] In considering the theme of religion in anglophone Malaysian literature, I am (re)visiting the "cultural memories" of a people and what they reveal about: the state of religious tension that has been ideologically engendered, thereby dividing the people; the complexities of practising religion in a country increasingly transformed by (post)modernity and globalization; and the private negotiations one has to make between one's religious adherence and one's sexuality, gender and/or class.[83] Within such a reading praxis, my investigation of these texts follows Theodore Ziokolwiski's recommendation that the religious elements in literature ought to be interpreted "seriously or parodistically, devoutly or critically".[84] Also, by focusing on the "local" and the "particular" of some of these narratives (Buddhism in Lee Kok Liang's novel, Hinduism in Maniam's writings, Christianity and Confucianism in Shirley Lim's stories and Islam in the works of Che Husna Azhari and Karim Raslan), I hope that this study may reveal the ways in which these narratives participate in "the emergence of a new and broader definition of universal human values, which asserts the shared concerns of all peoples across their differences".[85]

When reading the narratives of the writers, what becomes evident is the pronounced presence of religion, however indirect, as a theme. Or to put it differently and in order to address the title of this study, religion is often "intimated" in these narratives, forms an important subtext, and serves as a kind of interpretive direction, but without becoming a major concern (except perhaps for the writings of K. S. Maniam). The significance of religion in Malaysian anglophone fiction, however, has not been well reflected in available scholarship. Criticism often focuses largely on the dimensions of nationalism and/or race (see individual chapters for further evidence), neglecting altogether a host of equally important issues including religion, gender, sexuality and class. Also, such scholarship often adopts a sociological model for interrogation which, I feel, tends to ignore or neglect the texts' more slippery and "unsymbolizable" features such as semblances of trauma, the violence of rhetoric, and the unconscious, all of which would be

revealed through a psychoanalytical investigation. As such, this study draws substantially on psychoanalytical insights (especially of the Lacanian school) to read the selected narratives' portrayal of religion which, as it will become clear, is often inseparable from constitutions of sexuality, gender and race.

Chapter 1 focuses on Lloyd Fernando's two novels, *Scorpion Orchid* (1976) and *Green Is the Colour* (1993). Of the writers discussed in this study, Fernando's depiction of multiracialism and multireligiosity is the most encompassing perhaps due to the overt political stance his narratives take. Separated by almost two decades, both novels provide variegated perspectives on Malaysia's socio-political landscapes and the extent to which religion and race have influenced the differences. In the more optimistic *Scorpion Orchid*, Fernando recommends a model for nation-building that is premised on religion's capacity to acknowledge and embrace otherness as a motivation towards unity. The "vision" proposed here has interesting affinities with French theorists Derrida's and Levinas's views on hospitality, and it is against this concept that I frame my reading of the novel. *Green Is the Colour* is decidedly darker in tone, implying a sense of frustration over the failed establishment of friendship amongst the different races, such as that envisioned in the first novel. This novel also gestures toward much of the racial unrest experienced by the country in 1969 although in a decidedly speculative manner. Together, both novels represent the cultural and political vicissitudes of a nation as it encounters modernization and globalization, and what this means for the various communities and their particular religious beliefs.

Another writer who acknowledges religion's capacity to celebrate otherness is Lee Kok Liang, whose works will be the focus of Chapter 2. In the only novel published during his lifetime, *Flowers in the Sky* (1981), Lee suggests that friendship can be forged between individuals from different racial and religious backgrounds without necessarily having to "recognize" the other as an ally; in fact, the narrative seems to imply, again with a Derridean slant, that friendship can also be premised on misrecognition. In the novel, it is the Buddhist monk and Christian medical doctor's inability to communicate (through language) with each other that precisely compel both men to bridge their gap of differences not by co-opting the other into familiar categories of

the self, but by "learning" about that otherness. This reading rejects the view proffered by various critics that the two men's failure to converse suggests the breakdown of the multiracial relationship. The novel is also heavily invested with Buddhist imagery; deploying Bernard Faure's excellent theorizing of Buddhism from a psychoanalytical perspective, I make certain observations about the way *Flowers in the Sky* (which, in Buddhism, is a metaphor for "fantasy") portrays and problematizes, interestingly, the monk's religiosity. This chapter will also consider one of Lee's lesser-known short stories, "Ibrahim Something" (1992), which deals with the vexing issue of religious conversion in Malaysia. In this story, the psychic and emotional upheavals faced by a Chinese man who converts to Islam are carefully illuminated to reveal their complex entanglements with race, kinship and sexuality. That both stories are set in hospitals attest to Lee's typically ironic stance that seems to question the extent to which religion can ultimately heal racial fracture.

Fernando's and, to a lesser extent, Lee's writings tend to have a multiracial focus and depict religion's potential to either forge deeper ties or motivate division. The narratives of Shirley Lim, K. S. Maniam, Che Husna Azhari and Karim Raslan, on the other hand, are more focused on a particular ethnic community, which in turn provide interesting viewpoints on how various Malaysian communities observe, practise and contest their religious systems.[86] K. S. Maniam's narratives will be examined in Chapter 3. Specifically, I will discuss his first two novels, *The Return* (1981) and *In a Far Country* (1993), and the short story, "The Pelanduk" (1989). The community that people Maniam's stories are the Tamil-Hindus, and as many critics have acknowledged, his stories are as such deeply infused with Hindu symbology. My reading of *The Return* diverges from the standard interpretation of the protagonist's grandmother and father as "failures" when it comes to negotiating a diasporic identity in a new land because they stubbornly refuse to relinquish the religious and cultural heritages (including Hinduism) inherited from their previous homeland. Instead, I argue that a lifestyle reminiscent of an ascetic adopted by these two characters toward the end of their lives insinuates a triumph over insurmountable forces, and aids them, paradoxically, in finally "rooting" spiritually and transcendentally to a land in which they cannot otherwise find a sense of

belonging. This dilemma of belonging is revisited in "The Pelanduk" where the clash between tradition and modernity is given full rein. Drawing on the story of Sita's abduction in the *Ramayana*, "The Pelanduk" is a complex and subtle investigation of the obstructions certain traditions and belief systems place upon a community, consequently trapping it in a cycle of poverty and socio-cultural regression. Finally, in Maniam's possibly most experimental narrative, *In a Far Country*, the dilemma between ethical responsibility and worldly renunciation is explored. If Maniam's first novel, at least in my reading, promotes renunciation as a viable strategy for self-transcendence, this second novel seems to suggest that to do this without ethical impunity is to misunderstand one's religious calling (or *Dharma* in Hinduism). Both "The Pelanduk" and *In a Far Country* make definite references to ritual sacrifice and to interrogate this motif, I recourse to René Girard's theories of sacrifice and scapegoating, and the subsequent development of these theories in the context of Hinduism by Brian Smith and Wendy Doniger.

Chapter 4 performs close readings of selected stories by Shirley Lim and her two novels, *Joss and Gold* (2001) and *Sister Swing* (2007). Of these, only *Sister Swing* explicitly references religion as a theme; nevertheless, a tacit acknowledgement of the often adverse influence of religion (especially Confucianism and Christianity) on the lives of middle-class Malaysian Chinese thread through many of her narratives. Lim's reflection on the Chinese people's affinity with their beliefs is however, as I will demonstrate, guided by nostalgia for traditionalism that privileges patriarchy; because of this, her stories *persistently* plot women as either victims of or passive colluders with their fathers' faiths. Such a narrative strategy is fundamentally biased and ends up reinforcing that which Lim purportedly sets out to challenge: the subordination of women under patriarchal systems.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of two short stories by two emerging Malay authors who write specifically in the English language. In "Mariah" (1993) by Che Husna Azhari, the vexing issue of polygamy in Islam is sympathetically, if ironically, explored. Reading this story against contemporary debates on the issue, I argue that the narrative irony which leads to non-closure cleverly enables the story both its critical edge *and* its adherence to the status quo perspective on the matter. "The

Neighbors" (1996) by Karim Raslan boldly intimates the "unspeakable" circumstance of homosexuality in Islam, but deftly redirects this "problem" to a lesser moral one: that of being nosy. As such, the narrative, after positioning Islam as a "private" matter and a tolerant religion, cannot bring itself to exonerate homosexuality from its own pronouncements, but has to instead append "blame" and "sin" onto a busybody woman, thus displacing altogether the contention the story sets out to address. Hence, despite the apparent promotion of a "modern" Islam this story seems to undertake, it cannot in the end wrest itself from the religion's traditional and fundamentalist circumscription, thus bringing into radical relief the problem of Islam, sexuality and modernity in contemporary Malaysia.

Conclusion: Reading Marginality, Reading Postmodernism

This book is defined by the marginality of the subject matter. At the same time however, this marginality is also defined on several levels, some of which are consciously approached while others surface only as this study unfolds. First, it is a study of Malaysian fiction written in English, which continues to occupy a peripheral position (although increasingly less so) in the nation's cultural space. Second, it examines the way in which these narratives represent religion (which as a subject matter, is often already defined "in terms of marginality")[87] — a direction which scholarship often neglects or ignores due perhaps to the "sensitivity" of such a concern. Third, and one which surfaces indirectly as the result of analysis but has become an important area of exploration, is the manner in which these narratives portray women. The noticeable alignment of women with religion in almost all the stories discussed reflects the persistence of casting women as symbols of religious and cultural particularity, and often not without problems. For example, Fernando, Lee and Maniam deploy "religious" women to function as foils against the hypocrisy and bigotry of supposedly "religious" men, but in the process, these women are also subjected to forms of violence visited upon their bodies. This is done, so it seems, to suggest by way of metaphor or irony, religion's "failure", but what cannot be dismissed is that these women are also textually brutalized and their individualities, because they function as symbols, obfuscated.

