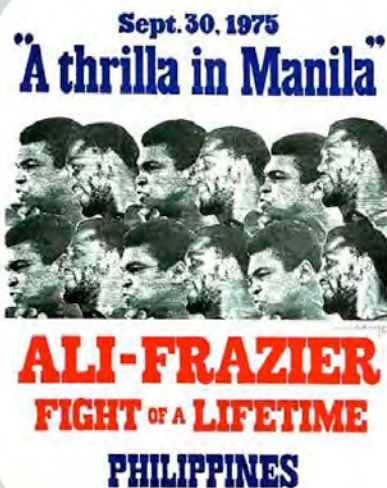


EXPLORATIONS

a graduate student journal of southeast asian studies

Volume 9 Spring 2009



IN THIS ISSUE: Marcos' Philippines and the Thrilla in Manila THOMAS QUINN | Charting the Maritime Realm of the Sama of Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia LANCE NOLDE | Young Women's Suicides in Early Twentieth-Century Vietnam LINH VU | The Phenomenon of Indonesian Muslim Dolls | A. BUDIYANTO

Dear readers –

It is with great pleasure that we present the 2009 issue of **EXPLORATIONS** graduate student journal of Southeast Asian studies. The following pages touch on a diverse array of topics, from Muslim dolls to a dark period between those darker in Cambodia's history to linguistic code-switching in Malay to the sea people who call Southeast Asian waters home. Equally diverse are the authors and editors who contributed to this issue, a committed group of burgeoning Southeast Asianists hailing from countries around the globe. In a long list of people to thank, they certainly are the first who come to mind. Their dedication and patience in bringing this journal to print are greatly appreciated. We are equally obliged to Kelli Swazey and Margaret Bodemer, the past editors of **EXPLORATIONS**, for entrusting us with the journal. Their foresight and organization allowed us to step directly into the operation of what was already a well-oiled machine. Dr. Barbara Andaya and Dr. Liam Kelley provided indispensable faculty support, and we also thank the University of Hawai'i's Center for Southeast Asian Studies for sharing their resources, their office, and the assistance of their very talented Outreach Coordinator Paul Rausch. Christian Razukas is the man behind the layout magic, and his many sleepless nights will not be soon forgotten. We also thank the University of Hawai'i's Student Activity and Program Fee Board (SAPFB) whose generous support made the print version of this journal possible. In many ways, this issue represents the changing face of Southeast Asian scholarship – from the disciplinary diversity of the topics explored, to the identities, nationalities, and research interests of the explorers themselves. Enjoy.

Editors,

Rachel Hoerman and Deanna Ramsay

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The principal mission of **EXPLORATIONS** is to offer a forum for graduate students to present research relating to Southeast Asia. This forum introduces the work of graduate students studying Southeast Asia to others in the field, encourages the publishing of scholarship by those from Southeast Asia about the region and fosters a sense of community among those interested in Southeast Asia from around the globe. **EXPLORATIONS** embraces the diversity of academic interests and scholastic expertise of its authors, and hopes to encourage discussion both within and across disciplines in topics concerning Southeast Asia.

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Playing with Piety

The Phenomenon of Indonesian Muslim Dolls

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Introduction: Muslim Dolls as Religious Visual Culture

Muslim dolls are a new phenomenon within contemporary popular Islamic culture, particularly in Indonesia. While most contemporary Indonesian Islamist movements like Salafism (neo-Wahabism) are deeply influenced by transnational Islamist ideologies and thus reject any figures of humans,¹ moderate Salafists often allow children to play with dolls. This acceptance is based on the *Hhadi*s that spoke about Aisyah, the youngest wife of the Prophet, playing with a type of doll when she was about nine years old. Despite this acceptance, many conservatives still argue that Aisyah's doll was not precisely a human-shaped doll.

Muslim dolls emerged in Indonesia in 2005, soon after the reformation era² when Islamic movements emerged more prominently in public spheres, marking a modern turn in the evolution of Islamic movements. Along with this transition into modernity, members of various Muslim organizations that married and built families began to consider secular toys for their children's entertainment, particularly dolls. Not only were Muslim parents concerned about whether toys were or were not Islamic in nature—a crucial point

considering conflicting opinions among Islamic authorities regarding dolls—but these parents also had pragmatic concerns regarding the safety, educational value, and affordability of toys. Toy makers developed creative strategies in order to take these concerns into account.

Muslim dolls and other popular "Islamic" imagery in popular culture—such as *busana Muslim* (Islamic clothes), Islamic stickers, Islamic music performances, among others—represent a huge material database for "religious visual culture." Currently, there are various scholars engaged with contemporary Islamic visual culture in Indonesia: Budiyanto (2006) and Lukens-Bull (2005) have written about Islamic stickers, while Carla Jones (2007) and Nuraini Juliastuti (2003) have examined Muslim clothing. Most of these scholars have utilized various media and cultural studies theories and methods in their study of Islamic visual culture. In recent decades, as Brent Plate (2002) notes, religious scholars have shifted away from "verbal-textual" doctrines toward the visual and material artifacts constituting religious "practice."³ David Morgan (2000) similarly observes visual imagery's significance in religious practices:

[T]he new study of religious visual culture begins with the assumption that visual artifacts should not be segregated from the experience of ceremony, education, commerce or prayer. Visual practices help fabricate the worlds in which people live and therefore present a promising way of deepening our understanding of how religions work.⁴

Both Morgan and Plate stress the significance of visual imagery, not only as a component of performances, rituals, and ceremonies, but also for understanding these practices themselves.

Beyond contributing to and serving as a lens through which to analyze rituals, religious visual imagery can serve as a point of departure into discourses relating to broader social issues and contexts. Plate states that visual culture offers:

an attempt to talk about the visual components that are imbedded in everyday life [and] is engaged with the production and the reception of visual objects, the makers and the viewers. And in this mode of analysis, gender, sex, race, nationality, religion, family, and other forces of identification come to play a vital role in the construction of the way we look and are looked at. These components of identity affect the way images are produced and reproduced, and how such images are viewed, and by whom.⁵

These social concerns provide fruitful ground for research, as the majority of the scholarship about Islamic arts tends to focus on the “fine arts” such as calligraphy and architecture, including Plate’s own books on religious visual culture. This paper will analyze the phenomenon of Indonesian Muslim dolls as an expression of religious visual culture and scrutinize popular Islamic materialist culture by taking into account Plate’s “field of vision,” a comprehensive analytical methodology for examining the visual components in the Indonesian community.⁶ Additionally, I explore some of the religious and social issues that arise when considering Muslim dolls as visual culture in Indonesia, focusing particularly on the ways religious transnationalism and globalization impact this phenomenon. Specifically, I will examine the varieties of religious transnationalism⁷ that have influenced the emergence of the Muslim doll in Indonesia. Through these issues, I will note the waves of globalization—or, flows of religious, social, and economic content through increasingly connected agents from around the world—that are exposed by the Islamic doll phenomenon. Lastly, I will consider

Indonesian Muslims’s reception and interpretation of the specifically Indonesian character of these Islamic dolls.

Barbie: A Story of the Globalized ‘Secular’ Doll

The birth of the modern doll is represented by the production of a global phenomenon known as Barbie. Barbie was created in 1959 by Ruth Handler, and is, in many ways, an icon of Western consumerism, celebrating Western aristocratic and bourgeois values and lifestyles. To those living in the non-Western world, this ideal of a modern, high-class lifestyle has long been an obsession, but it is also frequently critiqued for eroding traditional cultural values.⁸ As an emblem of Western modernity, Barbie’s image sparks such ambivalence (see Figure 1).

Despite critiques of Barbie, she can be found in countries around the world, just as bourgeois values and lifestyles are not exclusive to Western civilization. Yet, the imagery of wealth, elegance, and fantasy that Barbie embodies can be traced in history: for instance, fantastic affluence characterizes many epic stories of princes and princesses that exist in various civilizations around the world. This affluence is present in the Islamic tale of *One Thousand and One Nights, the adventures of Prince Panji of Java*, or in any folklore from China, India, Japan, and in other countries and historical civilizations.

Acknowledging her international appeal, makers of Barbie have attempted to fuse, and possibly appropriate non-Western cultures, by creating special edition dolls whose clothing and packaging adhere to stereotyped national images (see Image 1). These questions about Barbie’s international appeal and cultural adaptability are important to consider as popular culture becomes increasingly global. Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the *habitus* helps illustrate the complications that arise at sites of cultural intersection. “A set of durable practices, values, and dispositions which is both structured and structuring,” the *habitus* represents the “context in which we understand the world and acquire beliefs, values and knowledge through practice.”⁹ We might therefore understand Barbie’s status as an icon of bourgeois culture as an effect of cultural practices of the West. Yet, as a global commodity, Barbie’s popularity threatens to export

Western values and sensibilities into global culture. This global culture can be understood as threatening to an Indonesian Muslim who is characterized by practices that are influenced by his or her own habitus (e.g. Islamic culture). This cultural intersection between West and non-West that global capitalism helps produce—we see this particularly with Mattel’s global marketing strategies—can place differing cultural practices into conflict.

In *Barbie Culture*, Mary F. Rogers recognizes the Muslim world’s anxiety over the cultural intrusion that Barbie represents, suggesting that Barbie can alienate many around the world, as her image reflects racism, sexism, consumerism, and materialism. For many Muslims, Barbie’s world is perceived as a kind of “fantasy of consumption,” a world that is far from the reality most girls face. Barbie idealizes white skin, light hair, blue eyes, a thin body-shape, Western conceptions of beauty and, above all else, fashionable upper-class appeal. This reflects the existence of social and cultural hierarchies in which “whiteness” is understood stereotypically as clean, good looking, honorable, successful, morally good, healthy and charming. For that reason, Barbie has also become representative of Western popular culture and the associated “American Dream” ideology. In this sense, the world of Barbie appears to be normative in popular

culture: these ideologies of wealth and consumption differ significantly from the ideal world of Islamic norms and values.¹⁰

Transnational Islamic Piety for the Modern World

Markets and politics are two sides of one coin: they are inseparable and infused with cultural values and practices. For instance, the conflicts in the Middle East seem to have no certain solution because of continuous fighting for natural resources, political interests, and religious pride and honor. Each of these conflicts intermingles and overlaps with other conflicts whose origins are not precisely known. Islam has historically been a highly political religion, a source of ideologies deeply rooted in the Middle East, and continuously evolving concomitantly with developments in modern political, economic, and cultural realities. These modern developments, combined with Western-European imperialism, have challenged political Islam’s status within the global community. This ideological conflict illustrates Islam’s status as a global and hegemonic power, and, it should be noted, Islam’s own ideologies have both positive and negative influences upon others in the world.¹¹

In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington predicts the emergence of Islam (and China) as a counter power toward the West is imminent.¹² Huntington claims that since the fall of the Ottoman Empire there has been an ongoing struggle to regain the previous political, economic and cultural power of Islam. The struggle to create a pan-Islamism in the late nineteenth century seemingly failed to solidify because of the emergence of the modern, Western state.¹³ These circumstances set the stage for the emergence of modern Islamic nations, both in the Middle East and the rest of the Islamic world. In the 1990s the Islamic ‘civilization’ movement became a political strategy intending to create an Islamic society characterized by the Islamization of everything, and was initially led by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi.¹⁴ Budiyanto (2006) notes that throughout the various global Islamic movements in the 1990s, including the one in Indonesia, a common theme was the notion that the *umma*, or Muslim community, was an important element in Islamic activism. Thus, the Islamization of society, not the state, emerged as the strategy for constructing and building the imagined universal *umma*.¹⁵ While this



Figure 1.
Sumatera Barbie,
courtesy
Sage Evans

contemporary transnational Islamic movement was initially inspired by the *Ikhwanul Muslimin*, a transnational Islamic movement arising in Egypt in 1939¹⁶, its new strategy, as Oliver Roy (2004) argues, is focused on Islamizing society rather than Islamizing the State: “The neo-fundamentalists of Islam reject the political struggle as means of establishing such a state. They believe that an Islamic state should result from the re-Islamization of the *umma* and should not be a tool for this re-Islamization”.¹⁷ Seeing the West’s hegemonic cultural power in the global marketplace as a threat to the fate and faith of the young generation, Muslims countered by creating cultural commodities of their own. One example of this cultural response is the creation of *Arrosa*, the Muslim doll.

The phenomenon of the Indonesian Muslim doll was motivated by ideas of transnational Islam, suggests its creators. Umining Dwi Kusminarti (Atiek), the Director of PT Haula Sejahtera, one of the creators of the *Arrosa* Islamic doll, notes that a Muslim doll was already being manufactured in the Middle East and that it was similar to a Barbie doll. This inspired the creation of a new doll, one with Muslim clothes. She wanted the female doll to wear the *jilbab* (the headscarf) and the male dolls to wear the *songkok* (a rimless cap). “This Muslim doll is heavily laden with Islamic faith and values,” said Atiek, a mother of four daughters.¹⁸

Atiek, who created *Arrosa* with her friend Asrul Iman, recalled that their inspiration to create a Muslim doll first came when they realized there were no dolls dressed in Islamic clothing available for her daughter. Although a doll named *Razzane* existed in Malaysia, these dolls were difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Atiek decided then to make the Muslim dolls herself. Atiek markets the *Arrosa* doll primarily through the Internet to surrounding cities in Java and neighboring countries. She notes that currently there are many orders from Bandung, Balikpapan, Duri, Surabaya, Bahkan, and even Abu Dhabi and Singapore, but Atiek also admits a desire to expand distribution into foreign markets; for instance, Malaysia where there appears to be a similar interest in dolls with Islamic clothing.¹⁹

It can be said that Muslim dolls, as a subculture of the Islamic world, represent a counter to the cultural hegemony that Barbie symbolizes. However, *Arrosa* is not a purely Muslim creation. Her main material components are products of the global market: she is

originally made in China. Rather than manufacture her own doll, Atiek instead purchased a plastic molded doll from China and dressed it up.²⁰ However, dolls from China generally have western faces, although most consumers want an Asian or Middle-Eastern looking doll. If the demand for the doll continues to grow, Atiek will manufacture her own doll, including additional clothing, such as wedding dresses, traditional Indonesian clothes and other accessories, such as a prayer carpet, rosary, and *musholla*.²¹

Unlike what was suggested by George Ritzer that, “it is much easier to export things in a form of ‘nothing’ throughout the whole world, rather than to export things in a form of ‘something,’”²² Muslim dolls, which are full of Islamic attributes and values, sell well globally, similar to Barbie, thereby complicating Ritzer’s theorization of the circulation of commodities. Muslim dolls are infused with unique attributes that give them value as *something*. They are conceptually bound with Islamic culture (as simultaneously a local and global religious and cultural movement), with temporal specificity (modernity), with humanism, and enchantment.²³ This complexity in the depiction of a Muslim is emblematic of the segmented sentiment of the Muslim community, which has traditionally had a vast global presence since the early part of thirteenth century. Considering this background, the Muslim doll serves as an effective media and consumer tool for shaping the Muslim consciousness in the context of global and universal Islamic world values.²⁴ As a material object in circulation, the Muslim dolls—with all of their accessories and products—facilitates the spread of local Islamic values to influence transnational religious culture.

Muslim Doll: The Birth of Visual Mimicry

The Muslim doll is a phenomenon of the early 21st century, first appearing in the Middle East in 2004 with the launching of the *Fulla* doll by NewBoy International in Syria. The doll, *Fulla*, named for a genus of jasmine flower that grows in the Middle East, quickly became a bestselling item. In contrast to Barbie’s blond hair and blue eyes, *Fulla* has black hair and brown eyes, and she is dressed in long dresses and skirts that cover her knees.²⁵ (See Figure 2).

In 2005, two new Muslim dolls came to the market: *Razzane*, created by Ammar Saadeh and Sherrie



Figure 2.
Fulla Doll Display,
courtesy
Gerry May

Saadeh, and Arrossa. The Saadehs say that they created the Razzane doll as an alternative doll for Muslim girls and boys. In contrast to Barbie's sexual appearance and pronounced bust, Razanne appears modest, with clothes that cover her body, including the *jilbab*.

According to the Saadehs, Razzane portrays the ideal character traits for young Muslim women, such as an unpretentious appearance, kindness, good manners, and piety (*taqwa* and *sholehah*). At the time they created Razanne, the Saadehs felt there were not any models of Barbie that were positive for Muslim girls.²⁶ Razanne was created as a tool for Muslim girls to learn the values of education and religiosity, not as an object of admiration that encourages girls to obsess over their own bodies. Razanne is available in three versions: white skin with blonde hair, light brown skin with black hair, and dark skin with black hair. Representing an image of an idealized modern Muslim woman, Razzane is popular in Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and in Southeast Asian countries, and is also sold in America, Canada, and Germany.²⁷

From this short history it is clear that the birth of the Muslim doll is representative of "mass-popular-art"

that emerges as an effect of the recent revitalization of Islamic consciousness throughout global Islamic communities. This Islamic consciousness has developed in the face of the perceived dominance of Western culture and values, and is intended to stimulate discourses that will lead to a return to the day of "glorious Islam". This counter-hegemonic consciousness can be traced back to the latter part of nineteenth century.²⁸ The Muslim doll illustrates the discursive shift in Islamic movements' gaze from state to society, with its argot doctrines asserting that Islam is revealed to all of mankind as the way of *al-akhlakul al-karimah* (Islamic moral kindness) and *al-rahmatan lil al-amin* (Islamic universal values). These discourses are also likely a response to the paranoia of Islam in the Western world after the tragedy of 9/11. Recognizing the cultural hegemony and paranoia of the West, the Islamic consciousness is able to focus its anxieties towards countering imperialist images, such as those that Barbie represents.

The Barbie doll is not just a representation of certain cultural values, but is believed by many in the Islamic world, including many Indonesians, to be

representative of Western culture as *jahiliyyah*, or ignorant and led by “American-Zionist Jews.”²⁹ Muslim dolls serve to strengthen the religious identity of children and develop a Muslim imaginary that is closer to reality. Nevertheless, the problematic imagery of the perfect Barbie body does not disappear for the modern Muslim doll, especially with Muslim dolls made in Indonesia. This is an example of what Rene Girard describes as a “mechanism of mimetic/mimesis desire.”³⁰ The Indonesian doll is representative of the Muslim desire to be a part of the advancement and modernization that is associated with Western civilization, while simultaneously being different. Although the Muslim doll makers prefer to create an “indigenous brown-looking doll,” the very fact that this doll must imitate Barbie indicates Barbie’s power as a market icon. The Muslim doll in Indonesia does not appear in the market on its own terms: it must reference and respond to Barbie. Every aspect of the doll, from its inception to its aesthetic values, is labeled as explicitly “Islamic,” yet almost all of the materials and processes are identical to Barbie’s, including the bright pink color of the packaging.