Part of each chapter, thus, is devoted to analyzing the depiction of women in the narratives under discussion.

My investigative framework is, in the end, effectively postmodern in that I am concerned with the way critical reading of selected narratives performs a "dislodgement" of the narratives' "claims of location and legitimacy" and unsettles "the comforts and securities granted by the narratives that declare and justify where we are".[88] That is, by subjecting the narratives to various theoretical frameworks — postcolonial, feminist, psychoanalytical, poststructuralist — I hope to exploit the critical dialecticism engendered from this to "expose the pretensions to place [or subjectivity, or belief, or identity] involved in our [meta]narratives", and to "question our proprietary postures, and counter claims of possession with contrary narratives".[89] In positioning the selected, "contrary" narratives *in tension* with the metanarratives of the nation's (pretentious) racial/religious exceptionalism, what I wish to explore are the gaps and schisms in the national imaginary that nevertheless allow for the celebration of "the people" against the homogenizing, absolutist ideology of "identity" that is defined by race and religion. In this way, not only are the narratives and the religion they thematize exposed for their possibly "essentialist and foundationalist paradigms", they are also productively engaged with "the problematics and potentials of postmodern discursive contexts" that will necessarily render them multifaceted and profoundly significant.

Notes

Introduction

1. Jamie S. Scott (2001: xv). As the various literary genres would require different scholastic treatments which are beyond the scope of this study, I will only deal with English-language Malaysian fiction; religion, however, is also an important element in plays and poetry written by Malaysian writers.
2. Chelva Kanaganayakam (2001: 317).
3. Deleuze and Guattari (1990).
4. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2002: 3).
5. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 184).
6. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2002: 10).
7. Lloyd Fernando ([1969] 2001: 37).
8. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 188).
9. Salman Rushdie (1991: 17).
10. Ibid.
11. Tham Seong Chee ([1981] 2001: 41).
12. Aihwa Ong ([1991] 1995: 174). See also Virginia M. Hooker (2003: 230–40) and Raymond L. M. Lee (2004).
13. Since 2003, the government has revised its position on the medium of instruction for mathematics and science, which will thenceforth be taught in English. However, this has remained a contentious issue, and the Malaysian cabinet has decided to revert to Bahasa Malaysia again for national schools, and the mother tongue for national-type schools (i.e. schools which use Chinese or Tamil as media of instruction), for these subjects in 2012 ("Maths and science back to Bahasa, mother tongue", *The Star*, 8 July 2009).
14. For a detailed discussion of non-*bumiputra* discontentment over the NEP, see in particular Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo Kwame Sundaram

(1999). It is also important to argue the point that the privileges derived from the NEP primarily benefit *bumiputra*s who belong to the "middle- and upper-class orientation" (Chandra Muzaffar, 1989: 77). *Bumiputra*s from the lower class, who are without official connections, and especially those who belong to the various indigenous communities of Malaysia, remain largely sidelined by the policy (ibid., 75).

15. For a useful discussion of the problem of constructing a national literature, see Luisa J. Mallari (2000).
16. Rajeev S. Patke (2003: 72).
17. Ibid. (71).
18. Tham Seong Chee ([1981] 2001: 59).
19. It is important to note that one reason Malay writers then were more resistant to the use of English was because they were the inheritors of the land, as opposed to the Indian and Chinese writers who were culturally deracinated and therefore more receptive of the colonial language.
20. Tham Seong Chee ([1981] 2001: 45).
21. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 184).
22. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1990: 59).
23. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 184).
24. Tham Seong Chee ([1981] 2001: 53).
25. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 182).
26. Grace Chin (2006: 2).
27. Mohammad A. Quayum and Peter Wicks (2001: x).
28. See Edward Said (1996: 47–64).
29. See his *As I Please, Selected Writings 1975–1994* (1994) and *Sajak Sajak Salleh: Poems Sacred and Profane* (2002).
30. Salleh ben Joned (1994: 62).
31. Ibid. (65, emphasis in the original).
32. Rehman Rashid has not written anything substantial beyond his self-published autobiographical novel, *A Malaysian Journey* (1993). Amir Muhammad has since focused his creativity on the filmic medium, making controversial documentaries such as *The Big Durian* (2003) and *The Last Communist* (2005). Dina Zaman is the author of several short stories, some of which are collected in *Night and D*ay (1997), and a collection of essays on Islam in Malaysia, *I Am Muslim* (2007). I will be discussing the relationship between Islam and modernity in Malaysia in the concluding chapter.
33. Quoted in Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (1995: 17).
34. Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2001b: 144).

35. The narratives of Che Husna Azhari and Karim Raslan will be considered in the concluding chapter.
36. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 195); Sumit Mandal (2000: 1002).
37. For a critical discussion of the resurfacing of anglophone Malaysian literature, see Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 195–99).
38. Sumit Mandal (2000: 1003).
39. Ibid. (1007, 1003).
40. Mohammad A. Quayum (2003a: 199, emphasis in the original).
41. This is not to say that Malaysian writers skirt away from the theme of nationalism altogether, although those who consider it remain few. Notable are Kee Thuan Chye's and Huzir Sulaiman's plays, *We Could *** Mr. Birch* (1994) and *Atomic Jaya* (2002) respectively, and Shirley Lim's *Joss and Gold* (2001).
42. K. S. Maniam ([1987] 2001a: 263).
43. This has not, however, prevented several early Malay writers writing in the national language to continuously stereotype and cast aspersions on the other races in their narratives. See Tham Chee Seong ([1981] 2001).
44. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1990: 60, emphasis in the original).
45. Homi Bhabha (1990: 297).
46. Ibid.
47. Kee Thuan Chye (2001: 68).
48. Ibid. (69).
49. Kee's essay specifically gestures to a politically motivated incident in 1987 when the government, evoking the Internal Security Act (ISA), mobilized "Operation Lalang" and imprisoned without trial more than one hundred members from opposition parties for alleged sedition and undermining the ruling elites, even to the extent of momentarily shutting down a major press in the country.
50. Kee Thuan Chye (2001: 70).
51. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1990: 59).
52. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 97).
53. Wong Phui Nam (2001: 102).
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid. (106).
56. A recent book that charts the literary history of these three nations is Philip Holden and Rajeev Patke's *The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English* (2010).
57. This statistic is according to the Malaysian Population and Housing Census (2000). For more information, see www.statistics.gov.my. Last accessed 14 January 2009.

58. Barbara Andaya and Leonard Andaya ([1982] 2001: 129–30); Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail (2003: 119).
59. For details, see William Roff (1967) and Anthony Milner (2003).
60. Azmi Aziz and Shamsul A. B. (2004: 351).
61. There is already a significant body of work available on the resurgence of Islam in Malaysia, so I will keep my analysis to a minimum. For those interested in this particular history of Malaysia, see Judith Nagata (1980, 1982 and 1984) and Chandra Muzaffar (1987).
62. Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Abdullah Shabery Cheek (1988: 843). ABIM is the acronym for "Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia", with the word "Angkatan" carrying military connotations. PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) is an ultra-religious left-wing resurgent party that continues to hold political power, especially in the east-coast states.
63. See Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Abdullah Shabery Cheek (1988) and Kikue Hamayotsu (2002) for comprehensive discussions.
64. Kikue Hamayotsu (2002: 364).
65. T. N. Harper (1999: 376); D. K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne (1994: 75–112).
66. T. N. Harper (1999: 376).
67. Aihwa Ong (1999: 227).
68. Ibid. (226–27).
69. Raymond L. M. Lee (2004: 131).
70. Although Islam is Malaysia's official religion, Malaysia is not an Islamic country. Furthermore, the law which governs Islamic concerns, the *Syariah* law, is limited to family and religious matters, and involves only the Muslims. In all other areas and for the non-Muslims, Malaysia abides by the English common law.
71. This will be dealt in more detail when considering Lee Kok Liang's short story, "Ibrahim Something", in Chapter 2.
72. Statistics according to the Malaysian Population and Housing Census (2000), see note 57.
73. Kikue Hamayotsu (2002: 360, emphasis in the original).
74. Ibid. (364–65).
75. See Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan Ackerman (1997).
76. Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Abdullah Shabery Cheek (1988: 867). See also Raymond L. M. Lee (1988) for a useful argument on how other religious groups realigned themselves to counter Islamic revivalism during this period.
77. Ann Anlin Cheng (2002: 25).
78. Ibid. (27).
79. Bill Ashcroft (2001: 456).

80. Peter Kerry Powers (2001: 10).
81. Ibid. (11).
82. I am indebted to Peter Kerry Powers's study of religion in Asian-American fiction, *Recalling Religion* (2001), for this insight.
83. In using the term "theme", I am not suggesting that the various religions depicted in the narratives are represented in a universal way. For example, Islam is not practised and observed in the same way in all Islamic communities, and hence it would be blatantly inaccurate to say that Islam in Malaysia operates on the same ideological level as Islam in other nations. In this sense, I agree with Adorno that "art cannot make concepts [i.e. religion] its 'themes'. The relationship of the work and the universal becomes the more profound the less the work copes explicitly with universalities, the more it becomes infatuated with its own detached world, its material, its problems, its consistency, its way of expression" (1992: 297). It is in this spirit that my study is undertaken: to focus on the "detached world" of individual and communal adherences to religions that proscribes them with "universal" dimensions because they bring the problematics of such adherence into comparative relief.
84. Theodore Ziokolwiski quoted in Jamie S. Scott (1996: 304).
85. Bill Ashcroft (2001: 446).
86. One may argue that Lim's *Joss and Gold* (2001) has a more multiracial focus. This is certainly tenable in light of the fact that her characters are more ethnically diverse, but as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that narrative attention is focused on a middle-class family comprising mainly Chinese women. More problematically, it also becomes evident that non-Chinese characters often function as foils to ennoble these women, especially in the case of the occidental Chester.
87. Jamie S. Scott (1996: 309).
88. Wesley A. Kort (1990: 584).
89. Ibid. (582).