Still, this mimicry can be a form of cultural contestation. Sara Ahmed argues (in Prabasmoro, 2003, pp. 94-95) that through mimicry the Muslim doll hybridizes Barbie to challenge the doll’s claim to originality and authenticity.³¹ At the same time, next to Barbie, the Muslim dolls disclose the dialectical interaction of a multitude of dualisms (e.g. master/slave, West/non-West, other/self, global/local, etc.). The global/local dialectic is notable, in the context of globalization and transnational Islam. As the Muslim doll mimics Western Barbie, Muslims articulate local (Islamic) values via a global language of dolls and markets.³²

Furthermore, an ironic and paradoxical consciousness among Muslims has seemingly emerged, as can be seen by the racial claims of Muslimness by the Razzane and Fullas dolls. The creators of Razzane and Fullas regard dolls that physically resemble Muslims as somehow inappropriate for a *bule*, or westerner, to own. Yet, many Muslims in Europe, the Middle East, and even in America have diverse types of bodies, hair, and eyes, and also speak “*bule*” languages. This demonizing of Westerners as ‘others’ accentuates the paradox of transnational Islam in Indonesia, where at once it presumes a universalistic

stance that goes beyond racial and geographical claims, but simultaneously shows insularity.

Muslim Dolls: Where Art, Politics, Consumerism and Religion Overlap

If we agree that the Muslim dolls are a visual art form, or at least stand as images of Islamic popular visual culture, it is important to consider them not only as a commodity, but also within the context of Islamic political culture. As mentioned previously, the doll was created to disseminate the symbolic and aesthetic values of Islam, thereby contributing to the increase of Islam’s political profile in the popular media. The creators understand that their target audience recognizes and appreciates the importance of Islamic cultural values. Not only do the dolls’ creators experience economic gain by producing the dolls, but they also share in cultural and symbolic gains that come with the dissemination of Islamic images of faith and piety. Muslim consumers also share in these symbolic benefits, Atiek confirms: “[This doll] is made as media to support education and early educational activity in disseminating Islamic values ... The birth of Arrosa itself is a response to an alternative choice of various dolls in the market. But, because those dolls are generally wearing ordinary clothes, we try to sell dolls with Islamic clothes.”³³ Thus, the Muslim doll becomes a symbol of the artistic doll, an aspect of Islamic art, but also a promising business venture with vast market potential, with the addition of a political identity embedded with the primary values of Islam. Presently Arrosa is exporting its doll-clothes products to America specially designed for Razzane.³⁴ Also, in a relatively short span of time, Fulla has penetrated the Indonesian market.

The Muslim doll represents the ways religion, politics, art and economics blend in public space and modern markets. The production of both secular and religious material culture in public space is generally aimed to appeal to the interests of their prospective customers. The crucial distinction between secular consumer products and religious ones is the embedded aura of religious value within the latter. Products of religious culture are seen by consumers to have religious and spiritual attributes, while, ironically, also having an economic value that characterizes materiality. The producer of any product, including Muslim dolls, must think about capital, costs, and the

efficiency and profitability of production.³⁵ Conveniently, Muslim dolls are a product that is relatively easy and inexpensive to market, because their consumers have become a voluntary marketing network through their *pengajian* and *arisan*, and through political activities.³⁶ Moreover, the market for religious materials and products is actually broad and relatively stable.

The producers of the Muslim dolls clearly understand the needs their consumers—Muslim families with children—who wish to be more reflective of religious tenets and guidance. This contrasts with the products created by secular producers, which are assumed by religious consumers to promote modern lifestyles and aesthetics that reflects the interest of the producers only.³⁷ Producers and consumers of religious products speak of a similar “call” for piety that transcends business needs. Does it mean that the producer of religious products tends to prioritize the religious piety rather than business? The producers of religious products often believe that spirituality is more important than economics; still, in Islam, being profit-oriented is not a sin.

Although the Muslim doll is a commodity with an image that circulates through social and media networks, the fact that it has a physical, three-dimensional form should not be overlooked. These dolls are not just ideas, but physical objects that have close contact with consumers’ bodies and minds through play. Thus we see the intersection of religious, political, cultural, and economic forces coming together in the physical act of childrens’ play and pleasure.

Additionally, Muslim consumers can identify with the Muslim doll. This identification makes parents more secure with the Muslim doll than other dolls, because this doll looks like people in their own community and would likely have similar everyday values and practices (*habitus*). Consumers also enjoy repeatedly playing with Muslim dolls including purchasing new dolls, clothes and accessories. In this concern for the doll, children and parents (and nannies) that play with and talk about the characters of their Muslim dolls develop strong psychological ties to their dolls. This engagement in the imaginative world of the Muslim dolls occurs whenever they are played with. Moreover, when imagining their dolls in a certain setting, narrative, or staged, diorama-like scene, children and

parents might experience a pleasurable sense of disconnection from the real world; yet, Muslim values remain a central component of this play. Pleasure is also a component of consumption itself, and the commodification of religion, particularly in Islam, is not taboo. Throughout history religious commodities (e.g. religious relics) have been prominently featured.³⁸ In fact, public space in Islam is always seen (ideally or imaginatively) as totally religious space, as evidenced by the notion of public society as *umma*.³⁹

Therefore, even as modernity continues to reshape our lives and the world, the public spaces that emerge do not undermine the existence of religious culture and religious public space. This conception of religion and public space runs counter to suggestions by scholars who claim that modernity will fully secularize this space. Indeed, religious commodities have flourished in the market, as religion continues to adapt to evolving expressive modes to communicate its ideas and realities. The Muslim doll represents one such manifestation of this adaptation.

Muslim Dolls and Indonesian-ness: A Remark

Due to the combination of Islam’s extensive history in Indonesia and the quantity of Muslims living within its borders today, Islam is clearly influential in the formation of Indonesian identity.⁴⁰ As I have argued, the Muslim doll stands at the intersection of the local and global, the national and transnational: it is a hybrid cultural product of modern Indonesia and global Islam. It is also worth noting that the appearances of these Muslim dolls, especially Arrosa, resemble the urban elite class of Muslims. Atiek admits that she follows fashion trends, since not all Muslims wear the *jilbab* or the *songkok*. She notes that she wanted the dolls to be more fashionable, including having the dolls wear skirts and pants.⁴¹ The clothing of these Muslim dolls therefore resembles what Carla Jones observes as *busana Muslim*, which represents the historical discourse and interpretation of state understandings of Indonesian-ness, modernity, and Islamic tradition in the practices of piety and modernity.⁴²

On the other hand, Islamic fashion does not garner significant resistance from traditional Islam such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) or modernist groups such as *Muhammadiyah*. This does not mean there is no resistance to the dolls at all, as other Islamic

transnationalist movements oppose and reject this modern hybridization, which they consider to be a Western representation dressed in modern Islamic fashions. Transnational Islam, particularly the neo-salafism (such as Majelis Mujahaddin of Indonesia-MMI and Front Pembela Islam-FPI, and Hisbut Tahir Indonesia-HTI),⁴³ intensely reject and refuse all items that exhibit Western influences, which they see as heresy, including these fashionable and modern *busana Muslim* clothes for modern Muslims and Islamic dolls.⁴⁴

Most of the Salafist Islamic groups assert Islam as the ideology of the state to suit their political interest by prescribing Arabic style clothing as the only dress code for genuine Islamic identity. Regardless of the identity politics that the dolls stir, Muslim dolls are obvious examples of material culture that has been influenced by the processes of globalization and localization.⁴⁵ To conclude, I would like to return to what Dr. Shahid Athar said regarding the Muslim community concerning this phenomenon of Muslim dolls. His statement has gained popularity among an Indonesian Muslim mailing list that poses an imagined conversation between Barbie and a Muslim Doll:

Barbie Doll: "Welcome to United State of America, land of freedom and bravery. Welcome and have a great fun!"

Muslim Doll: "What do you mean by freedom, bravery, and fun?"

Barbie Doll: "For us, freedom is the ability of all people to choose clothing and god. We are free to choose our lifestyle, friends, both male and females. The definition of bravery is the bravery to try drugs, alcohol, and sex! Fun is dating, dancing, and drinking until drunk, anything that makes you happy!"

Muslim Doll: "For us, freedom is freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom to worship God. For us, bravery is person who is brave enough to fight temptation, 'syahwat' desire, and hate. Are you brave? For us, fun is enjoying life with friends, family, and nature, not with Bobby or George (Barbie males).

Barbie Doll: "All of those are good lifestyle values, but you will soon forget it as fast as you forget your life, you will dissolved with your life, you will become as one of amongst us and you will have a boy friend like Bobby!"

Muslim Doll: "We will not worship what you are worshiping and you also will not worship of what we are worshiping. For you there is your way, for us this is our way".⁴⁶

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End Notes

- 1 The Salafist of Indonesia generally used their transnational cleric's fatwa such as: Asy-Syaikh Muhammad bin Shalih Al-Utsaimin rahimahullahu and Asy-Syaikh Shalih Al-Fauzan hafizhahullah. They said that perfect human-like doll is absolutely forbidden. See this debate in www.abfaza.wordpress.com/2007/08/27/sayang-anak-bolehkah-boneka/ (retrieved December 11, 2007) and Qardhawi, Yusuf. Halal dan Haram dalam Islam. No 2.3.6 "Rukhsah Dalam Permainan Anak-Anak", at <http://media.isnet.org/islam/Qardhawi/Halal/2034.html> (retrieved December 11, 2007).
- 2 Reformation era is the era after the authoritarian New Order Regime, which began after 1998. From then on, the power of Islamic movements emerged stronger than before in public, particularly in challenging the nationalist political movements. For more on this topic see Riddel (2002).
- 3 Plate (2002): 10.
- 4 Morgan (2000): 51.
- 5 Plate (2002); see also Rampley (2005), Walker (1997), and Zolberg (1990).
- 6 This "field of vision" is Plate's methodological approach for critiquing visual culture, and is elaborated by Rose (2007). That which is included in the field of visions is: 1) The image itself - what it looks like, its execution, physical materials, etc; 2) The relationship between the medium and the message, or form and content, of the image; 3) The creator of the image, including his or her ethnic, gender, sexual, racial, religious identity; 4) The nature of the language that surrounds the image in terms of explaining it, arguing against it, or for it; 5) The responses, on all sides, to the image - physical responses, verbal responses in news papers and journals, the response of the museum goers, legalistic responses; 6) The historical context of the image - in this case, among thousands of other images; 7) The identity of those who view the image; 8) The particular cultural crossings that are constantly taking place-in the image itself or in the creator itself; and 9) The role of social, political, and cultural institutions in the creation and reception of "art" (Plate 2002, p. 5).
- 7 Religious transnationalism is a term for a new wave of religious movements that organize their networks across national borders, sometimes in conflict to movements within the nation-state. In the case of Indonesian Muslims, the term is usually attributed to the new movements other than Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two major Islamic institutions within Indonesia.
- 8 The images of modern, progress, and 'civilization' in Indonesia, not just Muslim community, generally refer to achievements of the 'Western civilization' (Mrázek 2006), but at the same time it seen as the actual source of the threat to 'local civilization' (i.e. norm, culture, and values) (Laffan 2003). In relation to the Muslim and modernity issue, Bellah (2000) clearly state that the problem of Muslim with modernity is actually a matter of the question whether modernity is able to fulfilled the various needs of modern Muslim religiosity effectively; not about the modernization of politics, family, and individuality. Therefore, the creation of these Muslim dolls offers one of the answers on how Muslim religiosity copes with modernity.
- 9 Barker (2004): 81.
- 10 Siregar (2007).
- 11 Based on research from the Freedom Institute and PPIM-UIN Jakarta, the notion of imperialism prominent in contemporary Indonesian Muslim discourse, particularly the transnational Islam. It is actually a mixed feeling of belief and understanding that the Western world, generally represented by America, is still obsessed with the old agenda of colonialism and imperialism of the 19th century that is threatening to Islam. Indeed, imperialism is mixed up with a variety of terms: globalization, (neo) capitalism, (neo) liberalism, (neo) imperialism of western world that makes a powerful cultural, political, and an economical homogenization impact on the Muslim world. See Mujani (2005) and the Freedom Institute - PPIM UIN Jakarta. Nalar-Jakarta.
- 12 Huntington (1996).
- 13 For further discussion on the formation of nationalism of Indonesia and the role of Islam see Laffan (2003).
- 14 Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi a professor at McGill University (1921-1986) initially led the discursive movement for the Islamization of knowledge, Arabism, and chaliphatism in the 20th century. See the discussion at Azra (1996): 28-48.
- 15 Budiyanto (2006).
- 16 Ikhwanul Muslimin or Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hassan Al Bana and his colleagues such as Sayyid Qutub and others in Egypt 1939. This movement initially started from education-based at mosques and madrasah, which is why it is popularly known as tarbiyah movements. For further issues on the influences of Ikhwanil Muslimin' ideas (not to say ideology) in Indonesian Muslim movements please see Rahmat (2008).
- 17 Roy (2004): 247.
- 18 Translation by author. See "Tren Boneka Muslim". Nova. March 13, 2006. At <http://www.tabloidnova.com/articles.asp?id=11090&no=2> (retrieved December 11, 2007).
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Translation by author. See Pengusaha, April 2006, "Peluang: Boneka Berbusana Muslim, Boleh Juga" at Peluang: Boneka Berbusana Muslim, Boleh Juga, <http://www.majalahpengusaha.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=661> (retrieved December 11, 2007).
- 22 Ritzer, cited in Siregar (2007): 123-124.
- 23 Siregar (2007): 123-26. What is 'nothing' for Ritzer is a globalized product that is generic, lacking local-ties—it is timeless, dehumanized, and disenchanted. Here, Siregar gave the notion of the 'mall' as an example, however debatable the example, in which as McDonalds, Coca-cola, or Barbie is also treated as global-product (which is 'nothing').
- 24 Even though, the Muslim world is not homogenous in its politics and ideology, today they share a monolithic discourse that is the 'shariatization' issue.
- 25 Translation by author. See "Fulla, Boneka Modis Berbudi Sopan," Kompas Cyber Media, 13 April 2007 at <http://www2.kompas.com/ver1/Perempuan/0704/13/053459.htm> (retrieved December 11, 2007).
- 26 See "Razanne, Boneka Muslim," Republika. Januari 20, 2005 at http://www.republika.co.id/koran_detail.asp?id=184557&kat_id=329&kat_id1=&kat_id2= (retrieved December 11, 2007).
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 For the details of the impact and the Indonesian's umma hope on Pan-Islamic see Laffan (2003).
- 29 See this Muslim assumption at Budiyanto (2006).
- 30 Girard (1977).
- 31 Prabasmoro (2003): 94-95.

- 32 Therefore, as Prabasmoro argues through a reading of Hall (1998), local capital (the producer) should develop its certain “globality values” in its local product to be easily recognized by its consumer, while not entirely losing its centrality. In fact, one may see that actually it is really a matter of global Islam vis-à-vis global capitalism, which is usually perceived as Western. Indeed, historically and culturally, Islam has been made out by Indonesian Muslims as being “local”, making Muslim Barbie dolls more powerful and marketable than their ‘traditional and indigenous’ counterparts. The discussion on mimicry and hybridization in postcolonial era of Indonesian can be seen at Prabasmoro (2003): 94-95 and Ahmed (1999).
- 33 *Majalah Pengusaha* (2006).
- 34 Boneka Muslim. ‘Jelang Sore’ (News program). (2008, August 1). Jakarta, Trans TV.
- 35 Siregar (2007): 96.
- 36 Pengajian is a regular meeting of mostly women reciting the Quran, whilst Arisan is mostly womens groups conducting regular social gatherings whose members contribute to and take turns at winning an aggregate sum of money.
- 37 Siregar (2007): 94
- 38 Geary (1986): 169-194.
- 39 Islamic society; in which individuals and groups within it should be subject to Islamic norms and morality.
- 40 Azumardi (1994).
- 41 Nova 13 March 2006.
- 42 Jones (2007).
- 43 Once in 2008, at the Islamic Book Fair event, I saw how differently they displayed the Arrosa dolls with the ‘Aa Gyms’ dolls (the doll made in Bandung inspired by Aa Gym community); the Arrosa was placed on the floor and scattered around with used books, meanwhile the ‘Aa Gym’ dolls were beautifully arranged (See Image 4). About the Aa Gym movement see Solahudin (2008).
- 44 For modern clothing most of the Salafist ulama reject any un-Islamic representation, although debatable enough, dolls are strictly avoided in most of salafist theology. See the debates at <http://muttaqun.com/clotheswithpictures.html> (retrieved December 11, 2007).
- 45 Robertson (1992) and Robertson (1995).
- 46 Translation by author. See the debate about Barbie vs. Muslim doll by Dr. Shahid Athar See at <http://qitori.wordpress.com/2007/03/08/boneka-Barbie-boneka-muslim/> (retrieved December 11, 2007).

“Great is Our Relationship with the Sea¹”

Charting the Maritime Realm of the Sama of Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia

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Dispersed widely across the eastern seas of island Southeast Asia, Sama² peoples have long caught the attention of visitors to the region. Whether in the Southern Philippines, northern and eastern Borneo, or the numerous islands of eastern Indonesia, the unique sea-centered lifestyle of the Sama has inspired many observers to characterize them as “sea gypsies” or “sea nomads,” a people supposedly so adverse to dry land that they “get sick if they stay on land even for a couple of hours.”³ Living almost entirely in their boats and sailing great distances in order to fish, forage, and transport valuable sea products, Sama peoples were, and often still are, depicted as a sort of “curious wandering tribe” lacking strong connections to any one place.⁴ In the last few decades, however, historical and ethnographic research on Sama peoples has compelled scholars to rethink commonplace conceptions of Sama as “sea nomads,” and has led to a more nuanced understanding of Sama cultures and livelihood practices which takes into account the profound and long-standing attachments of Sama peoples to particular places within island Southeast Asia.⁵

A close reading of the ethnographic and historical sources has revealed that, rather than a peculiar “wandering tribe,” the Sama-Bajau ethnolinguistic

group is composed of a number of smaller subgroups, each with a slightly different dialect and cultural attributes, and each possessing an intimate knowledge of a particular littoral environment in which they live as well as a more general but still thorough knowledge of the broader maritime spaces in which they travel. Through lifetimes of carefully calculated long-distance journeys as well as daily interaction with and movement throughout a particular seascape, Sama peoples have developed a deep familiarity with vast expanses of the eastern seas of island Southeast Asia and have established far-ranging networks that criss-cross and connect those maritime spaces. Thus, while Sama peoples, both in the past and present, traveled widely in search of valuable sea produce and indeed many spent much of their lives afloat, the portrayal of Sama as nomads has tended to obfuscate the deep relationship Sama peoples have with the maritime spaces in which they live.

Given the centrality of the sea in Sama lives, it follows that any effort to comprehend their histories and cultures necessitates an understanding of the environments in which they operate and their relationship to those places.⁶ With that in mind, in this article I hope to contribute to the growing body of literature on Sama peoples in eastern Indonesia by

exploring practices and relationships which have made the eastern seas of island Southeast Asia into a network of familiar places for Sama peoples living in Southeast Sulawesi; a space I refer to as the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm.

In a broad sense, the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm consists of an informal network of historical and contemporary links between families, friends, fishing grounds, trading centers and trade routes, through which knowledge and goods are exchanged and an awareness of commonalities shared with other Sama communities in Southeast Asia is fostered. Within their larger maritime realm, Southeast Sulawesi Sama operate within smaller home-spaces, spaces which serve as a home and regular collecting range for a general group and which hold particular cultural and historical significance for that group. Spanning a vast portion of the eastern seas, this maritime realm is not a territorialized space or a precise area of exploitation which Sama claim as their own.⁷ Rather, the maritime realm of Southeast Sulawesi Sama is instead a fluidly defined space that Sama people have come to know with a high-degree of familiarity by way of generations of movement in and interaction with the marine environment. In this way, the maritime realm I refer to here is akin to what geographer Edward Soja has called a “thirdspace”: a space which “can be mapped but never captured in conventional cartographies, [and obtains] meaning only when practiced and fully lived.”⁸

In order to map out this space and evidence something of its meaning for the Sama, the first section of this article will use the example of Sama living in the Tukang Besi archipelago (Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia), highlighting settlement narratives and historically and culturally significant features of the land and seascape as a means to demonstrate the historical and cultural relationship of Tukang Besi Sama peoples to their particular home-space. The next section will broaden its focus to some of the processes by which the larger maritime realm of the Southeast Sulawesi Sama has been created and connected. First, by describing a few examples of contemporary and historical fishing grounds, trade routes and markets frequented by Sama fishers and traders in relation to their role in the trade of sea resources such as sea turtles and trepang, I will not only demonstrate Sama familiarity with the seascape, but I will also try to

convey a sense of the mobile practices which have brought Sama peoples to various places in the eastern seas and the linkages that have resulted from such travels.

Interrelated with this system of trade routes, fishing grounds, and markets, are the informal social networks through which many Southeast Sulawesi Sama operate. Through kinship, friendships, and other social connections with other Sama and *bagai* villages and people in distant areas of their maritime realm, Southeast Sulawesi Sama fishers and traders have created an informal network which they can rely on for goods, shelter, and knowledge of the surrounding seascape. Similarly, it is through these social networks and mobile practices that some Sama living in Southeast Sulawesi have become more aware of “cultural commonalities” they share with other Sama groups in Southeast Asia.⁹

Home-spaces within the Maritime Realm: Sama Tukang Besi

The incredibly rich marine environment of the Tukang Besi archipelago explains in part the existence of Sama settlements in that area. In addition to the four major low-lying islands of Wangi-Wangi (also known as Wanci), Kaledupa, Tomea, and Binongko, the archipelago is home to over 600 square kilometers of some of the most biologically diverse reef complexes in Indonesia and numerous other habitats ideally suited for an astonishing variety of marine life.¹⁰ Mangrove forests line several of the islands, offering shelter as well as several coastal fresh water springs, and massive reef systems such as the Kapota, Kaledupa, Koromaha, and Tomea atolls are within a day’s sail given the right winds. Likewise, the relatively predictable weather patterns, shallow seas, abundant access points to deeper waters, and large varieties of fish, *trepang*, sea turtle, and other marine species make the archipelago an ideal home-space for Sama peoples. Now home to five Sama villages (Mola, Sampela, Mantigola, La Hoa, and La Manggau), the generous living conditions and abundant resources of the Tukang Besi seascape would have been a principal reason for initial Sama exploration and settlement in the area.

While there is generally limited information available on the history of Sama settlement in the Tukang Besi archipelago, an exception to this is the excellent work

of Pak Kasmin and Natasha Stacey, who have suggested that Sama from the Tiworo Strait area (the strait between the islands of Buton and Muna and the southeast peninsula of Sulawesi) first began settling in Tukang Besi around the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ According to the narrative recorded by Kasmin, once the Sama discovered the area to be rich in ocean resources, they requested permission to move from the Sultan of Buton, who was overlord of the Tukang Besi area, and a pass was given. Led by two Sama *punggawa* (a type of Sama leader), named Puah Kandora and Puah Doba, Sama from the Straits of Tiworo region sailed into the archipelago, eventually settling in the area of southwest Kaledupa island sometime in the 1850s, where they lived on their *perahu lambo*, *lepa*, and *soppeq* until building permanent pile-houses.¹² Sama fishers alternated seasonally between their base on the southwest coast of Kaledupa and a shallow lagoon on the southeast coast during the east and west monsoon seasons.¹³

In addition to the narrative recorded by Kasmin and Stacey, oral histories I gathered in 2007 from Sama elders in the villages of Mantigola, Sampela, and La Hoa provide additional perspectives on the migration of Sama peoples into the Tukang Besi Archipelago. One narrative told to me by a Sama man tells that two *punggawa* named Mbo Kandora and Mbo Doba led the first groups of Sama to settle in the area of Mantigola, a movement which he dated to the time of his great-grandparents.¹⁴ According to this narrative and others, Sama families from near Bau-Bau (on the southern coast of Buton Island) sailed to the Kaledupa and Tomea Atolls with the west monsoon, where they lived on *soppeq* hunting fish, *trepang*, and variety of other sea produce for weeks and months at a time. These elders said that early Sama built semi-permanent pile-houses and anchored in the shallows where Mantigola now stands, and did so of their own accord. Although Sama from the Straits of Tiworo region acknowledged the authority of Buton, their initial voyages to Tukang Besi conducted in search of ocean resources and fishing grounds followed regional weather patterns and resource cycles more so than the commands of the Sultan. While searching for sea products desired in regional markets Sama fishers also explored the island chain and found places ideal for establishing new roots.

An additional settlement narrative that offers another historical perspective was told to me by Sama elders in

Tukang Besi. It refers to a figure named La Ode Denda as the one who initiated Sama migration from Tiworo into the archipelago sometime in the early nineteenth century. La Ode Denda—remembered as a laki (lord of the aristocratic estate) who lived in Wolio, the former capital of the Buton Sultanate on the island of Bau-Bau—purchased the island of Kaledupa from the Sultan of Buton.¹⁵ As the narrative goes, once La Ode Denda was in possession of Kaledupa Island he called on both Sama and *bagai* peoples living around the sultanate's center in Wolio to join him on Kaledupa Island.

Overall, local settlement narratives suggest that Sama peoples settled in Tukang Besi sometime in the early to mid-nineteenth century at the latest, although it is still not clear whether their original migration into the area was on their own accord as an extension of early fishing and collecting voyages or on the invitation of local *bagai* elites. Nevertheless, a few speculative comments may be ventured in regard to the narrative recorded by Kasmin and the La Ode Denda version described above. Movement into Tukang Besi could have been undertaken as a part of a larger migration led by a member of the *kaomu* (Buton aristocracy), as the Sultanate of Buton is known to have granted permission to members of the *kaomu* to establish new settlements in Tukang Besi in order to extend control into the peripheries. Another possibility, which seems to fit well with the narrative recorded by Kasmin, is that Sama groups under the leadership of two *punggawa* received a pass from the Sultan to either move into the area or operate as merchants in the realm of Kaledupa, which was then a *barata*, or vassal state, of Buton.¹⁶ Yet both of these possible explanations are complicated by the fact that Kaledupa was made into a vassal state of Buton sometime around the fifteenth century, and a substantial portion of those who settled in the area were slaves of the Buton aristocracy.¹⁷

Although many of the specific details are unclear, the Sama settlement narratives described above suggest that by the mid-nineteenth century at the latest, the waters of the archipelago had become a home-space for Sama peoples from the Tiworo region. Importantly, those who recounted these narratives consistently suggested that Sama peoples had seasonally explored and fished the waters of Tukang Besi prior to any major migration into the area. The coral reef complexes, especially the Kaledupa and Tomea atolls, the

mangroves and fresh water springs, and the copious marine resources of the archipelago were all cited by Sama elders as principal reasons the first Sama groups came into the area. With this perspective in mind, I suggest that regardless of the political circumstances which brought or called these particular Southeast Sulawesi Sama to settle in Tukang Besi, it seems that Sama peoples traveled into the archipelago and have lived there for two centuries or longer, in large part because of the rich environment they encountered there.

The Making of a Home-Space

The Tukang Besi Archipelago has become the regular collecting grounds and home-space of the Sama living there. As I demonstrate in the next section, Sama from Tukang Besi frequently make long-distance journeys, some as far as northwest Australia, but most spend their time in the waters of the Tukang Besi Archipelago. In general terms, Sama peoples I met in Tukang Besi classified this pattern of movement and activity within the archipelago as either *pallilibu* or *pongkeq*. Though by no means concretely defined practices, in my experience *pallilibu* was used to describe the almost daily practice of searching for fish and other sea resources in nearby environments, while *pongkeq* was used by Tukang Besi Sama almost solely in reference to longer journeys to the Kaledupa and Tomea atolls. These are seasonal trips usually made in small boats, with family, in groups, or alone, and which last up to one or two months at sea.¹⁸ It is these practices that have made the Tukang Besi seascape an intimately familiar home-space for Sama peoples living there.

Almost daily *pallilibu* trips into the variety of marine habitats surrounding Tukang Besi are a dominant feature in Sama lives, bringing them into frequent contact with the surrounding environment. In the village of Sampela for instance, men, women, and children are constantly coming and going in their boats, spending long hours fishing and gleaning the littoral. Many leave close to sunrise, heading off to either the seagrass beds which surround the village, the reef wall and deep water channel near the small island of Hoga, or to one of the many reefs to the southeast. Other fishers will set their nets in the evenings, pulling them in the next morning before sunrise, while other fishers will wait for the ideal tide in order to net fish in

the nearby sea-grass beds and deep water channels through which strong currents flow, bringing with them an abundance of marine life. Some Sama will free dive nearby reef areas, both in daylight and at night with a lantern, searching for trepang, trochus shells, octopus, and a number of other marine species.

Just as early *pongkeq* ventures by Sama peoples into Tukang Besi were made to harvest the rich resources of the nearby Kaledupa and Tomea Atolls, Sama living in Tukang Besi today still make seasonal voyages to the atolls. During the calm season in Tukang Besi referred to by Sama as *sangai teddo*, Sama fishers will *pongkeq* to Kaledupa and Tomea Atolls, living aboard boats for up to two months collecting and drying a variety of sea goods. Since the advent of motorized fishing vessels in Tukang Besi Sama villages, however, the practice of traveling to the offshore atolls has become much more frequent, and less time-consuming. Sama fishers can now easily travel alone to the atolls for shorter periods of time.

The above activities are only a few examples of the numerous practices under the headings of *pallilibu* and *pongkeq* which have allowed the Sama to become intimately familiar with all the intricacies of their aquatic environment and have made the waters of Tukang Besi into a regular collecting ground and home-space. Over time, Sama villages, fishing grounds, fresh water springs, burial grounds, and *sillangang pemali* (spiritually powerful or taboo places) have become spiritual, cultural, social, and economic centers for the Sama living there. By way of these interactions with the land and seascape, Sama in Tukang Besi have accumulated a store of knowledge about their immediate environs which is shared with future generations and perpetuated through a certain degree of continuity in Sama practices. Furthermore, countless hours spent on the water—whether on boats, in pile-houses built in the shallows, in the mangroves, or walking the reefs at low-tide—have marked the Tukang Besi seascape with a history.¹⁹ For Tukang Besi Sama, the majority of their past experiences have taken place in the waters of the archipelago and as such their histories are also embedded in the land and seascape, with the places of La Hoa, Mantigola, Sampela, and later Mola and La Manggau becoming important sites of memory and history for local Sama populations.



Figure 1. The Sama Maritime Realm, courtesy of the ReefBase Project

A number of areas in the Tukang Besi sea and landscape are of deep spiritual and historical importance. For example, a specific, hard-to-find rock outcropping in the thick of the mangrove forest near Sampela is a place to which local *sandro*, a spiritual guide and healer, bring offerings and conduct important spiritual rituals.²⁰ There are also a number of *sillangang pemali* known to the Sama of the region which are respected by way of careful propitiation and observance of appropriate behaviors. One example is that of Toro Gagallah, a cave and reef complex near the island of Binongko, which is home to *Ma' empa' engkah na*, a giant octopus with four tentacles. Since *Ma' empa' engkah na* is quite dangerous and spiritually powerful, many consider Toro Gagallah to be *pemali* and specific rituals and behavioral proscriptions need to be observed when in the area.²¹ While today proscriptions and obligatory offerings are sometimes ignored by local fishers, oral histories suggest that *pemali* spaces such as Toro Gagallah are still quite prominent features of history and memory for local Sama peoples. As such, one can get a sense of local Sama's attachment to the marine environment of Tukang Besi, as well as the historicity of that seascape.

A similar sense can be gleaned from additional places of historical significance, particularly specific places associated with legendary Sama figures from the past. The small strait between Kaledupa Island and the islet of Lintea Tiwolu, and a particularly large rock nearby, for example, are associated with a legendary Sama *bajak* (pirate) named Mbo Lonting.²² As Sama tell it, living alone on a *soppeq* anchored in a natural hiding place in the mangroves, Mbo Lonting would ambush any *bagai* vessels passing through the strait. Possessing a certain supernatural strength he could not be hurt or killed and this made him most feared among the local population as well as passing sailors. His prowess is legendary among Tukang Besi Sama and stories of his feats still circulate widely among local communities. Mbo Lonting reportedly only met his death as an old man, when he fell from a large rock outcropping that he had used as a lookout, and where one finds scattered offerings today.²³ The significance of these places can be inferred from current Sama practices. Even today, when one passes through the strait where Mbo Lonting once anchored, the history associated with his legendary person will often be recited, and those who claim Mbo Lonting as their

ancestor will often visit the rock where he fell to his death when some sort of help is needed.²⁴

The memory and reverence of Mbo Lonting by Sama in Tukang Besi, along with the many other historically important features of the local seascape, are an example of what constitutes a single home-space within the greater Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm. At the most intimate level, the maritime realm is an assemblage of home-spaces similar to Tukang Besi. Rather than wandering without orientation toward a particular set of dwelling places, Sama in Southeast Sulawesi in fact maintain a close attachment to a particular home-space within the eastern seas—a space which a particular Sama community (or communities) is intimately familiar with and historically connected to based on their daily interaction with and movement through that environment. In the section that follows, a few key examples of the sort of larger historical and contemporary movements of Southeast Sulawesi Sama peoples will be drawn on to demonstrate the links that exist between the smaller Sama home-spaces as described above, and a larger, informal network of trade and social relations. By virtue of their movement throughout the marine environment, Sama fishers and traders have forged extensive links between their home-spaces and families and friends in other villages, distant fishing grounds, trading centers and trade routes throughout the eastern seas. In doing so, the seas have become a familiar space for the Sama of Southeast Sulawesi.

Trade Routes, Fishing Grounds, and Sea Products in the Making of the Maritime Realm

The majority of those Sama I interviewed in 2007 have traveled extensively throughout the eastern seas of archipelago Southeast Asia. Many spoke of movement as a necessary aspect of life, as something one does to find food and make a living. Much of their long-distance travel was done under sail and for the purpose of collecting marine produce and finding lucrative markets. Even so, the notion of travel for the sake of traveling is common as well. Many of the younger males spoke of a desire to journey to new places and new markets, just as their elders had done in years past. As the primary extractors of sea products desired in local, regional, and international markets, Sama have for centuries served a highly important

economic and social function.²⁵ Through their extensive movements and their specialized socio-economic niche, Sama traders and fishers have created and continue to create an informal maritime network of familiar places connected by social relationships and trade linkages. Based on interviews and, where possible on the written record, a brief look at some of the sea products collected, fishing grounds and trade routes used by the Southeast Sulawesi Sama may help to highlight something of the nature and extent of their maritime realm, while also underscoring both the antiquity and, to some degree, continuity of these practices in many Southeast Sulawesi Sama communities.

The trade in sea produce is an integral aspect of the formation and expansion of the Southeast Sulawesi maritime realm.²⁶ Of the many varieties of sea produce collected and processed by Sama fishers, sea turtle, tortoise-shell, and trepang are among the most important in the process of creating and extending the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm. The search for these goods in particular has sent Sama peoples as far west as the Karimun islands in the Java Sea, as far north as Sabah on the island of Borneo and the southern Philippines, as far east as the Bird's Head region of West Papua, and as far south as the northwest coast of Australia.²⁷ In the course of these journeys, Sama fishers and traders have incorporated these oceanic and littoral spaces into a maritime realm of familiarity and experience, connecting distant markets and communities with their respective home-spaces in the process.

Sama were crucial to the collection and trade of turtle and tortoise-shell in the eastern Indo-Malaysian archipelago because of their knowledge of the habitats, breeding patterns, and feeding habits of the sea turtles. Several recalled their travels to Bali, Surabaya, Kupang and Makassar, where they offloaded turtles caught in various places. One Sama man in his mid-80s, for example, remembered:

In the past I would *lamaq* [sail] by *perahu lambo* to Maluku to get *boko* [green turtle] and sometimes copra, and then go to Bali, Makassar, or Java to sell the goods there. [In the early 1950s] I lived in Serangan [Serangan Island, Bali] for a few years fishing turtle. There was a small group of Sama living there, around seven families. I worked for a Balinese boat and the *anakhoda* [owner and captain] would just sit and I would dive and spear

turtle. Sometimes we would go all the way to Karimun [Java Sea] hunting turtle to sell in Benoa [harbor in eastern Bali]. We could sell a lot of turtle there.²⁸

As this segment of a particular Sama narrative suggests, the demand for green turtle in Bali, where it is an important part of religious ceremonies as well as a popular fare, brought Sama fishers into close contact with areas of Bali, the Lombok Strait, and the Java Sea.²⁹ In the 1950s, while in Bali to sell green turtles and copra he had caught in northern Maluku, Mbo Salang was offered a job hunting turtle on a boat owned and piloted by a Balinese *anakhoda*. Originally, he rented a room from the *anakhoda* on the coast of Serangan Island, off Bali, but he soon built a small pile-house on the nearby reef flats where other Sama families had congregated. From what Mbo Salang remembered, of the seven or so Sama families living on the coast of Serangan in the 1950s, three had traveled to Bali from around Pulau Selayar in South Sulawesi, and the others from various Sama villages in Southeast Sulawesi, namely around Tiworo. For over three years, Mbo Salang lived in Bali, netting as well as diving to spear green turtle which were sold in Benoa harbor.