Chapter 1

1. See for example, Koh Tai Ann ([1986] 2001), Bernard Wilson (2000), Catherine Diamond (2002) and Chiu M. Y. (2003) for *Scorpion Orchid*, and Wong Soak Koon (2001), and Mohammad A. Quayum (1998 [2001], 2004 [2006]) for *Green Is the Colour*.
2. K. S. Maniam ([1987] 2001b: 82)
3. Raymond Firth (1981: 584).
4. Bernard Wilson (2000: 13).

5. There were several riots which erupted in Singapore throughout the 1950s, the two most incendiary of which were the Maria Hertogh Riots (December 1950) and the Hock Lee Bus Riots (May 1955). For elaboration, see Yeo Kim Wah and Albert Lau (1991).
6. The racial riots (mainly between the Malay and Chinese communities) in Malaysia broke out on 13 May 1969. For a detailed discussion of this tense socio-political climate that subsequently brought about important changes in national policy that are still in effect today, see Leon Comber (1983), and also Barbara W. Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya ([1982] 2001).
7. Chiu M. Y. (2003: 48).
8. All references to *Scorpion Orchid* are to the 1976 Heinemann edition.
9. K. S. Maniam ([1987] 2001b: 82).
10. Bernard Wilson (2000: 13).
11. Presumably, this episode takes place over the Thaipusam period. Thaipusam is a Hindu festival commemorating the birthday of Lord Murugan. During this day, devotees engage in acts of penance, chief of which is the mortification of the flesh. To exemplify this, devotees carry elaborate *kavadi*s, which are portable altars profusely decorated with peacock feathers and attached to the devotee through 108 *vels* (or skewers) pierced into the skin on the chest and back.
12. Bryan Turner (1996: 147). For a useful introduction to this Weberian concept, see Martin E. Spencer (1973).
13. Bryan Turner (1996: 147).
14. John Marcus echoes this point in his essay when he writes that "[as Weber] uses the term [charisma], it signifies a social and political authority resting upon a religious-emotional empathy with a magical, or ideal-incarnating, leader" (1961: 237).
15. Max Weber ([1915] 2004: 76, my emphasis).
16. Bryan Turner (1996: 146).
17. Ibid. (147).
18. Jacques Derrida (1995b: 27).
19. Slavoj Žižek (1994: 101).
20. Terry Eagleton (2005: 54).
21. Ibid. (55).
22. Raymond Firth (1981: 593).
23. Anthony Piepe (1971: 158).
24. John Marcus (1961: 238). The term "chiliasm" (also known as "millennialism") refers to the Judeo-Christian belief that prior to the final judgment on humankind, Christ will rule the earth and institute

the Golden Age or paradise on earth. Appropriated for the theory of charisma, it suggests that followers of a charismatic leader assume that when this said leader attains ultimate power and authority, it will imply a protracted time of blessing and well-being for them.

25. Bernard Wilson (2000: 13).
26. Jacques Derrida (2002: 56).
27. Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
28. Jacques Derrida (1995b: 40).
29. Hent de Vries (2001: 178).
30. Richard Kearney (2005: 300–301).
31. Hent de Vries (2002: 315).
32. The other "authority" would be history, but a history that is also opened to reinterpretation and the influences of counter-histories (such as myths). This may explain why the narrative is consistently interspersed with vignettes taken from historical works such as the classical texts *Sejarah Melayu* (*The History of the Malays*), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (*Chronicles of Hang Tuah*) and *Hikayat Abdullah* (*Chronicles of Abdullah*) — all of which are works which would not comfortably fit within a framework of what constitutes history from a Western perspective, because these works are as much myths and legends as they are history.
33. Hent de Vries (2002: 298).
34. Jacques Derrida (1999: 50–51).
35. Emmanuel Levinas quoted in Hent de Vries (2002: 331).
36. Wong Ming Yook (2000: 279).
37. Critic Wong Soak Koon (2001) analyzes the surrealistic, open-ended conclusion to the narrative by eliciting its ominous dimensions. In contrast, and perhaps a less tenable reading as the narrative does not support it, is Mohammad A. Quayum's view that the "novel ends in a hopeful gesture" ([1998] 2001: 172). Although the principal antagonist in the novel, Panglima, has been defeated and removed, there is a profound suggestion that Yun Ming — the so-called protagonist of the story — has taken over his position, and from what the narrative suggests, will be possibly as conniving and cruel as his predecessor. Quayum argues in his 1998 essay that "The liberation of Sara from the truncated life that Omar enforces on her in the name of religion and tradition, therefore, comes as an important step to creating a new and brighter future for Malaysia, in which every individual will be equal in spite of race, religion or gender" (168). Again, I find this view difficult to sustain in light of the narrative's equivocal conclusion. Sara, by this time, is still traumatized by her encounter with Panglima, and Yun Ming's trustworthiness is now suspected. What she is liberated "to" is highly questionable.

38. See, for example, Wong Soak Koon (2001), and Mohammad A. Quayum ([1998] 2001).
39. Wong Soak Koon (2001: 76).
40. Barbara Andaya and Leonard Andaya ([1982] 2001: 299).
41. After the worldwide recession of the mid-1980s until the economic crash in 1997, Malaysia showed steady and increasing economic growth due to the implementation of various policies (such as reduced government investment in economic enterprises and increased privatization) as well as an attractiveness to foreign investors. For more information, see Amarjit Kaur (1999).
42. Jordan's essay (1990) specifically discusses the narratives of Angela Carter, a British postmodern feminist and Gothic writer.
43. Elaine Jordan (1990: 22).
44. Ibid. (26).
45. Ibid. (29).
46. Aihwa Ong ([1991] 1995: 165).
47. Edward Shils (1965: 201).
48. Ibid. (202–3).
49. Bryan Turner (1996: 146).
50. Martin Spencer (1973: 345).
51. If, following John Marcus, the distinctiveness of a charismatic authority lies "in its incarnation of some vision of a transcendent state" (Marcus 1961: 239), it could therefore be argued that the sort of leadership that Bahaudin and Panglima manifest certainly belongs to the category of the non-charismatic. As Marcus further distinguishes, for non-charismatic authority, "it is rational; its primary impetus comes from tradition and an established bureaucracy. In such cases too, there is frequently an identification of the members of the group with the ruler, but it is the identification of the present self rather than the transcendental self" (ibid., 239).
52. John Milbank (1998: 271). Milbank's thesis is on the sublime as transcendence and freedom.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Talal Asad (1999: 183).
56. Ibid. (185).
57. Ibid. (186).
58. Ninian Smart (1998: 82).
59. Ibid. (83).

60. Ibid. (84).
61. Emmanuel Levinas quoted in Hent de Vries (2002: 331).
62. Hent de Vries (2002: 331).
63. Jacques Derrida (1999: 83–84).
64. Wong Soak Koon (2001: 80; 2004: iii.).
65. Julia Kristeva (1982: 4).
66. In Malaysia, the religion of a Muslim citizen is signified in his or her identity card.
67. Julia Kristeva (1982: 76, emphasis mine).
68. Stella Sandford (2000: 12).
69. Jacques Derrida (2001: 129).
70. Jacques Derrida (1995b: 27).
71. It is this ambiguity that compromises any redemptive conclusion in the novel, such as the defeat of Panglima, Bahaudin's usurpation by the more liberal Pak Zaki, and Omar's abandonment of Bahaudin's teaching (in fact, it is Omar who saves Siti Sara from being held hostage by Panglima [174–76]). That the novel concludes with this profound sense of uncertainty suggests that the problem goes beyond human incitements of racial and religious tensions. It is almost as if there is something menacing pervading the socio-political atmosphere that can turn even a supposedly well-meaning individual such as Yun Ming into another version of Panglima.
72. Luce Irigaray (1993: 112).
73. Luce Irigaray (1991: 112).
74. Ibid. (113).
75. Other female characters in the novel play nondescript, stereotypical functions; they are either vicious (Ethel Turner), promiscuous and passive (Neela), or unattainable-because-beautiful and intelligent (Patricia) — configurations corresponding with the traditional female images of the witch, the prostitute and the angel.
76. For further discussion, see Deniz Kandiyoti (1994), Julie Mostov (2000), and Nira Yuval-Davis (2001).
77. Mohammad A. Quayum ([1998] 2001: 170).

Chapter 2

1. Except for Islam, which is almost absent throughout this story.
2. Raymond Lee (1988: 406). Lee is not, however, speaking of Lee Kok Liang's novel, but of the religious revivalism across all faiths in Malaysia during the 1980s.