Several other Sama fishers recalled a similar experience of travel and trade as that described by Mbo Salang. These men collected turtle from a variety of areas in eastern Indonesia in order to sell in Bali, as well as Makassar and Surabaya. All of those interviewed stated that the best areas to collect large quantities and varieties of turtle are the numerous islands around Obi in north Maluku, Aru and Kei Islands, as well as areas of the Bird's Head and northwest Australia, areas which recent scientific research has demonstrated to be the breeding grounds for the largest numbers of hawksbill turtles and other species.³⁰ Sama fishers said that they usually sailed to these areas with the east monsoon, ideally timing their journey with the lunar cycle and the turtle's breeding pattern in order to ensure a large and profitable catch. This fact corresponds with M. Marhalim's assertion that over the last century Chinese and Balinese traders frequently offered loans to Sama fishers so that they could focus on hunting turtles, a large portion of which came from West Papua and Maluku.³¹ Sama oral accounts of the their role in the turtle trade suggest that Sama fishers from Tukang Besi traveled widely, from the Karimun islands in the Java Sea to the Bird's Head region, in

order to capture sea turtles for regional and international markets. These accounts also suggest that much of their catch was sold to intermediaries and other buyers in ports such as Kendari, Bau-Bau, Makassar, Benoa, and Surabaya, with whom they had established a trading relationship.

The search for tortoise-shell and *trepang* was also an important part of the creation and expansion of the Sama maritime realm to the far south of their home-spaces in Southeast Sulawesi. Several Sama from Tukang Besi recalled voyages to what is now Australian territory in order to collect sea products for trade in market centers such as Bau-Bau, Kendari, Makassar, and Surabaya. One such trip, recounted by an elderly Sama man in Sampela, was made sometime in the early 1940s on a *perahu lambo* from Mantigola in order to fish the waters around Cape Londonderry and the Admiralty Gulf (northwest Australia).³² Departing in early November, Mbo Dadi and four other Sama men sailed first to Kupang in order to stock up on supplies and repair a damaged sail. From there they sailed to the reefs and shoals of Cape Londonderry, collecting *trepang*, trochus shell, various fish, and hawksbill turtle, staying there over a month before returning.³³ As Mbo Dadi remembers it, the cargo from this trip was sailed to Makassar and sold to a Chinese trader with whom the *anakhoda* had established a relationship on previous ventures.

A similar narrative was related by a Sama man, Mbo Diki, who was born in Mantigola in the early 1930s. As he remembered it:

We would *lamaq* [sail] to Australia [northwest coast and offshore islands] to catch fish, shark, turtle, *trepang*, *trochus*, a lot of sea products. In the past I was *anakhoda* of a *perahu lambo*. I went to Australia often then; it is very good fishing there. I sold the dried fish, *trepang* and turtle to Bau-Bau or Makassar, and sometimes to Surabaya. It was easy to get *trepang* there. If the weather was right, we could make two trips during the season, but usually only one. Around the time of *PKI* [Indonesian Communist Party; referring to the 1965 coup] I made good money from *trepang*, tortoise-shell, and shark fin, selling it in Makassar. But, in the eighties I fished Seram [roughly 200km west of Papua]; it is good fishing there too. I have not gone to Australia since then.³⁴

As Mbo Diki's narrative describes, Australia has long served as a fishing ground for *trepang*, shark, turtles,

trochus, and a variety of fish. The sea produce collected on these trips was usually sailed to Bau-Bau, Makassar, or other ports and sold to one of the traders with whom Mbo Diki had established a relationship, unless the trip was made on credit in which case the goods were given to the financier at a prearranged price.³⁵

Where Sama oral accounts of the last half-century or more offer a sense of how trade and the search for sea produce served to create and expand the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm, more recently the written historical record helps to establish the long history of this trade and Sama interaction with, and movements throughout, the eastern seas. Soon after the arrival of Europeans in the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago, United Dutch East India Company (VOC) officials were already well aware of the important function Sama peoples in the eastern seas served in the acquisition of sea produce for regional trade.³⁶ The prominence of Sama fishers as the primary collectors of these goods was still apparent in the eighteenth century as VOC commentators noted that Sama groups from Sulawesi were traveling along the coasts of the islands of Sumba, Sumbawa, Flores and Timor in search of trepang, arguably one of the most desired sea products of that century.³⁷

In the nineteenth century, European travelers frequently mentioned, even if only in passing, the importance of Sama from Sulawesi for the procurement of key trade items, especially trepang and tortoise-shell, and the extent of their maritime voyaging. In 1815, for example, one astute observer noted that Sama fishers from Sulawesi were, “long accustomed to fishing for trepang” at Ashmore Reef.³⁸ In 1837, George Windsor Earl likewise noted that Sama peoples, “congregate in large numbers on the coast of Celebes [Sulawesi],” “[and] with the westerly monsoon they spread themselves over the eastern seas in search of trepang and tortoise-shell, extending their voyages to the north-west coast of Australia.”³⁹ Less than a decade later C. van der Hart discussed the function that Sama from the Banggai islands of central Sulawesi served in collecting tortoise-shell and trepang, goods which he noted would be “sold in the China market.”⁴⁰ Likewise, Dutch explorer and entrepreneur, Jan Nicholas Vosmaer’s plans to establish a trading center at Kendari Bay in the 1830s relied heavily on Sama fishers as the suppliers of profitable trepang and other

sea products, a fact which suggests something of the economic benefit to be gained from forming a trade relationship with Sama peoples.

While the importance of Sama peoples to regional trade may be obvious, these brief passages also intimate the long history of their movements through the eastern seas and their familiarity with those oceanic and littoral spaces. Overall, Sama activities of trade and travel, as well as those trade routes, fishing grounds, and market centers associated with important sea products like trepang, green turtles, and tortoise-shell, have served to widen the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm well beyond their respective home-spaces. Through their voyaging and highly specialized adaptation to the marine environment, Sama from Southeast Sulawesi and elsewhere have established vast social networks which connected the innumerable resource-rich islands and reef complexes of the eastern seas to one another and to large trade entrepôts such as Makassar and Surabaya.

Sama Social Networks

By social networks, I am referring to informal but nevertheless important and lasting connections between Sama communities across the eastern seas, which are often based on kinship as well as friendships, trading relationships, and cultural similarities. As Jennifer Gaynor has noted, “such networks follow shorelines and criss-cross archipelagic spaces,” but Sama people “do not all necessarily have to travel these interconnected spaces” in order to know that these connections exist, “as long as they hear about the movement of friends, family and prior generations to and from places near and far.”⁴¹ When sailing to areas such as eastern Java, Sabah, Flores, Maluku, or elsewhere in Sulawesi, Sama traders and fishers have often relied, and continue to rely on pre-existing relationships for a variety of needs, or they establish new relationships among the local population on which they could later rely. Likewise, in times of conflict and disturbance Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi have both relied on existing links and created new connections in their flight to safer places. In the process of these journeys, knowledge, stories, experiences, and sometimes blood-lines, are exchanged across vast distances much in the same way Sama collect and transport sea produce across the Indo-Malaysian archipelago. In what follows, I will

demonstrate that some of the same Sama voyages which have provided vital goods to regional markets for centuries have also served to establish and sustain important social and economic linkages between Sama communities across the eastern seas in the recent past.

While the relationship between Southeast Sulawesi and areas such as Maluku, Flores and northeast Borneo have a long history, here I will focus on more contemporary linkages which Sama oral histories can offer some insight. The long history of frequent interaction between Sama communities and the world of Maluku, for example, continues today in variety of forms.⁴² In the last century, Sama from Southeast Sulawesi made regular voyages to Maluku, particularly the islands around Obi and Seram, in order to fish turtle as well as collect copra for trade in various regional market centers. Oral histories demonstrate that Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi have continued to travel to Maluku for much the same reasons and they often rely on existing social connections as well as creating new ones in the course of their travels. As there are a number of Sama communities in Maluku, with relatively large numbers in North Maluku, Sama fishers and sailors from Southeast Sulawesi frequently call upon these villages for various types of support.

For example, Puto Daleng, a Sama fisherman from the Kendari region, has family members in the village of Bajo Guruapin in north Maluku, whom he often stays with when traveling to fish turtle.⁴³ According to Daleng, his father Bunuasing married a local woman in Maluku sometime before World War II, whom he had met as a result of his frequent voyages there for fishing and trade. Despite the fact that Bunuasing continued to live in the Kendari region, where he had a wife and two children, he maintained his relationship with the woman in Maluku through his regular stays there and the infrequent financial assistance he sent.⁴⁴ As a result of this kinship link to Maluku, Puto Daleng is able to rely on friends and family there for food, a place to sleep, and companionship. Equally important however, it is through these connections that Puto Daleng and other Sama were, and still are, able to exchange local knowledge about fishing grounds, weather conditions, trade, and employment opportunities.

As Gaynor has suggested, these networks are by no means limited to those who participate in them directly, but the benefits and knowledge are also

passed on to other Sama elsewhere through stories and conversation.⁴⁵ While the story of Puto Daleng is only one example, his experience is by no means a singular phenomenon. In the course of my research I noted several similar situations where Sama fishermen from Southeast Sulawesi had marriage ties to other areas, including East Java, Flores, Maluku, and elsewhere in Sulawesi. Furthermore, many of these Sama males had married more than one woman at a time and in more than one place. Centuries of interaction between Sama communities in Southeast Sulawesi and Maluku have resulted in the formation of numerous links between the two regions, many of which continue to be important today.

Similar connections exist between Southeast Sulawesi Sama and communities throughout the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago, linking fishers and traders from Southeast Sulawesi to areas of eastern Borneo. Like the links between Southeast Sulawesi Sama and the world of Maluku, there is also a long history of interaction between Sama in Sulawesi and eastern Borneo. From contemporary practices and oral histories we know that the Sama of Southeast Sulawesi continue to maintain these links. Today, as in the past, Sama fishers from eastern Indonesia travel to Sabah in order to fish and collect a variety of sea products. However, more recently Sama living in Indonesia have become an important, but now often illegal, part of the workforce for large fishing and ocean resource extraction companies based in Sabah. Sama from Southeast Sulawesi, for example, have found employment with Japanese owned commercial fishing fleets in Tawau, (Sabah). Sama males from Tukang Besi in particular, frequently travel to Tawau, sometimes with their families but more often with other males, where they work on purse-seine vessels fishing tuna.⁴⁶ Two Sama males in their mid-thirties from Sampela, named La Keke and La Demba, have been working on commercial tuna boats in Sabah since the age of fourteen and eighteen respectively.⁴⁷ When I met them in Bau-Bau on the island of Buton, both men and their families were headed to Tawau to work on purse-seiners. La Keke said that he would stay in Sabah as long as he and his family are happy, though he typically stays for at least one year. As a youth La Keke lived and worked in Tawau for nearly ten years before returning to Sampela and marrying there. Two of La Keke's children were born in Nunukan, a village on the

Indonesian side of the Indo-Malaysian border, as was one of La Demba's.

While this practice may not be exactly analogous to past economic and political relationships between Sama in Sulawesi and those in eastern Borneo, the migrations of Sama fishermen to the coasts of Sabah in search of new opportunities evidence a continuing Sama network. Furthermore, these more recent practices demonstrate the usefulness and importance of links between Sama communities through which important information is shared. Although the regional economy has changed in dramatic ways since the decline of maritime politics and trade entrepôts of earlier centuries, the exceptional maritime skills of Sama peoples have enabled them to adapt to new practices and markets, and thus, maintain an important position in the region's fisheries.

Another important aspect of Sama social networks is the creation of relationships which potentially can offer some sort of refuge when one is in trouble. In regard to Sama communities in Southeast Sulawesi, the frequency with which Sama peoples in the region have historically taken flight to avoid danger or find more accommodating spaces leads one to believe that this aspect of social networks is especially important to them. Though the written historical record mentions several occasions when Sama communities fled a home-space en masse in the face of violence and instability, the details of these movements are mostly absent.⁴⁸ Oral histories, however, can offer some clues as to how social relationships and previous travel experiences factor into these movements. Based on oral histories regarding instances of flight by Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi during the 1950s, evidence suggests that Sama peoples often relied on pre-existing relationships formed through family, friends, and previous travels, in their movements to find stability and safety. Additionally, these histories suggest that, in flight, Sama peoples also formed new ties with distant communities which continue to be important today.

One cannot speak of the role of social relationships between Sama communities in Southeast Sulawesi without discussing the large-scale movements that occurred in response to the Kahar Muzakkar Rebellion (or Darul Islam-Tentara Islam Indonesia, DI-TII) that took place in South and Southeast Sulawesi between 1950 and 1965. In her study on Sama communities

Gaynor mentions the "time-honored practice of flight" in the face of oppression or danger, and how this was a common response among Sama communities during tempo gerombolan (literally, "time of the gangs," which is the term commonly used by Sama to refer to this period). Throughout South and Southeast Sulawesi, Sama villages and bagai villages were uprooted and relocated as a result of the conflict which divided communities between those who supported the rebellion, those who supported the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army, or TNI), and those in-between, as many Sama were. In response to the traumatic events of those years, some Sama villages in the region were left abandoned for many years, some swelled with added "refugee" populations, and others formed in new areas.⁴⁹

While a detailed history of the rebellion is not necessary here, a brief description of some of the migrations that occurred will be sufficient to show the links that exist and those that were formed between Sama communities in Southeast Sulawesi and beyond as a result of the dislocation and relocation caused by the rebellion. An especially dramatic example is that of Mantigola, where hundreds of Sama families were displaced and the entire village was burned to the water as a result of fighting. One result of the movement from Mantigola can be seen in the village of Mola, where prior to the 1950s less than thirty Sama families lived, but in 1956-57 swelled in size as hundreds of families from Mantigola, Sampela, and La Hoa sought refuge there. Towards the end of the rebellion, a group of Mantigola and Sampela Sama moved to Pulau Tolandono roughly 30 km to the southeast of Mantigola, where they founded a new settlement known today as La Manggau.⁵⁰ During this chaotic period a number of Sama families, including those from the islands of Kabaena, Muna, and Buton, also fled to the islands of Flores and West Timor, especially the areas of Wuring and Sulamu.⁵¹ Families from Mantigola also fled to Sama villages in Labuha and Gane Barat in north Maluku, and Pulau Bungin near the island of Sumbawa, where they relied on distant relatives and friends for support.⁵² Likewise, several groups of Sama from villages in Tiworo resettled in Kendari Bay during the latter years of the rebellion, where many remain today.⁵³

Many of those Sama who fled did so to villages and areas where they had some sort of pre-existing

connection, be it family, friends, previous travel experience, or even just second-hand knowledge. Several of these Sama eventually returned to the home-spaces from which they fled, suggesting that the years spent in Sama communities abroad helped to establish new ties, through both marriage and friendship, which continue to connect these communities today. Similarly, in the case of those who remained in the villages to which they fled, links to their former home villages still exist. Aya Hami, for example, fled from her home-space in Mantigola to Wuring, West Timor in the late 1950s only to return to Tukang Besi in the late 1970s. Because she married in Wuring and lived there for nearly twenty years, Hami formed many lasting relationships with that community. Yet, when she returned to Mantigola after her husband's death, she was still able to rely on her natal community for support. These linkages between Sama communities are but one example of how the distant places and peoples in the eastern seas are connected as a result of Sama movements through these spaces, and how, in the process these distant places and peoples are incorporated into the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm.

A Sense of Cultural Commonality

Through their travels and stories of other's travels, Sama from various areas in Southeast Sulawesi have not only linked the vast maritime expanse of the eastern seas into an informal network of familiar places and social linkages, but such travels have also helped to create a sense of cultural commonality among the various Sama groups in the eastern seas.⁵⁴ Although there are many cultural differences among the numerous Sama groups in Southeast Asia, definite similarities in language, lifestyle, religion, and history do exist. When asked whether or not they perceived Sama from other regions of Southeast Asia to be of the same group or family as themselves, the Sama I interviewed in Southeast Sulawesi cited numerous reasons why they felt Sama in the Philippines, Malaysia, or elsewhere in eastern Indonesia were somehow of the same *suku* (tribe, ethnic group).⁵⁵ Trade, the search for sea products, shipping, migration, intermarriage, and numerous other mobile practices have brought Sama peoples into contact with Sama from other parts of Southeast Asia. These connections, in addition to helping form a Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime

realm, have helped to instill or reinforce a sense of Sama identity which extends well beyond the confines of their respective home-spaces as well as the borders of modern nation-states. As Clifford Sather has suggested in regard to the Sama communities of Sabah, "through this pattern of voyaging, a larger sense of awareness was maintained of membership in a more inclusive community of 'sea people,' the outer extent of which no single individual, no matter how well-traveled, could fully comprehend."⁵⁶

Of the similarities noted by respondents, language was one of the primary elements contributing to a sense of belonging to a larger Sama community. Linguists have noted the high degree of similarity among the various dialects of the Sama-Bajau language group to which the Sama of eastern Indonesia belong. While there are indeed differences between regions, the level of similarity is great enough for a high-degree of mutual intelligibility.⁵⁷ In the course of their travels, and through stories of travels, Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi have become aware of this linguistic connection. As one Sama fisherman in Lemobajo (north of Kendari) explained, "Wherever I have gone, Sama speak the same language. Some words are different, but mostly they just say them differently. I can understand them well enough."⁵⁸ In La Keke's travels to Tawau he befriended a number of Sama from the eastern coasts of Borneo and the Southern Philippines. La Keke made it clear that he felt that they were "different" from Sama in Southeast Sulawesi in some ways, but when pressed if they were still "Sama," he explained, "They are Sama. They speak the same language, they live like I do, but they sound different and dress different...Maybe we are of the same past."⁵⁹ This awareness of belonging to a larger "Sama" group is cultivated much in the same manner as I have suggested a Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm has been formed—through trade routes, the search for ocean resources, intermarriage, and migration. By coming into contact with Sama from other areas and recognizing traits in common, such as language, a sense of connection to other Sama communities is created and strengthened.

As La Keke's statement suggests, another key element in the recognition of cultural commonality is that of common practices. It is hard to pinpoint what La Keke meant by "they live like I do" because there is by no means a singular Sama lifestyle. While it can be

said that most Sama in the eastern archipelago are a sea-centered people, there are numerous exceptions to even this qualified statement. However, the fact that many of the Sama I met in Southeast Sulawesi referenced a distinct lifestyle common among Sama peoples leads me to believe that certain shared qualities do exist. Here, it will suffice to note that during their travels Sama from Southeast Sulawesi encounter Sama peoples from other areas in the eastern seas and recognize something related in their lifestyles—a similar sea-centered outlook and behavior that has historically given rise to such exonyms and endonyms as “sea peoples,” “aquatic populations,” and “Sama of the sea.”⁶⁰ At some point in their voyages, and by way of tales of such travels, an awareness of something similar developed in such a way that many Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi felt that they and the Sama Philippines and Sama Malaysia they encountered were somehow cut from the same cloth.

History is another element on which this awareness of commonalities might be based. Again, in this context the comments of La Keke are instructive. When he suggested that, “maybe we are of the same past,” La Keke was correct in more than one respect. For one, as mentioned above, based on linguistic studies it is clear that the Sama of eastern Indonesia are part of a larger Sama-Bajau ethno-linguistic group which also encompasses Sama peoples in what is today the Philippines and Malaysia.⁶¹ Secondly, among the sea-centered Sama-Bajau peoples wherever they may be found, similar historical traditions in the form of etiological narratives exist, namely those which relate a story about a lost princess of Johor and the Sama’s failed attempts at recovering her.⁶² These narratives are often related orally in fragments and were familiar to the majority of the Southeast Sulawesi Sama I interviewed. Alternatively, these narratives are sometimes recorded in *lontara*, Sama-owned Bugis language manuscripts originally written on sheets of lontar palm.⁶³ While *lontara* are extremely rare, and their possession usually limited to particular *lolo* (noble) Sama families, the origin narratives contained in some of these narratives appear to be known widely among the general Sama population.⁶⁴

In the course of my fieldwork it became apparent that these Sama narratives, which employ motifs similar to those recorded throughout Indonesia, Sabah, and the

southern Philippines, were known in one form or another by most Sama adults I interviewed.⁶⁵ Several knew the rough outline of the story, while some knew versions in great detail. What is more, several of those interviewed knew that Sama peoples from the Southern Philippines and Sabah had similar historical narratives; a fact they learned through their encounters with Sama peoples from these regions. As a young boy Mbo Nankang, for instance, learned from his father of the story of a lost princess from Johor whom the Sama had been sent to retrieve. In the late 1950s, during a trip to the Sangihe islands north of Manado, Mbo Nankang met several Sama males from the Semporna district of Sabah, who, to his surprise, shared with him a similar narrative which also spoke of a lost princess from Johor.⁶⁶ The sharing of historical narratives, such as in the exchange between Mbo Nankang and the Sama sailors from Sabah, is another way in which Sama from Southeast Sulawesi gain a sense of belonging to a larger group, recognized as Sama among themselves and by *bagai* as Bajo, Bajau, or Sama-Bajau.

Today scholars regard these narratives variously as “sea-based rationalization[s] of their presence in South Sulawesi,”⁶⁷ or as “cultural capital [which] signals connections with powerful others in the past,”⁶⁸ and as having “more to do with political ideologies and the subordination of maritime peoples... than they do with actual migrations or literal origins.”⁶⁹ To be sure, all of these definitions are well-thought out and accurate—especially in light of more recent linguistic and historical evidence put forth by scholars such as Pallesen—but, the fact that these narratives utilize highly similar motifs and serve comparable social functions in Sama communities throughout the eastern seas suggests a degree of cultural-historical similarity. Furthermore, the fact that Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi encounter while abroad narratives which are highly similar to those learned in their own communities, serves to reinforce or create a sense of cultural and historical connection among Sama populations throughout the eastern seas.

Just as Southeast Sulawesi Sama voyaging has created a vast space of familiarity in the eastern seas, travels for sea goods, trade, marriage, adventure, and safety have also brought the Sama of the region into closer contact with other Sama peoples from all over eastern Southeast Asia. In regard to a broader eastern Indonesian trade and cultural network, Leonard

Andaya has suggested that frequent movement and interaction in the form of trade, intermarriage, raiding, and migration, have helped to create a strong “sense of cultural commonality” in the region.⁷⁰ The existence of trade and kinship and other social networks among the Sama of Southeast Sulawesi, which connect them to numerous places within the eastern seas, serves a similar function.

Conclusion

Epeli Hau‘ofa, a scholar of Oceania, has commented that the everyday spaces in which we operate, “Our landscapes and seascapes,” are inscribed with culture and history, with present-day meanings and past significance, and thus, “We cannot read our histories without knowing how to read our landscapes (and seascapes).”⁷¹ This oft-cited geographer’s contention—that landscapes (and seascapes) are sites of the historical and cultural, and to understand a people’s history we must be aware of their conception of the land and seascape which they interact with—serves as a theoretical basis for this article. I have argued here that the sea is central to Sama living in Southeast Sulawesi, and thus their perspective of that space is central to understanding their histories. Part of that perspective, I believe, is to understand the oceans, seas, and littorals as a lived-space for Sama peoples. For many Sama peoples in Southeast Sulawesi the eastern seas of island Southeast Asia are an intimately familiar space, full of historically, culturally, and spiritually significant places. In aggregate, I have referred to this lived-space as the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm.

Where the example of Tukang Besi demonstrated the existence of specific Sama home-spaces in Southeast Sulawesi, a large portion of this article has been an effort to demonstrate that the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm encompasses a much more vast area of the eastern seas of island Southeast Asia. By way of their voyaging, Southeast Sulawesi Sama peoples have become intimately familiar with nearly one and a quarter million square miles of sea space.⁷² Rather than only a space to be traversed en route from one body of land to another, for Sama peoples this maritime realm is replete with familiar reefs, shoals, mangroves, spawning sites, currents, wind patterns, and resource cycles. As others have argued, the search for fishing grounds, trading places and secure living spaces was a major factor in the wide dispersal of Sama peoples

throughout the eastern seas. In the course of their travels Sama fishers and traders established new settlements, discovered new collecting grounds, and formed relationships in new locales. In sum, these movements have expanded the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm and incorporated familiar places and peoples into an informal social and economic network, one which facilitated additional movements and fostered a further familiarity with the seascape. Importantly, this network of familiar places linked through a variety of social and economic relationships has also facilitated the exchange of goods, knowledge, and opportunities among Sama peoples.

Finally, oral histories regarding these movements and relationships with peoples and places in the eastern seas suggest that the networks which comprise the Southeast Sulawesi Sama maritime realm have also helped to foster an awareness of belonging to a larger Sama community among Southeast Sulawesi Sama. In the course of their travels, contact with Sama peoples from other areas has reinforced among Southeast Sulawesi Sama an awareness of linguistic, cultural, and historical commonalities and thus, of a larger Sama community which transcends any one particular home-space. The fact that during their travels Sama from Southeast Sulawesi encountered Sama peoples from other areas in the eastern seas and recognized something related in their lifestyles, histories, and cultures, is important to consider. Through travel, trade, intermarriage, and encounters with new and old faces, an awareness of cultural commonalities has been cultivated among Sama peoples in the eastern seas.⁷³

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End Notes

1 I have used pseudonyms for all interviewees cited in this article. Interview with Mbo Doba, Sampela, 19-06-2007.

² The Sama of eastern Indonesia are a part of the Indonesian sub-group of the larger Sama-Bajau ethnolinguistic group that inhabits large portions of the southern Philippines and Sabah (northeast Borneo). Sama peoples in Indonesia are often referred to by non-Sama peoples as Bajo, Turijekne, and Bajau. I will refer to them as Sama because that is the endonym that they use in self-reference. See A. Kemp Pallesen, *Culture Contact and Language Convergence* (Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 1985).

³ Sixto Y. Orosa, *The Sulu Archipelago and its People* (Yonkers: World Book Company, 1923), 69.

⁴ H. von Dewall, "Aanteekeningen Omtrent de Noordoostkust van Borneo," *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 4 (1885): 445-447.

⁵ Celia Lowe, "The Magic of Place: Sama at Sea and on Land in Sulawesi, Indonesia," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 159.1 (2003): 109-133 is an excellent example of this scholarship.

⁶ Yi-fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," *Progress in Geography* 6 (1974): 213.

⁷ Compare with the more territorialized "precise domains" and "maritories" common among Orang Suku Laut groups in the Straits of Melaka described in Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), especially 180-181.

⁸ Edward Soja, "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination," in *Human Geography Today*, eds. Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Phillip Sarre (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 276.

⁹ My ideas regarding the role of Sama trading and voyaging patterns as well as their social networks in fostering an awareness of "cultural commonality," has been influenced greatly by the recent work of Leonard Y. Andaya. See, Leonard Y. Andaya, "Conceptualizing the Maritime World of Eastern Indonesia," lecture, Asia Research Institute, National University Singapore, December 2007.

¹⁰ Marine Program, World Wildlife Foundation Indonesia, "Rapid Ecological Assessment: Wakatobi National Park," *WWF Indonesia* (1993): 20.

¹¹ The thesis of Pak Kasmin (of Haluoleo University in Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi) contains detailed information on the settlement history of Tukang Besi derived from oral interviews in Mantigola and Mola in the early 1990s. Natasha Stacey's more recent work offers an informative section on Sama settlement in eastern Indonesia, focusing on Tukang Besi and the village of Pepela on the island of Roti. Kasmin, *Perlawanan Suku Bajo Terhadap Bajak Laut Tobelo di Perairan Kepulauan Wakatobi, Buton, Sulawesi Tenggara* (B.Sc thesis, Haluoleo University, Kendari, 1993); Natasha Stacey, *Boats to Burn: Bajo Fishing Activity in the Australian Fishing Zone* (Canberra: Australia National University E Press, 2007).

¹² For a description of the *perahu lambo*, see Michael Southon, *The Navel of the Perahu: Meaning and Values in the Maritime Trading Economy of a Butonese Village* (Canberra: Australia National University, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, 1995) 40. For a discussion of the *soppeq* (or *sope*), see Nick Burningham, "Bajau Lepa and Sope: A 'Seven-Part Canoe' Building Tradition in Indonesia," *The Beagle: Records of the Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences* 10.1 (1993): 208-210, 219.

¹³ Kasmin, *Perlawanan Suku Bajo*, 32-3; see also, Natasha Stacey, *Boats to Burn*, 22-24.

¹⁴ Verheijen notes that "Puah" can also refer to females, as in "aunt." See, Jilis A.J. Verheijen, *The Sama/Bajau Language in the Lesser Sunda Islands* (Melbourne: Australia National University, Materials in Languages of Indonesia, no.32, 1986), 104.

¹⁵ One Sama woman in Mantigola, who claims kinship connections to the Sultanate of Buton, said that La Ode Denda bought Kaledupa from a figure named Tuan Tumbuang, but I have been unable to learn the identity of that person, his status, or what relationship he had with the Sultanate of Buton.

¹⁶ According to Schoorl, the Sultanate of Buton identified four vassal states as *barata* (meaning “that which is used for the binding of outriggers”): Kaledupa, Muna, Tiworo, and Kalingsusu. Schoorl also notes that *kaomu* had settled in Tukang Besi, but he does not mention the time period in which the settlement took place. J.W. Schoorl, “Power, Ideology, and Change in the Early State of Buton,” in *State and Trade in the Indonesian Archipelago*, ed. G.J. Schutte (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), 28, 31.

¹⁷ Schoorl, 17-59; Susanto Zhudi, *Kerajaan Tradisional Sulawesi Tenggara: Kesultanan Buton* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1996), appendix 2a and 2b.

¹⁸ The exact meanings of these classifications, along with the term *sakei*, are unclear and their usage likely varies from place to place. The descriptions offered here are based on my observations and conversations with Sama in Tukang Besi. However, my Sama friend and translator, Iskandar Halim, often used the term *pallilibu* to describe or question Sama in other areas of Southeast Sulawesi about daily fishing and collecting practices. On the confusion regarding these terms and their meanings, see Jennifer Gaynor, “Liquid Territory: Subordination, Memory, and Manuscripts among Sama People of Sulawesi’s Littoral” (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2005), 76-84.

¹⁹ An excellent study of the way in which history is inscribed in the land and seascape by way of Sama activities is Celia Lowe, “The Magic of Place.”

²⁰ A *sandro*, sometimes spelled as “*sanro*” or “*sando*,” is a Sama shaman, healer, or *dukun* of sorts who is sought for spiritual guidance and to perform curing ceremonies as well as offerings to aid in fishing and travel.

²¹ Interview with Mbo Salang, Sampela, 08-06-2007. According to several *sandro*, in the past both Sama and *bagai* Tukang Besi islanders were afraid to cut down trees or harvest coral in the area around the cave. Likewise, if one desired to fish in that area, it was necessary to make an offering of betel nut, lime leaves and tobacco, as well as avoid using loud or foul language, spitting overboard, or making any aggressive actions, among other taboos, while in the area.

²² The term *bajak* or pirate was used by only a few Sama to describe figures such as Mbo Lonting, as most referred to him as simply a powerful person, or even a hero. Furthermore, the acts of “piracy” described by those interviewed were ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. Some said that Mbo Lonting never boarded passing vessels to steal goods or money, but only to demand food, tobacco, and demonstrate his power and bravery, while others said that Mbo Lonting often attacked vessels to steal goods and money, and usually killed those who crossed him. All sources, however, cited his supernatural power and fearlessness.

²³ The details of Mbo Lonting’s death are complicated by the fact that several versions exist as to how he died, why he was atop the rock outcropping, and whether or not he died at all. Nevertheless, the places associated with Mbo Lonting are an important part of the history of Tukang Besi Sama and their environment. Interestingly, several of those interviewed said similar figures of legendary status, much like Mbo Lonting, are revered, or at least remembered, in numerous other Sama communities throughout eastern Indonesia. A few spoke of a Mbo Jahinang, who is reportedly held in high regard by many Sama around the island Muna (Tiworo Straits, Southeast Sulawesi). Interview with Halim and Puto Asi, Sampela, 15-06-2007; Interview with Mbo Hasna, Mantigola, 12-06-2007.

²⁴ For example, a 26 year old Sama male from Sampela who claims Mbo Lonting as his ancestor, visited the rock outcropping and made an offering there, which he explained as being made in hopes that his ancestor would help him to pass his university exit exams. Interview with Dono, Sampela, 06-19-2007.

²⁵ Jennifer Gaynor discusses the role of Sama as “*tangan pertama*” or “initial extractors” of sea resources in her essay, “The Decline of Small-Scale Fishing and the Reorganization of Livelihood Practices among Sama Peoples in Eastern Indonesia,” *Michigan Discussions in Anthropology* 15 (2005): 90-149.

²⁶ See for example, Pallesen, 247; Christian Pelras, “Catatan tentang Beberapa Penduduk Perairan Nusantara,” *Masyarakat Indonesia* 6.2 (1972): 169-197; James J. Fox, “Notes on the Southern Voyages and Settlements of the Sama-Bajau,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 133.4 (1977): 459-465; Arlo H. Nimmo, *Magosaha: An Ethnography of the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut* (Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2001), 27-29.

²⁷ Sama peoples have traveled much further than the areas listed here. I am referring only to those journeys that were made by or remembered by Sama I met personally.

²⁸ Interview with Mbo Salang, Sampela, Session 2, 09-06-2007.

²⁹ According to M. Marhalim, “in the pre-Islamic era” green turtles were also considered to be of spiritual value by the Sama of Southeast Sulawesi. M. Marhalim, *Sejarah Perdagangan dan Konsumen Daging Penyu dalam Masyarakat Bajo di Selat Tiworo* (Unpublished Typescript, 1990).

³⁰ See for example, D. Broderick and C. Moritz, “Hawksbill breeding and foraging populations in the Indo-Pacific region,” in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Sea Turtle Conservation Genetics*, eds. Bowen, B.W. and W. N. Witzell (NOAA Tech. Mem.NMFS-SEFSC-396, 1996): 119-129.

³¹ M. Marhalim, *Sejarah Konsumen dan Perdagangan Penyu Hijau*, 3-4, 5.

³² Interview with Mbo Dadi, Sampela, Session 1, 11-06-2007. Mbo Dadi was only able to recall that the trip took place prior to *tempo gerombolan*.

³³ Sama sailors, like many other maritime communities in eastern Indonesia, refer to “north” as down or below, and “south” as up, or above. James Fox noted this spatial orientation in his, “Bajau Voyages to the Timor Area, the Ashmore Reef and Australia” (Paper presented at the International Seminar on Bajau Communities. Jakarta. 22-25 November 1993), 286.

³⁴ Interview with Mbo Diki, Sampela, Session 1, 07-06-2007.

³⁵ Interview with Mbo Diki, Sampela, Session 2, 16-06-2007.

³⁶ See, Leonard Y. Andaya, “Historical Links between the Aquatic Populations and the Coastal Peoples of the Malay World and Celebes,” in *Historia: Essays in Commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Department of History, University of Malaya*, edited by M. Abu Bakar, et al., (Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Historical Society, 1984), 41.

³⁷ Fox, “Notes on the Southern Voyages,” 461. For the importance of trepang to insular Southeast Asia’s trade with China see, Heather Sutherland, “Trepang and Wangkang: The China Trade of Eighteenth-Century Makassar c.1720s-1840s,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 156.3 (2000): 451-472.

³⁸ M. Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, vol. 2 (London: G. and W. Nichol, 1814), 257.

³⁹ George Windsor Earl, report attached to a letter from J. Mc Arthur to J. Stephen 20 September, 1842. Cited in, Peter Spillet, “A Race Apart: Notes on the Sama-Bajau People of Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara Timur and Northern Australia” (Paper presented at the International Seminar on Bajau Communities, Jakarta. 22-25 November 1993), 195.

⁴⁰ C. van der Hart, *Reize rondom Celebes en naar eenige der Moluksche eilanden Gedaan in den jare 1850* (The Hague: K. Fuhri, 1853), 104. Bosscher and Matthijssen noted in 1852 that Bungku and Banggai Sama were selling trepang in Kendari and paying a small fishing tax to the rulers of the Bungku and Banggai polities in eastern Sulawesi. C. Bosscher and P.A. Matthijssen, "Schetsen van de Rijken van Tomboekoe en Banggai" *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde* 11 (1854): 63-107.

⁴¹ Gaynor, "Liquid Territory," 5.

⁴² The fact that the seventeenth century La Galigo cycle, a Bugis epic, makes reference to *Bajo Sérani* (Malukan Bajo) suggests a very early connection between Sama in Sulawesi and the world of Maluku. Christian Pelras, *The Bugis* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 74.

⁴³ Interview with Puto Daleng, Lapulu, 21-06-2007.

⁴⁴ According to Puto Daleng, his father eventually stopped sailing to Maluku sometime in the 1960's and his wife there eventually remarried with another Sama fisherman, though one who only fished locally and did not make long distance journeys.

⁴⁵ Gaynor, "Liquid Territory," 5.

⁴⁶ Because most enter Sabah illegally, those with families often rent a small house (usually several families sharing one house) on the Indonesian side of the border in order to avoid having to buy passports for family members. According to La Keke, the authorities in Tawau did not ask Sama fishermen, or their families, for passports prior to 2000, but since then they have demanded passports. La Keke believed that this was a factor in the increased instances of Sama males who leave their families behind in Sampela when they travel to Sabah for work.