3. Juxtaposing a man of science and a man of religion is also featured in a later short story, "Such a Good Man" (collected in *Death Is a Ceremony*, [1992]).
4. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001: 177). Inspector Hashim, the novel's main Malay character, is cast in an ambiguous light. His "sensitivity" to other expressions of faith, rather than a genuine appreciation of his country's multiplicity, belies a self-seeking objective that is ultimately political — an attitude reminiscent of that held by the corrupt politicians that people Fernando's second novel.
5. Tan Chee-Beng (1983: 218–19).
6. Ibid. (219).
7. Tan Chee-Beng (2000: 282).
8. Ibid. (242–43). While Chinese reached the Malay Peninsular for trade in the tenth century, it was during the British occupation in the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that vast numbers of poor Chinese immigrants arrived in hope of a better life, and were able to earn and send money back to their families in the Mainland. The first Chinese immigrants were predominantly tin-miners, who later, through careful accumulation of wealth and enterprise, ventured into mercantile activities and shopkeeping.
9. Ibid. (243).
10. Tan Chee-Beng (1983: 236).
11. Malaysia also seems especially conducive to the establishment of divergent Buddhist traditions. Although the Mahāyāna school has been firmly rooted since the earlier part of the twentieth century, Buddhists are free to adopt other schools such as the Theravada, or other traditions such as the Thai and the Japanese (the Nichiren school). See Tan Chee-Beng (2000: 298–99).
12. Lee Kok Liang, *Flowers in the Sky* (1981: 124–28). All references are to the 1981 Federal edition.
13. Ibid. (300). Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman, however, disagree and view this revitalization as largely motivated by a nationwide Islamic revivalism that can potentially threaten the religious and cultural expression and rights of other ethnic groups. That this Buddhist revitalization is predominantly propelled by the laity strongly influences Lee and Ackerman's interpretation: "Despite the linguistic and cultural divisions, both the Chinese-speaking and English-speaking Malaysian Chinese are aware that they share a common destiny as non-Malays and non-Muslims in a Malay-dominated nation. As more than 90 percent of the Chinese identify themselves as Buddhist, they have a sense of belonging to a vague but common religious community" (1997: 60).

14. See Raymond Williams (1977).
15. Such as saving money to build him a residence that mirrors the environment of his beloved monastery back in China (142–43).
16. Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman (1997: 82).
17. Ibid. (68).
18. See Pierre Bourdieu (1971).
19. Erwan Dianteill (2004: 72).
20. Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman (1997: 82).
21. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001: 175).
22. See for example Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001), John Barnes ([1985] 2001), and Sharilyn Wood ([1990] 2001).
23. Sharilyn Wood ([1990] 2001: 201).
24. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001: 182).
25. Sharilyn Wood ([1990] 2001: 197).
26. Raymond Williams's theoretical distinction between religiosity that is "ideologized" and "pragmatic" can further illuminate this situation. In adhering to strict ritualism and codes of conduct (that is, ideologized religiosity) that are often "abstracted from immediate social context" (Jean DeBernadi, 1992: 249), Hung denies the "structures of feeling [that] can be defined as social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available" (Raymond Williams [1977]: 133–34, cited in DeBernadi, 1992: 249) that characterize pragmatic religiosity. He fails to appreciate that the two are interconnected, and that religion has a social dimension as well as a spiritual one.
27. John Kieschnick (2003: 6).
28. Sharilyn Wood bases her argument on the single episode of the monk entering his chauffeur-driven Mercedes at the end of the novel (170).
29. John Kieschnick (2003: 7).
30. Bernard Faure (1998: 45; 1987: 349). Another of Lee's stories which uses a religious metaphor as a title to signal irony is "Ami To Fu" (collected in *The Mutes in the Sun* [1974]), a Buddhist chant which means "I surrender all to Buddha". Instead, greed, selfishness and mutual exploitations between members of a grotesque family are the dominant motifs in the narrative.
31. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001) seems to take this view.
32. John Kwan-Terry (1984: 159).
33. Slavoj Žižek (2005: 58).

34. The trajectory of this psychic mechanism shares certain similarities with Sigmund Freud's concept of masochism. For details, see Freud's essay, "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924).
35. Michel Foucault (1973: 107).
36. Ibid. (108).
37. This indifference to the human *person* as opposed to a fascination with *physical defects and aberration* characterizes K from a young age (114). It is perhaps not surprising then that he becomes a doctor.
38. Jean Baudrillard ([1976] 1993: 126).
39. In my discussion of "Ibrahim Something", the prominence of the hospital as heterotopia will be made more evident.
40. Michel de Certeau (1984: 190). Descartes's "cogito ergo sum" presupposes that "I" can only be if thinking actuates, implying death's otherness and threat to rationalism. Or, as de Certeau, arguing from the point of "speaking", puts it, "The difference between kicking off (*crever*) … and dying (*mourir*) is a speech that articulates, on the collapse of possessions and representations, the question: 'What does it mean to *be*?' An idle question" (ibid., 193).
41. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001: 177).
42. Christopher Gowans (2003: 129). The other two cravings are for existence, and extermination.
43. Ibid. *Nibbāna* is more commonly spelled as "Nirvana".
44. Bernard Faure (1998: 15–16).
45. Ibid. (17).
46. An inconsistency in Hung's action is noticeable. Undoubtedly, the *Śūrangama Sutra* is a text that "warns among other things against the dangers of [sexual] desire" (ibid., 41). Yet this apocryphal work in the Buddhist scriptural canon "is itself strongly impregnated with Tantrism" (ibid.), a philosophy infused with sexual images. Thus, if Hung is attempting to eliminate his sexually awakened thoughts by meditating on the *Śūrangama Sutra*, its Tantric contents will certainly distract him even more.
47. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001: 181).
48. Pek Sim finds this preposterous because "if no one could learn to draw then who would draw the image of the World-Honored One" (138) to adorn temples? But out of respect for her brother's status, she keeps silent.
49. Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001: 181).
50. For Bernard Wilson, "The monk's repression of Ah Lan's attempts to achieve artistic and sexual liberation primarily stems from a denial of

his own physicality, but also has at its source a metaphorical muteness and emasculation that represents his frustration at being unable to adequately express himself (physically and verbally) in a country where 'everything had become grotesque' (Wilson, 2009: 138–39; inset quote from *Flowers* [132]).

51. Eve Sedgwick (1985: 88).
52. Michel Foucault ([1985] 1999: 196).
53. Christopher Gowans (2003: 64).
54. Indeed, this entire episode is strongly reminiscent of a carnival during the Middle Ages in Europe, which Mikhail Bakhtin has carefully theorized, where "the carnivalesque crowd … is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized *in their own way*, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity" (Bakhtin, 1994: 225). In the celebration of the discovery of Ganesh, every social norm and official authority is flaunted. Even Inspector Hashim, whose technique of crowd control echoes Pierre Bourdieu's point on symbolic power as an exercise of "control of other people's bodies and belief that is given by the collectively recognized capacity to act in various ways on deep-rooted linguistic and muscular patterns of behavior, either by neutralizing them or by reactivating them to function mimetically" (Bourdieu, [1984] 2005: 89), is unable to cow this crowd. Clearly, religious devotion is stronger than the fear of earthly laws.
55. Bernard Faure (1998: 48).
56. Georges Bataille (1986: 248).
57. Vesna Wallace (2007: 252).
58. K relies on his wife to manage his household finances, and his nurse O. Sim to manage his professional life.
59. In the case of nunhood, marginalization can sometimes take subtle, insidious forms. As Bernard Faure notes:

> Nunhood can have an ambiguous meaning when viewed as a form of control of female celibacy … Thus, a feminist could question whether the ideal Buddhist nun would be a genderless woman, a kind of superwoman who has transcended the limitations of gender and sexuality; or a woman who, by denying her womanhood, has interiorized patriarchal ideology. Is the nun's very desire to shed human limitations (including gender) a progress toward Buddhahood, or a mere denial (in the Freudian sense)? (2003: 52–53)

Although a Buddhist's ultimate goal is to deny the self in order to reach enlightenment, for a woman, there is an extra step that she has to undergo

before attaining this, and that is to become a "man" first (for accounts of Buddhist stories and discussion of the transformation of the female body, see Nancy S. Barnes [1987]). This is evident even in the sutras of supposedly egalitarian Buddhist schools like Mahāyāna Buddhism (evident in the *Lotus Sutra*, see Faure [2003: 91–94]), prompting Faure, who draws on Derrida's criticism of the notion of transcendence as apparently neutral (in *Points … : Interviews 1974–1994*), to conclude that:

> The transcendent (beyond or prior to) and duality [in this case, male/female] is already marked by masculinity. There is therefore no contradiction between the two discourses (of inequality and equality) … Awakening itself, as a realization of transcendence, is by the same token strangely masculine insofar as it remains the metaphysical abstraction of the "neither … nor". (Faure 2003: 142).

If standards of religious practices and codes of conduct in Buddhism are *always already* "male", then, as the argument goes, the ontological status of gender is certainly a non-issue, because this doctrine, at the end of the day, promotes the teaching that both men *and* women can achieve Buddhahood. Women in this sense are not at all disprivileged. They just have to wait a little longer, and undergo the slight inconvenience of being transformed (either through rebirth or magic) into a man first (which is not such a disagreeable circumstance, as being reborn a male suggests an abundance of good karma carried over from the last life or lives). Such a view, however, betrays a deeply masculinist perspective as it fundamentally reasserts the gender binarism that unquestionably elevates the spiritual maturity of men over that of women.

60. Pek Sim had wanted to be a nun, but was forcibly married off; she subsequently left her husband to join her brother (33).
61. Nancy S. Barnes (1987: 109).
62. Ibid.
63. Majella Franzmen (2000: 77).
64. Mutes appear in many of Lee's narratives: "The Mutes in the Sun" (1974), "Birthday Girl" (1974), *Flowers in the Sky*, and "Dumb Dumb by a Bee Stung" (1992). They have been read as metaphors of the politically deprived (Syd Harrex 1979: 143) and the socially and psychologically displaced (Syd Harrex, [1982] 2001: 175), of a breakdown in communication, and of a nation struggling to find its voice (Sharilyn Wood, [1990] 2001: 195).
65. John Terry-Kwan (1984: 153).
66. Ibid. (159).
67. G. E. von Grünebaum quoted in Bernard Faure (1991: 210).
68. See Sigmund Freud ([1913] 1998: esp. 612–25).