⁴⁷ La Keke said that he learned of the employment opportunity from older Sama men from Tukang Besi who had worked for similar companies in the late 1960s, and it was La Keke who had shared the information with La Demba. Interview with La Beke and La Demba, Bau-Bau, 01-06-2007.

⁴⁸ See Gaynor, "Liquid Territory," especially Chapters Four and Six; Esther J. Velthoen, "Contested Coastlines, especially Chapter Five.

⁴⁹ I place "refugee" in quotation marks because Sama respondents never used the term, or its Bahasa Indonesia equivalents, when referring to their status in the places they fled to. The Bahasa Indonesia term "*pelarian*" (which can be translated as refugee) was often used by *bagai* respondents in reference to these Sama communities however.

⁵⁰ This information is based on a number of interviews with Sama elders in Tukang Besi, mostly those from La Hoa, Mola, Mantigola and Sampela.

⁵¹ Burningham, "Bajau Lepa and Sope," 209; Stacey, *Boats to Burn*, 25.

⁵² Sama communities in South Sulawesi were also greatly affected. For instance, Christian Pelras noted during his travels there in 1970s that, starting around 1953 the scattered groups of Sama living along the western coast of the Gulf of Boné began migrating to Bajoé in South Sulawesi, where they built pile-houses along the inter-tidal zone. Pelras, "Catatan tentang Beberapa Penduduk Perairan," 184-185; David Sopher, *The Sea Nomads: A Study Based on the Literature of the Maritime Boat People of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Memoirs of the National Museum, Singapore), 146.

⁵³ Sama "refugees" from various villages in Southeast Sulawesi originally settled in Kendari at a place called Sadoha, but were resettled by the government in an area called Lapulu. Interview with Aya Hami and friends, Lapulu, 28-06-2007; Interview with Mbo Danjong, Lapulu, 29-06-2007.

⁵⁴ Andaya, "Conceptualizing the Maritime World of Eastern Indonesia."

⁵⁵ The term used by respondents varied depending on the language used in the interview. Those using Baong Sama often said something along the lines of, "*sanggéh Sama*," which can roughly be translated as "[we are] all Sama."

⁵⁶ Sather, *The Bajau Laut*, 60.

⁵⁷ Verheijen states that there is "only small divergence at the dialectal-level" between the Sama language spoken in eastern Indonesia and the Sama languages spoken in Sabah and the Southern Philippines. Verheijen, 26-7; see also, Pallesen, 117.

⁵⁸ Interview with Puto Gane, Lemobajo, 01-07-2007.

⁵⁹ Interview with La Keke and La Demba, Bau-Bau, 01-06-2007.

⁶⁰ Sama peoples have been referred to by *bagai* as "sea peoples," "aquatic populations," and other names which emphasize their connection to the ocean. Among themselves, the Sama of the Southern Philippines, use the ethnonym "Sama Dilaut," which can roughly be translated as "Sama of the sea."

⁶¹ Pallesen, 117.

⁶² One gets a sense of both the similarities and the spatial range of these narratives by looking at the works of: Dewall, who recorded the story of the lost princess of Johor in 1849 on the east coast of Borneo; Helen Follett, who recorded a similar story of the Johor princess in 1945 in the Sulu archipelago; Thomas Forrest, who recorded another version of the story in what is now eastern Indonesia in the 1780s; as did Verschuier in 1883. M. Marhalim also notes a similar version originating from a Makassar-Goa oral tradition. H. von Dewall, "Aanteekeningen Omtrent de Noordoostkust," 445-7; Helen Follett, *The Men of the Sulu Sea* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1945), 129-130; Thomas Forrest, *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas from Balambangan* (London: G. Scott, 1780), 372; F.H. van Verschuier, "De Badjo's," *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijke Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 7 (1883): 4; M. Marhalim, *Cerita yang Melegenda di Kerajaan Goa, suku Makassar* (Unpublished Typescript, nd.).

⁶³ During my fieldwork I was only able to obtain a photocopy of a photocopy of only the first page of the lontara' referred to in Gaynor's dissertation as *LB Lemobajo*. This copied page contains a section of a Sama origins story written in Bugis script, which Gaynor has translated in her dissertation. Gaynor, "Liquid Territory," 123.

⁶⁴ *Lontara'*, written in Bugis but owned by Sama (usually Sama-Bugis descent and/or those of *lolo* descent), are interesting historical sources. The known *lontara'* contain either genealogies which trace a *lolo* family line to a South Sulawesi kingdom, usually Goa or Boné, or they contain one version or another of the Sama etiological stories. According to researchers such as Gaynor, there are very few *lontara'* scattered around eastern Indonesia and those that do exist are considered to be sacred heirlooms by the families which own them.

⁶⁵ Of those interviewed, only one was widely considered to be of *lolo* descent and possessed a *lontara'*. Most respondents over the age of thirty (the target age group of my interviewees) knew at least some of the basic story of the lost princess, and the story of the *welendréng* tree, which derives from the undated Bugis epic, the *La Galigo* cycle.

⁶⁶ Interview with Mbo Nankong, Bau-Bau, 01-06-2007. For some of the similarities and differences between the narratives of the Southern Philippines Sama, the Sama of eastern Kalimantan and Sabah, and those in eastern Indonesia, see, Sopher, *The Sea Nomads*, especially 124-125, 141-142, 311-313.

⁶⁷ Horst Liebner, "Four Oral Versions of a Story about the Origin of the Bajo People of Southern Selayar," in *Living through Histories: Culture, History and Social Life in South Sulawesi*, eds. Kathryn Robinson and Mukhlis Paeni (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University, 1998), 129.

⁶⁸ Gaynor, "Liquid Territory," 254

⁶⁹ Sather, *The Bajau Laut*, 17-18.

⁷⁰ Andaya, "Conceptualizing the Maritime World of Eastern Indonesia."

⁷¹ Epeli Hau'ofa, "Pasts to Remember," *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts*. ed. Robert Borofsky (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 466.

⁷² Clifford Sather gives the number of one and quarter million square miles as the range for Sama peoples in Southeast Asia. Clifford Sather, "Sea Nomads and Rainforest Hunter-gatherers: Foraging Adaptations in the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago," in *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Peter Bellwood, James Fox, Darrell Tryon (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 1995), 257.

⁷³ See Andaya, "Conceptualizing the Maritime World of Eastern Indonesia."

Drowned in Romances, Tears, and Rivers

Young Women's Suicide in Early Twentieth-Century Vietnam

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In the summer we take pleasure in visiting the deep lake.

In the autumn we drink the toxic brew.

In the winter we recite poems about leaving this life.¹

These lines, illustrated by a four-panel cartoon, appeared on the front cover of *Phong Hoa* (Customs), a weekly newspaper published in Hanoi, in January 1936 (see Figure 1). *Phong Hoa* was founded by Nguyen Tuong Tam,² who is better known as Nhat Linh, the leader of an organization of Vietnamese literati called the *Tu Luc Van Doan* (Self-Reliant Literary Group). The newspaper openly and critically reflected Vietnam's contemporary social issues with a sense of acerbic humor. These four verses parody a classic poem about the joys one can experience during the four seasons. Its author, cleverly imitating classical structure and language, disparaged a phenomenon in Vietnamese society: suicide, which seemed to alarmingly have become a "fad" or pastime that people enjoyed partaking in all year.

Many Vietnamese newspapers in the late 1920s and early 1930s reported a very serious "plague" devastating the young people and particularly young women. Among them was *Phong Hoa's* portrayal of this sickness in pseudo-scientific style: "It mostly

involves young women. Their bodies become weak and fragile, while eyes are dreamy and always full of tears. They like to wallow in shallow water. This disease is a natural consequence of the 'novel' [*tiêu thụ* in Vietnamese, a transliteration of Chinese *xiaoshuo* 小说]

說] craze ... which manifests itself in the form of young people's fanatical devotion to mass producing and devouring romances."³ Such an ironic description refers to several key facts that contemporary Vietnamese people thought about the epidemic: the majority of reported suicide cases were women, many of whom sought death by jumping into bodies of water, which were common features of Vietnam's topography; and they seemed to be always daydreaming and hypersensitive to the tragedies they read in popular romances, whose characters' tragic ending allegedly drove them to self-destruction.

Certainly, the above descriptions do not represent all cases of women's suicides during that time; in fact, many of them chose voluntary death because of social, economic, and ideological changes while others did so due to their own or their husbands' gambling debts. While a number of women chose jumping into lakes or rivers, there were many cases of hanging, self-mutilation, shooting oneself with a gun, or overdosing on opium mixed with vinegar or taking a poisonous potion. Nevertheless, there must have been a certain amount of truth in the above mentioned description,

and this paper aims at finding a connection between the “typical” description of women’s suicide and the reality. Romance novels could not have had significant influence among young women unless they had attained a certain level of education as well as knowledge of literature. Therefore, we will begin by investigating education opportunities and accessibility to reading materials for Vietnamese women in the early twentieth century. After that, we will discuss two representative works of Vietnamese popular literature in the 1920s to see how romances actually impacted young female readers. I suggest that a review of popular novels and a discussion of women’s issues will demonstrate that a higher level of women’s education, together with the influence of the new reading culture and romantic literature, played a role in this sudden increase in suicides. I maintain that there was a relationship between the development of the printed word and higher suicide rates, but this connection was not ultimate or proportional because it is impossible to pinpoint all relevant social and inherent factors that determine the suicide rate of a community. We should lay more emphasis on the metamorphosis of Vietnamese society at the turn of the twentieth century, while carrying out a search for the answer to the suicide epidemic. But before we explore the impact of the printed word on Vietnamese women’s lives, let us look at some factual details of the suicide epidemic to see how serious it really was.

The Suicide Epidemic

Statistics on numbers of suicides in early twentieth-century Indochina were scanty and incomplete. From my research of newspaper reports, there were at least 191 cases of suicide throughout the country from 1925 to 1935, among which women accounted for approximately 64%. This percentage reflects actual cases of suicide; failed suicide attempts were likely to drive it far higher. However, an article in *Phong Hoa* mentions that over 250 people committed suicide in 1933 alone.⁴ According to Nguyen Van Ky (whose source is unknown), there were 2.7 suicides per 100,000 people in Vietnam, in comparison to 20.2 in France.⁵ A 1949 article by T. Smolski that addresses the issue of suicide provides some figures obtained from the criminal court: 7.5 suicides per 100,000 in the south.⁶ The author also claimed that urban agglomerations in the north led to too much confusion

and cross-listing so that the number of suicides could not be accurately determined. Extrapolating Smolski’s figures, there must have been about 540 suicide cases per year if we use this number and take the population of Vietnam during the 1920s-1930s to be approximately 20 million. Hou Yanxing in his research about women’s suicide in Shanghai, during the same period and when the population was approximately 28 million, reported an average of 2195.5 cases per year from 1929 to 1935, among which women accounted for 1158.7 or 52.8 percent.⁷ As far as we can conclude from these figures, even during the height of the suicide epidemic, Vietnam’s suicide rate was about seven to eight times lower than France and Shanghai.⁸

How could such a low suicide rate cause such a great deal of coverage and discussion in newspapers and periodicals? One of the reasons is that unlike cultures such as Japan’s, which considered suicide an honorable death,⁹ the Vietnamese did not think highly of self-inflicted death. For the Vietnamese, giving up one’s life voluntarily was usually seen as weakness of the mind and unfiliality towards one’s parents. This view was obviously influenced by Confucian ethics, which recognize the possibility of a righteous suicide, yet, in general, vigorously condemn self-destruction, for one must not harm the flesh and blood with which one is



Figure 1 (right).
Cover of *Phong Hoa*
(Customs),
January 1936

endowed by parents.¹⁰ Even cutting hair was viewed as a violation of traditional values of moral debt (*on*) and filial piety (*hieu*) because one was not allowed to “sully the body one possessed as a gift from one’s parents and ancestors.”¹¹ People who committed suicide also infringe on principles of filial piety in the sense that they failed to continue their ancestral lines or serve their parents.¹² Besides, Confucian followers maintained that the ultimate purpose of life is constant self-betterment;¹³ therefore, untimely death prevented humans from fulfilling this aim. However, the introduction of new forms of knowledge caused the decline of Confucian ethics as the sole source for moral guidance. In the next section, we will look into how this process unfolded.

Education and Suicide

“A daughter without talent is a good fortune.”

Vietnamese Proverb

Educational opportunities for women in early twentieth-century Vietnam led to a great transformation of society. Prior to this time, very few Vietnamese had been able to obtain any formal education and the number was even lower for women. Sending a child to school meant the family had one fewer toiler to work the land and more expenses to worry about. Moreover, girls were usually considered as temporary tenants at their parents’ houses, and when they got married, usually at young ages, they would belong entirely to their in-law’s households. This practice is reflected in the common saying: “Having a daughter in the house is like having a fish sauce vat hanging in the kitchen. One never knows when it will ferment so she should be married off as soon as possible.”¹⁴ Therefore, there was little rationale for a girl’s parents to sponsor her education, as she would eventually leave them for her husband’s family. Furthermore, women in the past were discouraged from learning, as a familiar proverb goes: “A daughter without talent is a good fortune.”¹⁵ A few daughters of scholar-gentry or affluent families could benefit from the tutorship of their fathers or join their brothers in class.¹⁶ Even though some notable Vietnamese women such as Doan Thi Diem (1705-1748) and Ho Xuan Huong (late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) produced outstanding

literary works that attested to the literary accomplishments of Vietnamese women, these exceptions were very few and did not represent the overall female population.¹⁷

The situation improved greatly when many young women were able to attend school and obtain degrees thanks to the adoption of a Latinized script (*quoc ngu*) and the establishment of the Franco-Vietnamese educational system in the 1920s, especially schools for women (*truong nu hoc*).¹⁸ But an even more important factor was the change in men’s opinions about women’s education, because in Vietnamese society the former had been exerting great influence on the lives of the latter throughout history. Starting in the period from 1905-1910, women were encouraged by Vietnam’s male scholars to educate themselves by attending public lectures.¹⁹ In 1918, Mr. Nguyen Hong Nguyen, a major contributor of *Nam Phong* (*Southern Ethos*), even modestly and honestly asserted that: “I regret that I did not have much education; therefore, I wish each of our women could learn ten times more than I did.”²⁰ The reader should know that the article was published in one of most influential journals in Vietnam at that time. The monthly magazine *Nam Phong* was founded under the guardianship of Albert Sarraut, French governor-general of Indochina (1911-1914 and 1917-1919), and the directorship of Pham Quynh, a classically-trained and pro-French scholar who was later appointed as head of the cabinet and minister of education in the constitutional monarchy government set up by the French in 1933.²¹ Another *Nam Phong* article in 1919 by Thieu Son, a male teacher and prominent contributor, criticized rather harshly some outdated notions still existing among the Vietnamese that prevented women from getting a proper education.²² The author argued that because both men and women undertook employment in society, women needed the same education as men, including ethics studies, geography, mathematics, hygiene, rulership [*cai trz*], history, philosophy, and customs. After such in-depth training, girls could take courses on cooking, sewing, knitting, and other practical household skills. In terms of difficult topics such as Classical Chinese (*chu Nho*) and French language, if one had intelligence, then it would not be harmful for her to learn some more; but if not, she should not waste her time. In short, looking at such arguments, we can conclude that many Vietnamese

intellectuals did not impose any restriction on women's education as long as their learning could benefit the country. The persistent fear among traditional scholars that women outsmarting men would lead to domestic disorder and social upheaval was entirely absent in these writings.

Before we reach a conclusion about the attitudinal change towards women's education, let us look at another prominent newspaper, the weekly *Phu Nu Tan Van* (*Women's News*). Though focusing more on women's issues, this paper attracted thousands of readers from all walks of life and from all over Vietnam, not just in the south where it was published. The newspaper not only contained many articles concerning women's emancipation, rights to education, health, and family-related problems, but it also established funds for students in need, organized an exposition of women's crafts in 1932, and built dining halls for the poor and unemployed.²³ An article published in 1933 by Thieu Son, a male author, journalist, and critic who was a major contributor to *Phu Nu Tan Van*, also attacked as obsolete the notion that girls' literacy would be dangerously employed in debauched acts, and thus corrupt young women's minds.²⁴ In fact, the author argued, "education is the key to open up the soul. Only when the soul is open can one take a grasp of one's self and direct it towards the morally upright [*chanh dai quang minh*] way."²⁵ The author argued that whether women collaborated with men or took men's jobs, they must be educated. If Vietnamese people continued to uphold such harmful thoughts and deprive women of education opportunities, humanity would lose a large number of competent workers because "the result of women's education in the world has proved that women do not lose to men in any field."²⁶ Thieu Son showed both abstract and concrete benefits from educating women in his arguments: knowledge not only makes women morally upright, but also allows women to contribute to the nation's welfare. Such a dramatic change in position on girls' schooling opened up the school gate to many young women. In the 1920s-1930s, more than 40,000 girls were able to attend public or private institutions, which was about 10 percent of the total elementary students, and at least an equal number received some kind of basic reading instructions at home.²⁷

We have looked at the evidence of an increase in the level of women's education in early twentieth-century Vietnam. Let us turn our attention to possible impact of this progress. I suggest that a considerable number of suicides by educated Vietnamese women in the early twentieth century demonstrate the connection between their educational level and their predisposition to self-destruction. While most of the suicides were usually reported in a hundred words or less, there were a few extraordinary cases that received extensive coverage. For example, in January 1932, *Duoc Nha Nam* (*Southern Torch*), a daily that focused on reporting the latest international and domestic events, and *Phu Nu Tan Van* both reported extensively on the case of Ms. Nguyen Thanh Van, a twenty-something woman who attempted suicide several times.²⁸ Abandoned by her father who remarried after her mother had passed away, Thanh Van lived with her brother and sister-in-law, with whom she often had disagreements. Because of a minor dispute with her sister-in-law, she tried to burn herself to death with gasoline, but was discovered in time by relatives. In the hospital, a doctor, moved by her good looks, took good care of her. Thanh Van, an orphan without much familial love, soon consented to marry the doctor without knowing that he already had a wife. Thanh Van became his second wife and suffered from the inferior treatment reserved for concubines, which was manifested in a popular saying: "eating leftovers and sleeping in the outer quarter" (*an com nguoi, ngu nha ngoai*).²⁹ Unable to get a divorce and start a new life, she drank a bottle of iodine on the way back from the pharmacy where she had just obtained it. She then hired a rickshaw in order to sit down upon feeling the effects of the drug. Thanh Van was, however, rescued by the rickshaw puller, who saw her fading away in his vehicle and took her to the hospital in time. Too determined to die, a few days later the young woman jumped from the second floor of a hostel and injured her legs. She was again brought to the hospital where they had to cut off one of her legs in order to save her life, but the extreme pain finally got to her. She left behind a note lamenting how in the modern world money corrupted people's minds and pushed young women to despair, which, according to the article, "shows that although having been born into a poor family, she had significant formal instruction and an intellect higher than that of the common people."³⁰ Nam Chuc, a prominent contributor to *Duoc Nha Nam*, wrote a eulogy for Ms. Nguyen Thanh

Van, lamenting the waste of a resolute and attractive woman who, because of chronic poverty and excessive affection, met an unfortunate end (*bac menh*).³¹

Six months later, *Phu Nu Tan Van* reported two other women committing suicide: one was a female teacher from Cao Bang, a northern province, who had been living happily with her husband (also a teacher), her in-laws, and their five children. On Saturday, May 7, 1932, Mrs. My went home early from school, ate lunch, and got into bed pretending to sleep.³² Under the covers, she cut her nipples and throat, which caused her to bleed profusely, soaking the shirt she was wearing. Probably affected by the extreme loss of blood, she then called out to her mother-in-law to help her change into another shirt. When the mother-in-law walked in and uncovered the blanket, she saw that woman's throat had been severed halfway through, her head and body were also separated, and blood from an artery kept flooding out. The old woman was extremely terrified and called for Mrs. My's husband, who unbuttoned her shirt to discover that her nipples were missing. It turned out that she tried to commit suicide by cutting off her nipples, but she soon found out she could not die from such wounds so she slit her throat as well. Mrs. My finally died after the mother-in-law had finished changing her in a clean shirt.

The other woman from the same report was Mrs. Ty, a secretary (*ki luc*) and schoolteacher from Lai Thieu, a southern province, who left her job and family without a word. Later, her husband heard that she had jumped into the Binh Loi River. Her body mysteriously floated back to Lai Thieu province where her mother lived. There were rumors that she might have chosen death because of a huge gambling debt, rather than an unrequited love or a family dispute. The anonymous author of this article criticized her thus: "for those who are country bumpkins with little education, it is understandable if they commit suicide because of pent-up feeling about something; however, for those who have some education and even have attained the position of a teacher, it is inexplicable and blameworthy if they commit suicide just because of some minor discontent."³³ Incidents like these clearly show the pervasive presence of educated, young, urban women among the victims of the suicide epidemic.

While educational opportunities and textbooks were still limited to the wealthy, newspapers and journals were more accessible to everyone because of their low

cost, availability, and coverage of social issues that concerned people from all walks of life. Publishing houses tried to meet the demand for more reading materials as the number of literate people rose. Hence, the changes in terms of printed materials in fact had an even greater influence than the increase in educational opportunities in Vietnamese society. In the next section, we will examine the role of newspapers and journals in shaping the life of women in twentieth-century Vietnam.

Reading Culture

"If daughters are allowed to learn how to read and write, they will just use such skills to exchange love letters with lousy men."

Vietnamese Saying

The educational system in Vietnam was "solely a machine for producing scholars imbued with Confucian doctrine"³⁴ for more than a thousand years, and "[the] influence of the Confucian pedagogue ran from the top to the bottom of nineteenth-century Vietnamese society."³⁵ Therefore, reading anything other than Confucianism-instilled works was frowned upon and even restricted by the government.³⁶ Furthermore, if a woman was caught trying to learn in secret, she would be labeled "rebellious" and her books torn apart.³⁷ What really bothered parents was that if their daughter could read and write, she might exchange love letters with a young man, which meant she was trying to escape from their control in the matter of marriage.³⁸ In the early twentieth century, this long-established fear was increasingly realized, much to the horror of traditional parents, when many young women who became exposed to ideals of romantic love, self-independence, and individualism, "rebelled" against Confucian-influenced customs. Newspapers and journals published many articles promoting the habit of reading and a culture of self-education. Nguyen Hong Nguyen (who, as we have seen earlier in this essay, strongly urged women to educate themselves in an abovementioned article) exhorted: "I have a few words for my fellows: if you want to be smart, please don't hesitate to spend money on newspapers. One day you will eradicate stupidity and humiliation and become intellectual [*tri thuc*] enough to compete with the world."³⁹ This article,

published in 1918, also advocated absorbing beneficial ideas and practices from different cultures, rather than limiting oneself to the Sino-Chinese tradition: “Our country in the past was influenced by the morals of Confucianism and Daoism which lack elements for intellectual enhancement; therefore, our country is weak, our people are poor, and our nature is unconfident.”⁴⁰ Lacking a healthy reading culture was detrimental to the very existence and status of the Vietnamese in the modern world.

The bloom of the Vietnamese press in the early twentieth century in terms of both quantity and quality aided the development of a good reading culture. Quite a few newspapers catered to a female audience. For instance, *Nu Gioi Chung* (*Women’s Bell*, published in Saigon in 1918), *Phu Nu Tan Van* (*Women’s News*, published in Saigon from 1929-1935), *Phu Nu Thoi Dam* (*Women’s Contemporary Discussion*, published in Hanoi from 1930-1934), *Dan Ba Moi* (*New Women*, published in Saigon from 1934-1936), and many others which did not last for more than a year because of censorship or lack of funds.⁴¹ Many other creditable newspapers and magazines contained various discussions about women’s affairs such as *Nam Phong* (*Southern Ethos*, published in Saigon from 1917-1933) and *Phong Hoa* (*Customs*, published in Hanoi from 1932-1936), whose articles this paper draws heavily from.

Such material changes led to mental transformations. Newspapers produced for women and discussing particular women’s issues gave female Vietnamese the feeling that they, for the first time, were the center of attention. Many early twentieth-century Vietnamese women came to feel that they could live for themselves, not their husbands, children, or in-law families.⁴² More importantly, periodicals at the time did not stop at reporting news and advocating for social reforms, they also published novels in serial form, which became very popular among readers. Such literary works contained multiple layers of meanings that led to different opinions about their influence in Vietnamese society. While education allowed people to benefit from the written word, the new reading culture allowed people to access various materials that would have previously been banned for their potential harm to social well-being.

Romances and Suicide

This brings us to the “novel craze” mentioned in the introduction. This craze was caused by an increase in the number of writers producing romances. Duoc Nha Nam’s article in 1932 voiced concern about an unchecked boom in the production of romances: “In our society, an uncountable number of novels have been published recently; valuable ones are few while the valueless are far too many... because even those who know only a few words want to be writers and publish their writings,” and proposed to establish a literature committee to control the quality of published works.⁴³ Such concern reflected a rise in quantity and, to a lesser extent, quality of fiction during the late 1920s and early 1930s due to better printing technology and, more importantly, a larger audience.

According to the speculation of newspaper reporters, those women who killed themselves were rumored to be “modern” (*tan thoi*) daughters of bourgeoisie families who spent their days reading romantic novels and ultimately copying the heroine’s actions. Such perceptions were grounded in the fact that novels by Hoang Ngoc Phach and in the *Tu Luc Van Doan*—led by Nhat Linh, Khai Hung, and Thanh Lam—and the “new poetry” by Xuan Dieu and Che Lan Vien, which often depicted the passionate, and usually unrequited, love between talented men and beautiful women—were very popular among young urban readers.

Pure Heart (To Tam) by Hoang Ngoc Phach, published in 1922, was frequently singled out by critics as the prototype for popular romances, and thus a cause of many young women’s melancholy and their tragic ends. An editorial in *Phu Nu Tan Van* claimed: “Recently Thuy Kieu and Ms. Pure Heart have trained many girl friends to be ultra-romantic, suspicious and fatalistic, and especially believers of the theory of “taking chances, closing eyes, and stepping forward.”⁴⁴ The novel is about a young woman, named Pure Heart, endowed with extraordinary beauty and a sensitive soul, but living in a traditional family. She falls in love with a schoolteacher whose romantic verses move her heart, but ends up marrying another man whom her family picks for her. Both of the characters belong to the generation of young educated people who are still reluctant to resist arranged marriages because their mindset is still steeped in traditional customs. They do not make their love known for fear of

transgressing the Confucian tradition, which commands children to obey their parents' decisions unconditionally.⁴⁵ The young female protagonist finally dies from increasing melancholy and deteriorating health, and the schoolteacher can only treasure all their correspondence and later tells this heartrending story to the author who writes it down.

Another novel that received a lot of blame for corrupting the mind of the female youth is *Nhat Linh's Severance* (*Doan Tuyet*), which begins with a conversation about a woman committing suicide because of her family's extremely cruel treatment of her. The novel's female protagonist, Loan, a young "modern woman," is forced by her parents to marry into a rich, ultra-traditional family against her wishes. She is already in love with a good-looking political activist who, however, cannot pay his rent and has to leave Hanoi to make a living elsewhere (while allegedly conducting revolutionary activities). In her new family, Loan is mistreated by her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, her own husband, and even his concubine. Their lack of education and culture turns them into malicious and hateful people.⁴⁶

Many contemporary intellectuals criticized the negative impact of such romances on young adults. Dinh Tan Vien wrote in a 1929 article, titled "The Harm of Reading Novels," that a young woman reading a novel about a female character of great beauty having affairs with young men in sentimental language cannot help but "become muddled, and day and night dream about coital affairs (*mong Vu Son*)."⁴⁷ He proclaimed, "Alas! This is definitely the seedling of corrupted morals, degenerated customs, shattered families, and a destabilized nation."⁴⁷ Phu Nu Tan Van's article by a female contributor in 1930, titled "Why Does One Commit Suicide?" also emphasized the problem of reading novels: "I saw many girls, only seventeen or eighteen years old, day and night wallowing in rubbish romantic novels, weeping and commiserating with the characters, and letting their minds wander in that airy-fairy world. There comes the feeling of world-weariness. And when they come into contact with the society, seeing that life is hard and full of troubles, they immediately think about death."⁴⁸

Interestingly, a few years earlier when *Pure Heart's* author, Hoang Ngoc Phach, was still a university student, he published an article voicing his concern about the harmful effects of sensational literature on

young women.⁴⁹ Hoang noted that romances had previously existed in Vietnamese culture, such as *Lamentations of a Concubine* (*Cung Oan Ngam Khuc*), *The Song of a Soldier's Wife* (*Chinh Phu Ngam*), and *The Tale of Kieu* (*Kim Van Kieu*), yet the creation and appreciation of such works were restricted to a few writers and a select audience while nowadays sentimental romances were overly profuse.⁵⁰ The author claimed that he did not want to either criticize female students who enjoyed romantic novels or condemn the flood of "sentimental" literature, he was just concerned that "nowadays, living in a world of hopeless dreams is like the sun in the late afternoon. Practical life is a widespread trend. For a country that is still underdeveloped like ours and in this extremely competitive world, being practical [*thiet thuc*] should be more valued than being refined [*hoa my*]."⁵¹ This pragmatic viewpoint, written in poetic style, reflected the advocacy of many young radicals in the 1920s, who stressed the necessity of incorporating Western utilitarian values into the Vietnamese society without abandoning traditional values.⁵²

That being said, the last chapter of *Pure Heart* proves widespread criticism of its harmful emotional stimulation wrong. This chapter carries the author's true intention. Hoang Ngoc Phach perhaps wanted to present his agenda discretely in the conventional form of romance. Yet, he used the concluding chapter to breakaway from the majority of tear-jerk novels, and that misled many readers who were too deeply impressed by *Miss Pure Heart's* tragedy to bother with the "live-strong" message. The author attributed the tragedy to the young girl's obsession with romantic love and sentimental literature, which develops to the point that she loses contact with the real world, and described how the schoolteacher turns his back to such lachrymose literature, tries to motivate himself with pictures of Napoleon and the like, and puts his mind to his teaching job.⁵³ The whole novel criticizes the weaknesses of young people who are so strongly bound by cruel traditions that they dare not fight for their own happiness. *Pure Heart* "obviously conveyed a message not completely congruent with the conscious intent of its author."⁵⁴

While Nhat Linh, the author of *Severance*, was criticized for contributing to the suicide fever among young women, he meant to encourage women to stand on their own feet and fight against the evils in the

society. Nhat Linh, though better known as a novelist of Vietnam's romance movement, was also a radical scholar and politician. We know, for example, that he was the founder of the newspaper *Phong Hoa* and its supplement *Ngay Nay (Today)*, which covered controversial social issues, challenged preordained customs, and promoted progressive ideas. In addition to fighting the colonial government with the pen, Nhat Linh was also involved in many nationalist movements over the course of his life. The message of *Severance* is in fact contrary to the criticism about its contribution to the high rate of female suicides. The protagonist, Loan, marries a "wimpy" man of a "regressive" family because her parents owe them a large amount of money. This motive bears resemblance to Thuy Kieu from *The Tale of Kieu*—a daughter sells herself into a brothel in order to rescue her father from imprisonment, which was at the time still considered a paradigm of filial behavior. Loan does not choose to commit suicide. Instead, she tries to reconcile with her husband's family and make the best out of her miserable situation. Even though the thought of suicide often crosses her mind, she tries to brace herself for difficulties and listens to encouraging words from close friends. The protagonist takes every insult and abuse with the grace and dignity of a strong and educated woman. However, in a fight with her husband and mother-in-law, she accidentally stabs him to death. At court, she calmly defends herself in perfect French, the language of educated Vietnamese during that time, and is acquitted. Afterwards, she builds a small school to support herself and finally reunites with her lover. The novel criticizes the obsolete traditions that allow and even encourage in-laws to treat daughters-in-law cruelly, exploit their labor, and turn them into breeding machines with the sole purpose of producing male heirs. It triumphs the figure of the modern girl who has an education and yet is not at all wrapped up in the romantic world. Loan is determined to overcome countless difficulties in life rather than give up. *Severance's* message is to encourage young women to fight against cruel traditions and to educate themselves in order to become independent from their families and husbands.

Although Hoang Ngoc Phach and Nhat Linh did not share the same viewpoints, their novels did not contain the "harmful" (*hại*) elements that many traditional-minded critics suggested they did. Hoang Ngoc Phach

was a conservative who held on to traditional values and was an elitist who wanted to take away materials that could possibly give people wrong ideas. Nhat Linh, on the contrary, wanted to do away with traditional mores that held Vietnamese women back and celebrated women's drive for knowledge and empowerment. Both of them identified contemporary social issues that deprived the Vietnamese from happiness, self-empowerment, and status. Their works particularly addressed the tragic situation of all too many young, urban, and educated women who were married to men for whom they did not have affection and into families that demanded them to slave away and give birth as frequently as possible. These women were not appreciated for their intellectual capabilities due to the residual beliefs of their traditional society in which women were not allowed to advance in the examination-based bureaucratic system. Because of their familiar settings and straightforward but carefully chiseled prose, such novels appealed to a large audience. Those who suffered from relationship or family problems, however, might not have picked up on the self-empowerment agenda, but rather the romances' melancholic sentiments.

Conclusion

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Vietnamese women were able to enjoy better education opportunities and a wider range of reading materials than ever before. Both the French authorities and Vietnamese nationalists saw the importance of women's roles in the new era. They advocated women's rights and provided women with schools, periodicals, talks, novels, discussions, exhibitions, and fairs, enabling the female sex for the first time to actively participate in the social sphere outside the homes of their families or husbands' families. While the same description cannot be applied to the rural female population, women in big cities attended classes and lectures, traveled and explored attractions, exercised and took up hobbies, read and submitted their writings to publishers, attended and organized fairs, and voiced their concerns at conferences and social clubs.

Reformation in the educational system and the growth of the printed world produced a number of young, urban and educated women. They became greatly desirable as candidates for marriage, as the Vietnamese, like many Confucian-influenced Asian

communities, highly valued education. In these Asian countries, where wealthy merchants were still looked down upon by society unless they sent at least one of their sons to school and donated money to local schools, an education was the ultimate source of a family's pride. Hence, affluent and powerful families sought out educated girls who would improve their fame and social status. Even married men with wealth and high positions preferred taking second wives or concubines who had both beauty and intelligence. An influential novel published right after the height of the suicide craze, *Dumb Luck*, by Vu Trong Phung, an author who portrayed the contemporary society with a sense of dark humor, satirically reflects how many wealthy Vietnamese came to embrace modernity, or *tan thoi* in Vietnamese, to the extreme. Everyone in the novel wants to look modern by wearing extremely revealing clothes (women) and putting on cosmetics (men), and behave in a modern way by taking up tennis, and adopting "free love" and a "proletariat" attitude. Therefore, for many of the nouveau riche, having a modern daughter-in-law in the family was a fad and the young girl became a precious piece of property that they could show off to neighbors and friends as a testimony to their class, status, and wealth.

These young brides, however, were expected to entirely devote themselves to their in-laws. They were expected to accept the fact that their education, which helped raise the bride price paid to their parent, should remain as an adornment after marriage and not an interference with the well-established daughters-in-law's duties as "corvée" laborers and bearers of male heirs. And there was the irresolvable conflict between the woman and her new family, which had been in existence since the invention of the institution of marriage. In the early twentieth century, with the prevalence of Western ideals, this conflict was further intensified by the tension between the modern and traditional generations.

Interestingly, the methods that Ms. Thanh Van chose to destroy herself proved another link between the modern world and suicides, i.e., gasoline, iodine, and tall buildings were modern inventions. Furthermore, while it cannot be proved that popular romances gave such women the idea of self-destruction, they might have reflected the life and mentality of many urban young women who were compelled by their parents or circumstances to marry against their wishes and chose

to resolve their familial conflicts with their own deaths. Gambling, unemployment, alcoholism, prostitution, and opium addiction raged among urban dwellers, sending many of them into despair, and suicide was just another increasingly pervasive problem in this transitional period in Vietnamese history.

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End Notes

- 1 [Front Page], *Phong Hoa* 159 (3 January 1936): 1.
- 2 In this essay, Vietnamese names are written in the order of last name, middle name, and first name.
- 3 Viet Sinh, "Cac Thu Dich Trong May Nam Nay" [Recent Epidemics], *Phong Hoa* 39 (22 September 1933): 4.
- 4 P.K., "Ro Kheo Lan Than" [Silly Thoughts], *Phong Hoa* 74 (18 May 1934): 5.
- 5 Nguyen Van Ky, "Rethinking the Status of Vietnamese Women in Folklore and Oral History," in *Viet-Nam Expose - French Scholarship on Twentieth-Century Vietnamese Society*, ed. Gisele L. Bousquet and Pierre Brocheux (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
- 6 T. Smolski, "Quelques Données Statistiques sur le Suicide au Vietnam" [Some Statistical Data on Suicide in Vietnam], *Le Peuple Vietnamien [Dan Viet Nam]*, no. 3 (August 1949): 55-59.
- 7 Hou Yan-Xing 侯艳兴, "20 shiji er, sanshi niandai Shanghai nuxing zisha tanxi" 20世纪二、三十年代上海女性自杀探析 [Women's Suicide in Shanghai from 1920s to 1930s], *Funu yanjiu luncong 妇女研究论丛*, no. 4 (2006): 52.
- 8 The distribution of suicides according to time, age, gender, and methods of suicide was also researched at that time though not thoroughly. For example, according to the medical study of Vu Cong Hoe completed in 1937, the city of Hanoi had a sudden rise of 11.32 cases per 100,000 inhabitants each year from 1927 to 1930, a peak of 30.75 cases in each 1933 and 1934, and a slight drop of 20 cases in each 1935 and 1936. These statistics were obtained from official records kept by municipal bureaus in the city of Hanoi, such as The Statistical Annual of Indo-China, Prosecutor's Office, and Office of Public Health, which the author, a doctoral medical student working on his dissertation at the time, admitted to be incomplete. Vu Cong Hoe, *Du Suicide dans la Société Annamite [Suicide in Annamese society]*, trans. Charles A. Messner (New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files, 1972, c1937), Table II, 5. T. Smolski presented some of the abnormalities in suicide patterns of Vietnam and European countries. While in Europe, the majority of suicide cases were people age 50 and over, in Vietnam, people from 20 to 40 years of age were most likely to commit voluntary deaths.