69. Bernard Faure (1991: 216).
70. Ibid. (211). The power of dreams is acknowledged in Buddhism even despite the fact that dreams "are ordinarily denounced as pure illusion" (ibid., 214).
71. This is evident in both Fernando, as the previous chapter demonstrated, and K. S. Maniam, as the next chapter will show.
72. John Barnes ([1985] 2001: 189). See also the essays by Syd Harrex ([1982] 2001) and Sharilyn Wood ([1990] 2001).
73. Malaysia's former prime minister, Dr. Mohammad Mahathir for example, is of Indian-Muslim heritage.
74. Judith Nagata (1978: 110). For useful studies of Chinese-Muslims in Malaysia, see further essays by Nagata (1978), and Rosey Wang Ma (2003, 2005).
75. Rosey Wang Ma (2005: 103).
76. Tan Chee-Beng (2000: 309).
77. I am indebted to David Leiwei Li's study on the racial abject in the Asian-American context (1998), from which I draw to discuss the predicament of the Muslim convert in Malaysia. Drawing on Kristeva's psychoanalytical work on abjection to discuss the situation of Asian-Americans, Li contends that "the [racial] abject … is not radical enough to be clearly differentiated and objectified, yet her difference is clear enough for a defensive posture to be established against her: the abject, in other words, must be kept at a respectable distance" (Li, 1998: 10). This situation seems, when modified slightly, to echo that of the convert in Malaysia.
78. All references to "Ibrahim Something" are to the 1974 Heinemann edition of *Death Is a Ceremony and Other Stories* (93–106).
79. Another similarity with *Flowers in the Sky* is the sequencing of the story over two days (in *Flowers*, it is three), signalled by time of day.
80. Fred Botting (1993: 253).
81. Since the 1970s however, the freedom to renounce one's conversion to Islam is no longer a possibility.
82. Chris Shilling ([1993] 2003: 6). Interest in body-building in the West gained currency in the last decades of the twentieth century. See Yvonne Wiegers's 1998 essay for elaboration.
83. Yvonne Wiegers (1998: 149).
84. Ibid. (154, inset quote from Loic J. D. Wacquant [1995]).
85. Tim Edwards (2007: 140).
86. Stephen M. Whitehead (2002: 183).
87. Ibid. (187). See Butler (1993) and Foucault ([1977] 1984).

88. Stephen M. Whitehead (2002: 183).
89. Ibid. (185–86).
90. I want to emphasize that this story reflects the dilemma of a single Chinese person with regard to conversion to Islam; as such, my interest is in what the story, through theoretical investigation, tells us, and should not be read as an attempt at pathologizing such converts or a criticism against Islam or being Muslim.
91. See David Morgan's essay (1993).
92. Although Lee sets his story during the Japanese occupation, it was published in the 1990s which would certainly inscribe contemporary political and social realities onto it as well. As such, this story can be read as a veiled criticism of the constitutionally defined notion of Malayness that effectively segregates the races and places Muslim converts, especially the Chinese, in a predicament.
93. Michael Peletz (1995: 88).
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid. (91).
96. Ibid. (88).
97. Rosey Wang Ma (2005: 103).
98. Judith Nagata (1978: 105).
99. Maurice Freedman (1979: 238). The third is between husband and wife. But from a hierarchical point of view, it is clear that Chinese kinship, at least as Freedman view it, clearly privileges patriliny and men. For a useful criticism of Freedman's model and suggestions of alternatives, see Charles Stafford's essay (2000) in which he discusses kinship patterns based on *yang* and *laiwang* models which, although existing subordinately alongside patrilineal kinship, are nevertheless significant. Yet, having noted Freedman's conceptual shortcomings and Stafford's more inclusive models, I have to agree with Ulf Mellström's point that Freedman's model remains crucial as "these three relationships hold as formative and important in the … successive order of the joint family, though not necessarily when it comes to stem or elementary families. In the latter two forms, the mother–son relationship is generally an emotionally strong bond, although it does not carry the same weight in family ideology" (Ulf Mellström, 2003: 74).
100. Maurice Freedman (1979: 105).
101. Of course, that the entire narrative is told from the perspective of a Chinese youth may belie an unconscious prejudice against someone from his community who has converted to Islam, and hence the need to "read" Ibrahim as necessarily despondent and a failure. For discussion,

see my essay "Islam, Masculinity and the Crisis of Conversion in 'Ibrahim Something'" (2010).

102. But Ma's observation of a more positive trend amongst Chinese-Muslims concludes somewhat ambivalently: "armed with wider Islamic knowledge, [Chinese-Muslims] find it easier now to resist re-assimilation into the non-Muslim Chinese community they once belonged to. At the same time, the increased awareness of Chinese culture and language makes it easier for them to avoid total assimilation into the Malay culture and community to which they now partly belong" (Ma 2005: 107). For me, resistance towards assimilation and partial belonging seem merely a reification of this community's already abject status, and I do not see how "wider knowledge" will help the situation.
103. Kirpal Singh (2001: 207).

Chapter 3

1. K. S. Maniam ([1987] 2001a: 263).
2. Peter Wicks (2001: 292). Maniam himself has attested to the importance of Hinduism when he writes that his narratives attempt to marry the "precision of the English language" with "the versatility and depth of Hindu mythology and spirituality" (Maniam, [1987] 2001a: 264).
3. David C. L. Lim (2005: 148).
4. David Pallaeur (1981: 267).
5. Ibid.
6. The issue of whether or not Hinduism is a religion remains an ongoing debate. For elaboration, see Harvey D. Griswold (1912) and Brian K. Smith (1987).
7. All references to *The Return* are to the 1993 Skoob Books edition.
8. Bernard Wilson (2003: 401). Wilson's terminology is derived and expanded from Edward Said (1996).
9. An aspect of Hinduism which features prominently in Maniam's work but with which I will not deal is caste/class. In *The Return*, it is obvious that Ravi's family is of a lower caste (possibly one that is closely associated with the *dalit* in view of Naina's occupation as a laundryman), while the head of the hospital grounds where Ravi's family reside — Menon, also known as *Ayah* — clearly belongs to the upper level of the Tamil-Hindu community. For a treatment of the issue of class/caste in Maniam's work see Andrew Hock Soon Ng (2007b: esp. 78–81).
10. Tang Soo Ping ([1993] 2001: 278).
11. David C. L. Lim (2005: 131–32). To an extent, these interpretations are "guided" by the first-person account of the narrative, such as when the

reader is told of Periathai's "unhappy" death ("her eyes never spoke a farewell" [10]) and of Naina's "intense, private dream" (167) that signifies madness — a situation which I find somewhat intriguing because despite both critics' awareness that Ravi harbours contemptuous feelings for his family, thus rendering his views blinkered and prejudiced, they nevertheless *subscribe* to his version of reality.

12. According to Margaret Yong, this house is "real" because it carries "emotional significance" for Periathai (Yong, [1991] 2001: 272).
13. David Mearns (1995: 107).
14. Ibid. (113). The largest group of Indian migrants to Malaysia during British imperialism came mainly from South India. Predominantly labourers brought in to work in rubber plantations, these migrants were often exploited and poorly treated, leading to a state of disenfranchisement that continues for various reasons to this day. For a circumspect study of Tamil identity in contemporary Malaysia, see Andrew C. Willford (2006).
15. Mearns (1995: 113).
16. Other aspects of the sacredness of the home include the maintenance of Dharma through proper familial relationships, daily *puja*s (prayers) to maintain its purity, and the instilling of values such as cleanliness, industry and self-restraint (see Nancy Falk, 2006: 133–34).
17. Eva Rudy Jansen (1993: 111).
18. Shirley Lim (1994a: 139).
19. Shiva is Himself the supreme ascetic (Anuradha Roma Choudhury, 1994: 72).
20. Gavin Flood (2004: 228).
21. Ibid. (227).
22. Ibid. (228).
23. Ibid.
24. S. Radhakrishnan (1914a: 172–73).
25. See, for example, *Chhāndogya Upanishad* (3.16), in Swami Nikhilananda (2003).
26. Swami Nikhilananda (2003: 281).
27. Ibid. (282). Brahmaloka is the realm occupied by pious celestial spirits.
28. All references to the *Bhagavad-Gita* are to W. Douglas P. Hill's translation (2004).
29. That she rapidly deteriorates soon after this episode, therefore precipitating her death, recalls Ah Looi in Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the Sky*, who also passes on shortly after receiving her Buddhist last rites which finally bring her peace (see Chapter 2).

30. Interestingly, there is a passage from the *Prasna Upanishads* that seems to echo Periathai's final passage to the Divine: "As when the rivers flowing towards the ocean find their final peace, their name and form disappear, and people speak only of the ocean" (vi: mantra 5). All references to *The Upanhishads* are from Juan Mascaró's translation (1965).
31. See Margaret Yong ([1991] 2001: 270).
32. David C. L. Lim (2005: 130–34).
33. Gemma Tulud Cruz (2006: 18).
34. Cruz's essay concentrates primarily on Filipino migrant women.
35. Gemma Tulud Cruz (2006: 14).
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid. (23).
38. The mark of Hindu identity, usually with a dot or three lines, on the forehead.
39. Maurice Bloch (2004: 65).
40. Gavin Flood (2004: 213).
41. Ibid. (225).
42. Paul Ricouer (1974: 84).
43. One critic even ascribes Naina's multilingual prayer to "glossolalia" which she explains as "the deranged speech associated with schizophrenic disorder" (Anne Brewster, [1988] 1993: 181).
44. David Smith (2003: 154).
45. Elizabeth Fuller Collins (1997: 186, 178).
46. Catherine Bell (2005: 271).
47. Shirley Lim (1994a: 139).
48. Margaret Yong ([1991] 2001: 275). Lamp and light are important motifs throughout the novel, as Yong discusses.
49. In her reading of the novel, Tang Soo Ping intimates the possibility of such an interpretation but quickly dismisses it, choosing to see Naina's self-destruction as "a last gesture of despair" (Tang, [1993] 2001: 279) issuing from a "crazed idea" (280). But why should Naina's action be construed as crazy if, as I have shown, it is ultimately aligned to his belief?
50. Margaret Yong ([1991] 2001: 275).
51. Shirley Lim (1994a: 141).
52. David C. L. Lim (2005: 157).
53. Paul D. Wiebe and S. Mariappen (1978: 128).
54. K. S. Maniam ([1987] 2001b: 265).
55. Ibid.

56. All references to "The Pelanduk" are to the 1989 AMK Interaksi edition of *Plot, The Aborting, Parablames and Other Stories*, 70–89.
57. The underlying myth upon which "The Pelanduk" is premised is the famous story of Sita's abduction by the demon Ravana. In order to separate Sita from her warrior and hunter husband, Rama, Ravana has his lieutenant Maricha transform himself into a beautiful deer in order to attract Sita's attention and hence lure Rama away (because Sita will certainly want Rama to hunt down the deer for her). The ploy succeeds (Maricha is sacrificed because Rama kills him with his swift arrow), and an epic war ensues in order to rescue Sita.
58. Theo D'haen (1997: 213–14).
59. Gilles Deleuze (1994: 41).
60. In *Interrogating Interstices*, I argue that the "grafting of a Hindu mythical creature onto a local, non-mythical one evinces, to an extent, a strategy of assimilation" (Andrew Hock Soon Ng 2007b: 73).
61. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel (2005: 243).
62. Romila Thapar (1989: 230).
63. Ibid. (217).
64. Andrew C. Willford (2006: 96).
65. René Girard (1977: 4).
66. Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger (1989: 208).
67. Ibid. (202). In the Vedic tradition, the most excellent sacrificial victim is man, followed by the horse, the bull, and finally, the goat (ibid., 201).
68. Ibid. (202).
69. Smith and Doniger surmise that this apparent contradiction (the worse is also the best) arises due ultimately to the remoteness of the "original", (ibid., 203) — remote, because human sacrifice has, under Brahmanic injunction, been condemned.
70. René Girard (1977: 8).
71. Ibid. (13).
72. Ibid. (101).
73. Ibid. (101–2).
74. Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger (1989: 193).
75. René Girard (1977: 107).
76. For elaboration, see my discussion of "The Pelanduk" in *Interrogating Interstices* (Ng, 2007b: 72–78).
77. I will discuss this in more detail in the conclusion of this chapter.
78. Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger (1989: 199).
79. René Girard (1977: 151).

80. Ibid. (159).
81. Ibid. (159–60).
82. Ibid. (161).
83. Ibid.
84. This separation is spatially defined. While "gloom and pessimism" are characteristic of the settlement's atmosphere, with its shacks of unpainted walls, heaped sawdust, and "ugly buildings, darkened and decayed" (76), Pandian's house is "bright orange" and furnished with "attractive, comfortable furniture" which "gave it a doll-like appearance" (80).
85. Trinh T. Min-ha (1997: 418).
86. René Girard (1977: 8).
87. Ibid. (161).
88. This further confirms Girard's view that "sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding" (ibid., 5).
89. Ibid. (161).
90. Richard Kearney (2003: 39).
91. Georges Bataille (1992: 47).
92. Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort (1978: 74).
93. Ibid.
94. See his *The Infinite Longing for Home* (2005).
95. James J. DiCenso (1994: 45). Sigmund Freud's most elaborate analysis of religion is in "The Future of an Illusion" ([1927] 1991).
96. Jacques Lacan (1977: 165).
97. Amy Holloway (2002: 212).
98. Ibid.
99. A working definition for what Lacan means by the void of the real is necessary. Although subjectivity is constructed and negotiated within the structure of the symbolic order, there are dimensions to the subject that remain unsymbolizable which, when they surface, reveal the subject's, and by extension, the order's fundamental limitations, or lack. These dimensions are what Lacan terms "the real". Slavoj Žižek writes that "The real is … the hard, impenetrable kernel resisting symbolization" (1989: 169), and experiencing it necessarily opens up a hole, or a "void" within the subject. Sometimes, such an experience realigns the subject's affinity with the symbolic: realizing his or her own ambivalent place in the order, he or she will no longer unconsciously submit to its imperatives but now achieves a measure of autonomy and control over his or her own subjective position so as to be able to *negotiate* with it. Other times however, this encounter can be harrowing enough to dissolve the subject altogether.

100. All references to *In a Far Country* are to the 1993 Skoob Books edition.
101. Barbara A. Weightman (1996: 59).
102. The term *māyā* is often translated as illusion, but this is inaccurate. A more correct translation would be "delusion", or that which is finite, and is, as the *Svestavatara Upanishad* reveals, itself a manifestation of *Brahman* (iv. 9, 10). That is, although *māyā* may seem opposed to *Brahman*, it is, in the end, part of *Brahman* itself. *Māyā* is what binds the human soul in "ignorance" (*avidyā*), thus resulting in it becoming confused between the *manifestation* of the Principle with the Principle itself. In fact, *māyā* can serve as a means by which the Principle is attained, for the infinite cannot be known without the finite, and reality cannot be reached without first differentiating it from the dross of delusion. As the *Kena Upanishad* proclaims, "I do not imagine 'I know him well', and yet cannot say 'I know him not'. Who of us knows this, knows him; and not who says 'I know him not'" (ii: mantra 2; see also *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, ii. 9. 26). The Absolute, in other words, cannot be known in its entirety, but it is not completely unknown either. As S. Radhakrishnan expostulates:

> The analogies which the Upanishads use to illustrate the relation between the Absolute and the finite world clearly indicate the reality of the finite world … Plainly the finite world is not a vivasta or an illusion, but a parinama or a real modification of *Brahman* … The world is nothing but *Brahman*, and, therefore, the world is not a baseless illusion or an imaginary dream. But the reality of the world is its dependence on the Absolute. The Vedanta philosophy does not dispute the reality of the world, but simply declares that the world is not unconditioned. (1914b: 443–44)

103. It is important to stress here that a subject's relationship with his space usually inheres in an unconscious level, or what Merleau-Ponty calls "a deeper life of consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty, [1962] 2002: 329).
104. The most uncanny of experiences is the return to the maternal womb. See Freud's "The 'Uncanny'" (1919).
105. Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 92).
106. The significance of the womb will become even more apparent towards the end of the narrative.
107. G. M. Carstairs (1999: 174).
108. See Judith Roof (1996) for elaboration.
109. Suchitra Samanta (1994: 799). I am indebted to this essay for much of my understanding of sacrifice as applied to Maniam's narrative.
110. Chelva Kanaganayakam (2001: 328).
111. See Chapter 1, note 19.
112. For clarification of the term *objet petit a*, see Chapter 2.

113. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel (2005: 244); includes quotes from *In a Far Country* (92, 129).
114. William Richardson (1998: 62).
115. Ibid. (60).
116. In a sense, Sivasurian can be viewed as an example of a *jivanmukta*, "the one who is completely free while still living in the body" (Klaus Klaustermaier, 1998: 207). A *jivanmukta* is not a saint but merely a sage because his liberation comes not from a knowledge of the path towards salvation, but from knowledge that discriminates between reality and representation.
117. Barbara A. Weightman (1996: 60, 62).
118. Madeleine Biardeau (1989: 71).
119. James J. DiCenso (1994: 59).
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid.
122. Space does not allow me to discuss the sublime at any considerable length. Suffice to say that this concept has a long history in Western philosophical traditions, and because of its association with the unspeakable, the mysterious and the unrepresentable, it inheres in dimensions of the holy. While Edmund Burke ([1757] 1970) attributes the sublime to passion, thus distinguishing it from beauty, Immanuel Kant ([1790] 1952) sees it as principally associated with the mind, and can therefore be overcome by reason. More recently, Jean-François Lyotard (1984) has theorized the sublime as that which defies representation, thus leading to a crisis in postmodern art. For an explicit treatment of the sublime and religion, see Rudolf Otto (1923); here, although the term sublime is never employed, Otto's description of the "numinous" is clearly related to the sublime.
123. Patricia Yaeger (1989: 207).
124. See note 102.
125. Madeleine Biardeau (1989: 87).
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
128. Erling Skorpen (1971: 293).
129. G. M. Carstairs (1999: 174).
130. James J. DiCenso (1994: 62).
131. Ibid. (64).
132. Paul Marcus (2003: 22).
133. See the *Bhagavad-Gita* (ii. 47; iii. 4, 8; vi. 1).

134. For a useful discussion of the relationship between duty, or work, and non-attachment, see Emerson W. Shideler (1960, esp. 311–13).
135. Susan S. Wadley (1977: 114).
136. C. W. Watson (1993: 202).
137. Bernard Wilson argues that Maniam's artistic experimentation is a "deliberate obfuscation in response to social and political pressure" (Wilson, 2003: 409). This is valid, given the sensitivity of writing about race and religion within the Malaysian political context. But the problem with such a view is that is precludes the possibility that the narrative's form may be intricately connected to its theme, and thus enriching the textual experimentation. Wilson's argument seems to suggest that Maniam has purposely written an obtuse novel merely to escape censorship.
138. Michel de Certeau and Marsanne Brammer (1992: 18).
139. Ibid. (20).
140. Paul Sharrad (1993: xvi).
141. Steve Vertovec (2000: 149).
142. Holloway (2002: 212).
143. Chelva Kanaganayakam (2001: 327).
144. K. S. Maniam (2001c). Last accessed 31 October 2008.

Chapter 4

1. Shirley Lim (1996: 21).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. (26).
4. *SARE* is an annual literary journal published by University Malaya. Lim has been one of the journal's international advisory board members since 2002.
5. Nor Faridah Abul Manaf (1995: 305). Episodes in Lim's memoir find oblique resonances in stories such as "All My Uncles" (1978), "Native Daughter" (1985), and "Hunger" (1990). These stories are collected in *Life's Mysteries: The Best of Shirley Lim* (1995).
6. Shirley Lim (2001a: 133). Lim develops her views from T. Wignesan's essay, "Religion as Refuge, or Conflict and Non-change" (1981).
7. T. Wignesan (1981: 77).
8. Andrew Hock Soon Ng (2007a: 163).
9. See Rodney Taylor (1998) and Mary E. Tucker (1998).
10. T. N. Harper (1997: 514).
11. See Chandra T. Mohanty ([1984] 1991) and Deepika Bahri (2004).

12. Shirley Lim (1996: 30).
13. The Peranakan are Chinese whose lineage can be traced back to the Malaccan sultanate of the fifteenth century and who have subsequently adopted, and adapted to, the Malay culture with regard to language, food and dress. Even so, they remain ethnically Chinese and are thus loyal to Chinese religions (such as Confucianism), family ties and identity markers. For detailed elaboration of the Peranakan people and their customs and culture, see Tan Chee-Beng, *The Baba of Melaka* (1998) and Joo Ee Khoo, *The Straits Chinese: A Cultural History* (1996).
14. This is an ambiguity which, I aver, is only finally reconciled through reclaiming surrogate mothers in the guise of Asian women writers through whose works Lim rediscovers female autonomy and empowerment (Andrew Hock Soon Ng 2007a: 175–78).
15. Shirley Lim (1996: 30–31).
16. Shirley Lim ([1988] 1994b: 13).
17. Shirley Lim (1996: 32).
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid. (33).
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid. (29).
22. Ibid. (78).
23. Ibid. (77).
24. Ibid. (112).
25. Musa W. Dube (2002: 107).
26. An example of such an episode was when a nun discovered Lim's exercise book inscribed with vulgar terms, for which Lim lost the warmth of this favourite nun's approval (Shirley Lim 1996: 116–17).
27. Ibid. (120).
28. Shirley Lim ([1988] 1994b: 15).
29. Mary Evelyn Tucker (1998: 5).
30. Ibid. (14).
31. Rodney L. Taylor (1998: 88).
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid. (89). Taylor also discusses other criteria which contribute to Confucianism's religiosity, such as sagehood as a religious goal, and the transmitting of doctrinal matters through records of the sages' teaching.
34. Ibid. (90).
35. Ibid. (95).
36. Heying Jenny Zhan (1996: 276).

37. Harriet Evans (2002: 340). As William Jankowiak points out: "Throughout Chinese history, the underlying appeal of that representation of maleness has remained constant: it is focused on non-biological achievement. This is a common cross-cultural finding about 'masculinity' and 'femininity': manhood is deemed to be something achieved through acts of competition with other men, whether physical or mental, whereas womanhood is linked to considerations of erotic attractiveness, reproductive success, and other related domestic achievements" (Jankowiak, 2002: 364).
38. Khoo Joo Ee (1996: 122).
39. Ibid. (123).
40. Henri Bergson (2002: 302).
41. Michel Foucault (1980a: 59).
42. Or, as Rey Chow asserts, "the 'liberation' of the self is simultaneously a repositioning of the sources of power that methodically structure social processes. What this means is that freedom, which is always imagined as freedom from power and from domination, is strictly speaking an effect of power; the 'free' or 'freed' individual as such is already a representation of the changing conceptions of power from an absolute to a relative, discursive basis" (Chow, 2001: 44).
43. See Andrew Hock Soon Ng (2006).
44. All references to "Haunting" and all subsequent short stories are to the 1995 Times Books edition of *Life Mysteries*.
45. Mark Wigley (1992: 336). Wigley's insights are specific to Western homes.
46. Ibid. (335–36).
47. Susan Mann (2002: 108, my emphasis).
48. As Steven Sangren observes, "[in] patrilocal Chinese families, young women are often dominated by their mothers-in-law, and they receive little support from husbands, who are bound by strong emotional and filial ties to their mothers. These young wives have little other recourse than to turn to their children for emotional support" (Sangren, 1983: 14). The situation will of course worsen for the young wife if she is barren.
49. For an interesting essay on the correlation between erecting architecture and human sacrifice in the Southeast Asian region, see Robert Wessing and Roy E. Johnson (1997).
50. Slavoj Žižek (1991: 31).
51. Relating this to Lim's own childhood experience, it is arguable that Lim's mother, unsurprisingly, never really fitted into the family, for as a peranakan woman who speaks only Malay, dresses provocatively, eroticizes herself through cosmetics and prefers her own company, she violates the very image of the Confucian woman, and must therefore be

relegated to the margins. As Lim confesses in her memoir, her mother "is an outsider, and silent in their [the family's] presence. This is not her house as it is their house, although my father is a son here" (Lim, 1996: 27). In abandoning her husband and children, Lim's mother merely confirms the family's perspective of her as a "bad" woman.

52. Karen McCarthy Brown (1994: 181). Brown is discussing the notion of fundamentalism here, but her point is nevertheless apt in describing the status of women within strict Confucianism.
53. Michel Foucault (1980b: 142).
54. Luce Irigaray (1985: 76).
55. Ibid. (134).
56. Luce Irigaray (1985: 76).
57. Gayatri Spivak (1988: 205). Essentialism, simply put, is the belief that there is a true and invariable essence of things which cannot be changed. In gender terms, for example, the idea that men are strong and rational, and women are weaker and prone to irrationality can be understood as one such essentialist view. For a useful elaboration of essentialism in postcolonial feminism, see Deepika Bahri (2004).
58. Susan Mann (2002: 108).
59. For a basic overview of Christianity in Southeast Asia, see Robbie Goh (2005).
60. Conversion amongst Straits Chinese was also motivated by commercial and educational benefits. In aligning with Christian missionaries and Christian-sponsored schools during the colonial era, many Straits Chinese merchants backing Christian-based programmes ended up converting themselves (ibid., 51).
61. See Xinzhong Yao (1997).
62. In Christianity, God the Father, the Virgin Mary and the Christ form the ideal "heavenly family", which "earthly families" should emulate to attain a measure of spiritual solace and esteem. As philosopher Henri Lefebvre aptly states, "The heavenly family is visited by earthly families, who offer it their good luck and misfortunes in homage. It gives them a magnified image of themselves. The heavenly and the earthly are joined: the human is mingled with the heavenly" (Lefebvre, 1991: 215).
63. Steven Sangren (1983: 4).
64. The first novel is *Joss and Go*ld (2001). Lim is also explicit about making religion a theme in *Sister Swing* because, as she has said, "For some reason, Asian American literature has not really dealt with religion as a theme. The Christian movement is very very strong with Asian American communities — the Korean church, the Filipino charismatic church, born again Christians. So I make the youngest daughter a fervent Christian,

who goes with her father-in-law, a pastor, to Los Angeles and works in a church there. So, what I was trying to do was also, as an Asian American writer, [to deal] with themes that are important to Asian American communities but that have not been so widely represented or popularly represented" (Shirley Lim quoted in Carmen Nge 2006, last accessed 12 August 2009).

65. All references to *Sister Swing* are to the 2007 Marshall Cavendish edition.
66. Timothy Reiss (2004: 118).
67. Rey Chow (2001: 41).
68. Ravni Thakur (1997: 114).
69. All references to *Joss and Gold* are to the 2001 Times edition.
70. In an interview, Lim takes a defensive stance when questioned about the "weak males" of her novel. Her argument, however, that this is an incorrect reading because "Henry successfully takes on his father's business role, remarries, and fathers a child. Paroo enjoys a happy marriage and career in Singapore … Chester is a successful professor" (Shirley Lim quoted in Mohammad A. Quayum, 2003b: 97) is unconvincing. That these men attain material and familial success does not necessarily translate to emotional strength or integrity, both of which, the narrative amply demonstrates, are lacking in the men. Henry cannot bear the fact that his wife has a child with another man and turns completely away from them; Paroo, after failing to culminate his clandestine affair with a Chinese in either marriage or death (*Joss and Gold*: 53–64), sheepishly submits to his parents' desire for an Indian wife; and Chester, whose callousness belies his emotional immaturity, is now emotionally dependent on his stronger, more confident wife, Meryl.
71. Susan Mann (2000: 842).
72. Nicholas Harrison (2003: 102).
73. Shirley Lim ([1988] 1994c: 169).
74. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1993: 9).
75. See Mohammad A. Quayum (2003b: 89–90).
76. Shirley Lim ([1988] 1994c: 173).
77. Ibid. (169). Of course, for a postcolonial non-native user such as Lim, English as a language of choice poses its own unique problems. For a nuanced reading of Lim's resistive affiliation with English, see Sneja Gunew (2001).
78. Shirley Lim quoted in Mohammad Quayum (2003b: 86).
79. Rey Chow (2001: 46).
80. For an elaboration on the paradox of writing autobiography, see Phillipe Lejeune (1989).

81. Shirley Lim ([1998] 1994c: 168).
82. Morny Joy (2004: 36).
83. As I have argued in my essay (2007a).

Chapter 5

1. William Shepard (1987: 331). This is opposed to "Islamic totalism" which includes both traditionalism and, to a lesser extent, neo-traditionalism (317–20). A nation which adopts this position largely resists any correspondence with the West, and operates strictly within religious paradigms. Shepard's reading of modernity is, in my view, somewhat limited by an uncritical collapsing of "modernity" with Westernization, but insofar as his premise that an important aspect of Asian modernism is premised on its encounter and confrontation with the West, this is warrantable and one to which I subscribe.
2. Joel Kahn (2003: 152).
3. Ibid. (153). For discussion of the Malay middle class, see Shamsul A. B. (1999) and Terence Chong (2005). Chong's essay is particularly interesting in what it says about the purposes of *Melayu Baru* (or New Malay) as a "political construction": "Firstly, referring to its existence was both a legitimization of the NEP and a pronouncement of its success. Secondly, it offered UMNO a strategy to publicly de-emphasize its role as patron of the *bumiputras* in order to enter a new ideological ground … where the discourse of helping Malays achieve economic parity with the Chinese could be gradually replaced by that of the need for national unity and identity in the age of globalization" (Chong, 2005: 577).
4. Joel Kahn (203: 153).
5. Ibid. This notion of "exceptionalism" was introduced by Ernest Gellner (1981) to describe Islam's tenacious ability to survive the onslaught of the modernity-secularization juggernaut.
6. For an excellent discussion of this state of tension between modernism and Islam, see Robert W. Heffner (1998).
7. Karim Raslan (2002: 43).
8. Karim expresses such a personal dilemma in another essay "Our Culture, Ourselves", where he writes: "Could I be modern and still be Malay? Or had I, in fact, betrayed my roots, my *adat* and my faith by being so modern?" (Karim, [1995] 1996b: 15). Although he ends with the surety that "A cultural identity is not fixed" (ibid.,18) it is clear from his stories that Karim has yet to find a resolution to this dilemma.
9. Kelantan is one of the thirteen states which make up Malaysia, and the most adamantly traditional in its Islamism.

10. All references to "Mariah" are to the 1993 Furada edition of *Melor in Perspective* (71–83). Che Husna Azhari's other two collections of stories are *Kelantan Tales: An Anthology of Short Stories* (1992) and *The Rambutan Orchard* (1993b).
11. Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2001b: 148).
12. Ibid. (149).
13. Che Husna Azhari quoted in Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (1995: 18).
14. Che Husna Azhari's perspective on feminism is, I feel, rather narrow. By "implied connotations", she means that before feminism, women did not recognize that they had rights, and since she is a Muslim who is aware of her rights as a woman, she does not see the need to adopt a feminist position. Certainly, feminism is not just about the realization of one's rights as woman, but also a trajectory which motivates the definitions and directions of those rights. As such, Che Husna Azhari's awareness of her Islamic rights is also indirectly her brush with Western (including feminist and modern) views (she studied in England, pursuing her secondary education at Oxford College, and her tertiary and postgraduate studies at Brunel University).
15. See the Introduction.
16. Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and tan beng hui (2006: 131).
17. Noraini Othman (2006: 344). While the situation has improved for non-Malay women because of significant changes in the last ten years in civil law, Malay women, under the legislation of the *Syariah* courts, remain increasingly disadvantaged.
18. Zainah Anwar (2009: 1).
19. Rashidah Shuib (2005: 187).
20. Noraini Othman (2006: 344).
21. Ibid. As Ziba Mir-Hosseini proposes, the view that polygamy is sanctioned by *Syariah* is actually an erroneous one. This is due to a confusion between *Syariah* (that is, "the totality of God's will as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad" [Mir-Hosseini, 2009: 25]) and *fiqh* ("the process of human endeavor to discern and extract legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam" [ibid.]). Polygamy is permitted in many Islamic communities because *fiqh* has often mistakenly been equated with *Syariah*, "not only in popular Muslim discourses but also by specialists and politicians, and often with ideological intent: that is, what Islamists and others commonly assert to be *Shari'ah* mandate (hence divine and infallible), is in fact the result of *fiqh*, juristic speculation and extrapolation (hence human and fallible)" (ibid.).

22. Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and tan beng hui (2006: 101). The campaign was launched by Sisters in Islam and eleven other women's organizations.
23. Space does not allow me to engage in a critique of polygamy in Islam. For useful views on this practice, see Leila Ahmed (1986), Anouar Majid (1998), Haideh Moghissi (1999) and Jane I. Smith (1979). The practice of polygamy in Muslim communities is based on the following verse from the Quran:

    > If you fear you cannot treat orphans with fairness, then you may marry other women who seem good to you: two, three or four of them. But if you fear you cannot maintain equality among them, marry only one or any slave-girl you may own. This will make it easier for you to avoid injustice. (Quran, Surah Al-Nisā 4: 3)

    While some scholars view this as "expressly and unambiguously [permitting] marriage with more than one woman" (Asghar Ali Engineer, 2004: 119), others assert that "Religious views on social issues" must be read against "existing discourses that are dominant in a particular historical period" (Mansoor Moaddel, 1998: 110). As the verse from the Quran implies, polygamy should only be practised as an act of compassion or generosity toward women who have no means of subservience, but if the man is anxious about maintaining fairness, he should then marry only one woman. In Malaysia however, because of the deeply patriarchal influence on the way Islam is practised, which is in turn legitimized by *Syariah* laws, the explicitness and contextual aspects of this verse have been ignored; instead, it has been reinterpreted by many Muslim states to support polygamy, often to the detriment of women.
24. Linda Hutcheon (1985: 54–55).
25. Robert Winzeler (1974: 64).
26. Aihwa Ong ([1991] 1995: 165). The concepts of *akal* and *nafsu* are originally part of the Malay belief system but later became imbued with Islamic significations. See also Chapter 2, under the discussion of Lee Kok Liang's story, "Ibrahim Something". See also Clive Kessler (1978).
27. Douglas Raybeck (1974: 230).
28. In fact, the Islamic women's organizations' criticism against the move to end polygamy in 2003 was primarily based on this argument — that polygamy is a solution to childless marriages. See Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and tan beng hui (2006: 101).
29. In Islam, divorce is viewed with disdain, especially by the Prophet Muhammad. Polygamy is thus seen as a means by which men can escape such censure, a pattern increasingly adopted by Muslim men in the West, according to Anne Sofie Roald (2001).

30. See Che Husna Azhari (1993a: 34–47).
31. Kelantan is one of the two states governed by the opposition, the orthodox party PAS, which came into power in 1990. Under this party, a system of gender segregation in public places has been introduced, including separate payment counters for women. Muslim women were banned from certain kinds of work (police forces, electronic factories, hospitals), and working night-shifts, because, as the then chief minister of Kelantan argued, this "may cause disruption and instability in the Muslim family life" (Noraini Othman, 2006: 342).
32. See Noraini Othman (2006: 342).
33. In *Heroes and Other Stories* (1996: 73–79).
34. I am not suggesting that homosexuality is a problem, but that it is viewed as such under current Malaysian civil and religious laws. It is also interesting to note that the British civil law, which Malaysia adopted after independence, and which was highly prejudiced against same-sex relations, corresponded well with the nation's Islamic perspective; despite the changes in law with regard to same-sex relationships in Britain since 1967, this has not been followed up by Malaysia, which continues to criminalize homosexuality until this day. Also, on a related note, the view that there was a level of tolerance for homosexuality in the Arab-Islam Middle East during the Ottoman period (1516–1789) is possibly a misconception. As Khaled El-Rouayheb argues, the sources that (Western) scholars use to substantiate this view are often poetry, legal, or medical ones, but these do not constitute a "realistic" picture of homosexuality in the Ottoman Empire. For details, see Khaled El-Rouayheb (2009).
35. "Datin" is a term denoting the wife of a "datuk", an honorific title conferred on an individual by the state's sultan for contributions made to society or the economy.
36. All references to "Neighbours" are to the 1996 Times edition of *Heroes and Other Stories* (119–31).
37. An *ulama* is someone who functions as an authority in Islamic matters.
38. There is a correlation here with Karim's own criticism against the nation's obsession with "moral crusades against incest and homosexuality" while "serious national issues are sidelined and ignored" (Karim Raslan, 2002: 42).
39. Khoo Ghaik Cheng (2006: 15).
40. Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (2001b: 151).
41. Che Husna Azhari quoted in Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf (1995: 18).
42. Che Husna Azhari quoted in Mohammad Quayum (2007: 243).

Conclusion

1. Washima Che Dan and Noritah Omar (2009: 157).
2. Ibid. (158).
3. Ibid. (163).
4. A recent novel by Chuah Guat Eng, *Days of Change* (2010) is purportedly the first novel written from the first person's point of view of a racial other (in this case, an elderly Malay man).
5. In January 2010, a controversy over the term "Allah" in a Catholic newsletter resulted in tension between Muslims and Christians, culminating in the bombing of a church in Kuala Lumpur by two Malay brothers. Although condemned by authorities and the Malay-Muslim population in general, and the two brothers were subsequently sentenced to jail-terms, the fact that such an incident could occur reveals the ambivalent relationship that the different religio-ethnic groups in Malaysia have, and has laid a strain on Najib's 1Malaysia campaign. For an overview of the controversy, see Kuppusamy (2010).
6. Philip Holden (2009: 55).
7. Ibid. (66).
8. Ibid. See also Alain Ricard (1987).
9. Alain Badiou (2005: 79, emphasis in the original).
10. For an argument, see Holden (2010).
11. Giorgio Agamben (1999: 107).

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