9 See Jerome Young, "Morals, Suicide, and Psychiatry: A View from Japan," *Bioethics* 16, no. 5 (September 2002): 412-424.

10 See The Analects VIII.3 in James Legge, *English Translation of the Four Books* (Taipei: The Council of Chinese Cultural Renaissance, 1979), 65-66. In this section, Zengzi, on his deathbed, showed his disciples how well he had preserved his body through life and that only by having taken good care of his body, was he "free from all blame."

11 Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 60.

12 The Analects II.5-II.8 in Legge, 42.

13 See The Analects VIII.7 in Legge, 66. Zengzi said, "An educated gentleman may not be without strength and resoluteness of character. His responsibility to life is a heavy one, and the way is long..."

14 Nguyen Thi Kiem, "Co Nen Tu Do Ket Hon Khong?" [Should Marriage Be a Matter of Free Choice?], *Phu Nu Tan Van* 269 (22 November 1934): 17-21.

15 Nguyen Dinh Ty, "Ban Su Hoc Con Gai Bay Gio, Nen The Nao?" [Discussing Women's Education Nowadays, What Should Be Done?], *Nam Phong* 23 (May 1919): 10-12.

16 Nguyen Hong Nguyen, "Luan Ve Dan Da Con Gai Nuoc Ta Doi Voi Su Hoc Va Su Van Chuong" [Discussion of Our Country's Women, Education, and Literature], *Nam Phong* 11 (May 1818): 319-320.

17 Doan Thi Diem is best known for her translation of Chinese poetry into the Vietnamese language (Chu Nom). Ho Xuan Huong is a celebrated female poet whose verses were strident, humorous, and exquisite at the same time.

18 See Gail P. Kelly, *Franco-Vietnamese Schools, 1918 to 1938*, Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975.

19 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 200.

20 Nguyen Hong Nguyen, "Discussion of Our Country's Women, Education, and Literature," 319.

21 Huynh Van Tong, *Bao Chi Viet Nam Tu Khoi Thuy Den 1945 [Vietnamese Periodicals From the Beginning to 1945]* (Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City Publication House, 2000), 124-133; Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in The Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 84; and Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 102. *Nam Phong* was published in romanized Vietnamese and had a Chinese supplement. Its articles were mostly concerned with philosophy, history, and literature of both Western and Asian traditions.

22 Nguyen Dinh Ty, 10-12.

23 See the long discussion of Phu Nu Tan Van in Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 220-228.

24 Thieu Son, "Su Hoc voi Dan-ba" [Education and Women], *Phu Nu Tan Van* 215 (7 September 1933): 8-9.

25 Ibid., 8.

26 Ibid., 9.

27 Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 206.

28 Duoc Nha Nam's editor-in-chief was Duong Van Giau, a southerner who graduated from Université de Paris with doctoral degrees in law and political science. The paper's content focused on lives of the working class and promoted Vietnamese independence from French rule. Because of its strong political stance, the paper was banned from circulation in the north in 1929, less than a year after its foundation, but survived underground in the south until 1937 thanks to the support of Indochinese Constitutionalist Party. Huynh Van Tong, 192-195.

29 The outer quarter is usually for guests, not for husbands and wives. Here, the second wife has to sleep alone in the outer quarter as a guest while the husband and first wife sleep in the inner quarter together. According to Lustéguy's observation of Tonkinese society from 1925 to 1932, the secondary wife was usually considered a servant. See Pierre Lustéguy, *The Role of Women in Tonkinese Religion and Property* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1954, c1935), 100.

30 P.K., "Trong Mot Tuan Le Hai Cai An Phu Nu Tu Sat: Nguoi Pham, Co Le Deu La Dan Ong" [Two Women's Suicide Cases in A Week: The Accused Are Probably Men], *Phu Nu Tan Van* 117 (21 January 1932): 5-7; "Ve Chuyen Nguoi Dan Ba Tren Lau Nhay Xuong Duong" [About the Woman Who Jumped from a Building], *Duoc Nha Nam*, 4 January 1932, 2; "Vi Sao Co Nguyen Thanh Van Vot Tu Tren Lau Dao Nguyen Xuong?" [Why Did Ms. Nguyen Thanh Van Jump from Dao Nguyen Hostel?], *Duoc Nha Nam*, 5 January 1932, 1; and "Co Nguyen Thanh Van Da Chet Roi" [Ms. Nguyen Thanh Van is Dead], *Duoc Nha Nam*, 6 January 1932, 1.

31 Nam Chuc, "Cau Chuyen Thi Phi: Khoc Co Thanh Van" [Popular Stories: Eulogy for Ms. Thanh Van], *Duoc Nha Nam*, 7 January 1932, 1.

32 She was called Mrs. My after her husband's name.

33 "Cung Lai Phu Nu Tu Sat! Hai Co Giao Quyen Sinh" [Women's Suicides Again! Two Female Teachers Committed Suicide], *Phu Nu Tan Van* 136 (2 June 1932): 9.

34 Boudarel and Nguyen, 40.

35 Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model - A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 181. Woodside argues that students in traditional Vietnamese society were trained to take the examinations to enter the bureaucratic ranks and only allowed to read Confucian classics. The lack of reading materials especially in provincial areas was compensated by oral circulation of folktales, history, and poems of all kinds. See Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 169-233.

36 For example, the Le dynasty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries forbid villagers from cutting printing blocks, as well as engraving and printing Buddhist and Taoist books and heterodox writings and "various national chronicles," which were associated with "profligacy." Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 186.

37 Boudarel and Nguyen, 40-41.

38 Ibid., 41.

39 Nguyen Hong Nguyen, "Khuyen Nguoi Ta Nen Xem Bao" [Advising People to Read Newspapers], *Nam Phong* 11 (May 1918): 320-321.

40 Ibid.

41 David G Marr, "The 1920s Women's Rights Debates in Vietnam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (May 1976): 371-389. Also see Nguyen Van Ky, "Rethinking the Status of Vietnamese Women in Folklore and Oral History," in *Viet-Nam Expose - French Scholarship on Twentieth-Century Vietnamese Society*, ed. Gisele L. Bousquet and Pierre Brocheux, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 101; and Huynh Van Tong, *Bao Chi Viet Nam: Tu Khoi Thuy Den 1945 [Vietnamese Periodicals: From the Beginning to 1945]* (Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House, 2000).

42 *Phu Nu Tan Van* 136 (2 June 1932): 9.

43 "Hoi Tieu Thuyet" [The Novel Association], *Duoc Nha Nam*, 20 July 1932, 1,6.

44 [Editorial], "Anh Huong Tieu Thuyet Trong Nu Gioi" [The Impact of Novels among Women], *Phu Nu Tan Van* 25 (30 August 1934): 1-2. These are lines from the Tale of Kieu, a story about a beautiful and talented girl named Thuy Kieu who undergoes overwhelming difficulties in life.

45 This point in Confucian ethics is manifested in various passages on filial piety, for instance, "A person... in his duties to his parents is ready to do his utmost..." The Analects I. 7 (James Legge, 40). Neil L. Jamieson, in *Understanding Vietnam*, claims that "A child [in traditional Vietnamese society] was supposed to try to please his or her parents all the time and in every way, to increase their comfort, to accede to all their wishes, to fulfill their aspirations, to lighten their burden of work and of worry, and to comply with their wishes in all matters, great and small." Jameison, 16-17.

46 Nhat Linh (Nguyen Tuong Tam), *Doan Tuyet [Severance]* (Ha Noi: Van Hoc, 1997, c1935).

47 Dinh Tan Yen, "Cai Hai Doc Tieu Thuyet" [*The Harm in Reading Novels*], *Duoc Nha Nam*, 25 July 1929, 1.

48 Thanh Ha, "Viec Gi Ma Tu Van?" [Why Does One Commit Suicide?], *Phu Nu Tan Van* 75 (23 October 1930): 1, 6.

49 Hoang Ngoc Phach, "Van Chuong Voi Nu Gioi: Cai Hai Van Cam Doi Voi Nu Hoc Sinh" [Literature and Women: The Harmful Impact of Sensational Literature on Female Students], *Nam Phong* 41 (November 1920): 379-383. An anonymous female student of Dong Khanh girls' school replied to this article. See: "Van Chuong Voi Nu Gioi" [Literature and Women], *Nam Phong* 42 (December 1920): 506-510.

50 Hoang Ngoc Phach, "Literature and Women," 379.

51 Ibid., 382.

52 See Jamieson, 84-97.

53 Hoang Ngoc Phach (Song An), To Tam [Pure Heart] (*Sai Gon: Thanh Xuan*, 1963, c1922), 100-103.

54 Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh and John C. Schafer, "From Verse Narrative to Novel: The Development of Prose Fiction in Vietnam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (November, 1988): 757.

The Geopolitics of Cambodia During the Cold War Period

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After gaining its independence from France in 1953, Cambodia, like many other newly independent countries, had to face the new escalating global problem of the time: the Cold War. As far as Cambodia was concerned, the effects of the Cold War were discernible from the outset, with the formation of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1951 in Vietnam and its influence on the communist movement in Cambodia. However, it was not ideological conflict alone that accounted for the destruction of Cambodia in the following decades. Michael Leifer, for instance, notes: "Ever since the decline of the ancient Khmer Empire, geography has combined with politics to shape the fortunes of the Cambodian state."¹ Similarly, British journalist William Shawcross also writes: "Cambodia is a victim of its geography and of its political underdevelopment."² This essay therefore intends to examine the main factors that were crucial to the development of Cambodian geopolitics during the Cold War era. I would argue that the geopolitics of Cambodia from 1953 to 1991 is characterized mainly by three factors: the Vietnam War, the legacy of French colonial rule, i.e. the country's territorial disputes with her neighbors, and finally, the rivalry of hegemonic

powers in the region as well as the politics of the Cold War itself.

The Impact of the Vietnam War

In order to better understand the key points of discussion in this paper, it is useful to offer a definition of "geopolitics." In the context of this paper, geopolitics refers to the influences of geography on politics, i.e., the relationships that exist between a country's politics and its geography, or the influences that geography has on political relations between countries.³

As the development of the Cold War polarized the globe, Cambodia, like the rest of the world, had to come to terms with the new political landscape. After successfully demanding Cambodia's independence from France in 1953, King (later Prince) Norodom Sihanouk tried to pursue neutralist policy with the hope of keeping his country out of war, while continuing to accept financial support from rival powers. Eventually, however, Sihanouk's foreign policy began to shift towards the left, so that he was labeled "procommunist" by the United States.⁴ Sihanouk's decision to align himself with the left

stemmed from his belief that the communists would finally win the Indochina war. Additionally, the prince displayed distrust toward Thailand and South Vietnam, two countries that were backed by the U.S. in this period. Internally, his move was an attempt to diminish the leftists' opposition, but it also had the effect of alienating the right wing of his government, especially army officials. In fact, in 1963, Sihanouk decided to cut off U.S. economic and military assistance, which had totaled about US\$404 million since the country gained independence. Moreover, he nationalized Cambodia's banks and the country's export-import trade.⁵ By 1965, Cambodia broke off relations all together with the United States, meanwhile turning to China for international alliance. In fact, as early as 1955, Sihanouk's rejection of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) already won him economic support from China and political support from the Viet Minh (the communists of North Vietnam).⁶ In 1966, Prince Sihanouk made a move that was to become a factor leading to the coup against him in 1970. Perceiving that the North Vietnamese would win its war against the United States, Sihanouk secretly allied himself with the North Vietnamese. To quote from David Chandler:

Under the terms of the alliance, the North Vietnamese were allowed to station troops in Cambodian territory and to receive arms and supplies funneled to them from North Vietnam and China via the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville. In exchange, they recognized Cambodia's frontiers, left Cambodian civilians alone, and avoided contact with the Cambodian army. South Vietnamese and U.S. officials soon knew about the presence of North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, and the movements of weapons and supplies, without knowing the details of the agreement Sihanouk had reached. Sihanouk denied for several years that any Vietnamese troops were in Cambodia, which angered the United States and South Vietnam but enhanced the image of injured innocence that the prince projected to the outside world.⁷

It was under such circumstances that the so-called "Sihanouk Trail"—the southern terminus of the more widely known "Ho Chi Minh Trail"—came into being. The trail, cutting through Laos and Cambodia, served as the logistical supply route utilized by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAV) and its southern supporters, the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong). The emergence of the Vietnamese sanctuaries on

Cambodian territories resulted in the U.S. secret bombing missions authorized by President Nixon. According to historian John Tully, the U.S. dropped almost 540,000 tons of bombs on Cambodia during the first half of the 1970s, exceeding the total of 160,000 tons of bombs dropped by the Allies on Japan in all of World War II.⁸ Estimates of the death toll range widely from 150,000 to the U.S. historian Chalmers Johnson's perhaps inflated estimate of 750,000.⁹

On March 18, 1970, while Sihanouk was abroad, the National Assembly of Cambodia voted 86-3 to remove Sihanouk from power. The U.S.-supported Khmer Republic was eventually proclaimed, with General Lon Nol as its Prime Minister. There is no direct evidence to support the claim that the U.S. was behind the coup; yet, it was clear that the U.S. was supporting Lon Nol's government thanks to its military strategy in the Vietnam War. Among Cambodians, the 1970 coup was more popular among educated people in Phnom Penh and the army, who were upset with Sihanouk's handling of the economy and the rupture with the United States. In the rural areas, however, people were still in favor of Sihanouk.¹⁰ Nevertheless, as David Chandler noted, for most people the idea that Vietnamese forces should leave Cambodia was more popular than the coup itself.¹¹ In fact, when the Vietnamese ignored Lon Nol's ultimatum that they leave Cambodian territory in forty-eight hours, tens of thousands of Cambodians joined the armed forces to drive the Vietnamese out, only to be defeated by the more experienced Vietnamese combatants.¹² Meanwhile, Lon Nol's army was not only fighting against the Vietnamese, but also against the Cambodian communists—the Khmer Rouge.

It is useful to note here that while the bombing missions by the U.S. on Cambodia's eastern parts had the effect of postponing the Communists' victory, it also drove some peasants to join the Khmer Rouge in the jungle, while many others fled to the capital Phnom Penh. Yet, not everyone who joined the Khmer Rouge was communist. Some went into the jungle to fight for exiled Prince Sihanouk who—now allying himself with his former enemy, the Khmer Rouge—encouraged his people to fight against Lon Nol.

When the U.S. lost the Vietnam War and finally withdrew its troops from Indochina, the Khmer Republic, without any more support from the U.S., was

left on its own and finally collapsed when the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975. Between 1975 and 1979 Cambodia was renamed “Democratic Kampuchea” under the leadership of Saloth Sar—the man who came to be more widely-known as Pol Pot. Despite the fact that it was short-lived, Democratic Kampuchea was a devastating regime in which approximately 1.7 million out of about 7 million people lost their lives to mass execution, inhumane working conditions, and starvation. Almost every Cambodian who lived through the period lost at least a few members of their family. The development of collectivism, the breaking of family ties, and the abolishment of the market economy along with a variety of civilian rights highlighted the main characteristics of Democratic Kampuchea. Alongside the execution of intellectuals and professionals, city and town dwellers were forced to resettle in the countryside where they became peasants to achieve the communist party’s (known to the local population as *Angkar*) unrealistic Four Years Plan to transform Cambodia into a land dominated by agrarian wealth. The regime was also known to have purged tens of thousands of its own cadres whom it suspected to be enemies at the infamous interrogation center S-21 in Phnom Penh. Sihanouk, on the other hand, was imprisoned in his own palace after the Khmer Rouge took power.

Border Disputes with the Neighbors

Once Pol Pot’s faction emerged amidst internal struggles among the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, border incursions to neighboring countries, namely Vietnam, and to a lesser extent Thailand and Laos, intensified.¹³ In terms of territorial disputes, both Thailand and Vietnam had often been in conflict with Cambodia. Thailand’s conflicts with Cambodia were more numerous during the French colonial rule over Cambodia (1863–1953); Cambodia’s disputes with Vietnam were more frequent during the Cold War era, specifically under the Khmer Rouge. Interestingly, Thailand’s territorial conflicts with Cambodia took place with the French who ruled Cambodia at the time, while Cambodia’s conflicts with Vietnam involved the two countries directly.¹⁴

Before coming to power the Khmer Rouge were trained by Vietnamese communists. Once in power, however, they became hostile to their ex-comrades.

The conflicts between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese had been simmering since as early as May 1975, when the Khmer Rouge attacked several Vietnamese-held islands in the Gulf of Thailand with the hope of gaining the territories in the confusion of the final stages of the Vietnamese civil war.¹⁵ The territorial dispute between Cambodia and Vietnam can be traced back to the French colonial rule of Indochina, if not earlier. Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863, and in 1874 some Khmer provinces were incorporated by the French authorities to the separate colony of Cochinchina (now southern Vietnam, referred to as *Kampuchea Krom* by Cambodians).¹⁶ This legacy of dispute certainly influenced leaders on both sides. Pol Pot was suspicious of Vietnam’s territorial intentions, and this feeling of distrust deepened when Vietnam signed a treaty of cooperation with Laos in July 1977, a move that Pol Pot interpreted as an attempt to encircle Cambodia and to reconstitute what had once been French Indochina.¹⁷ During these times, the Khmer Rouge demanded that Vietnam respect Cambodia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and abandon the Indochinese Federation policy, which Vietnam denied pursuing. The Khmer Rouge also claimed parts of the Gulf of Thailand, where they wished to benefit from offshore oil deposits, while the Vietnamese rejected this claim for the simple reason that they had harbored similar hopes.¹⁸ Furthermore, skirmishes alongside the borders led leaders of both sides to distrust each other’s sincerity. In fact, it is claimed that the Khmer Rouge had committed atrocities upon Vietnamese villagers in provinces along the Khmer border, killing 222 people, scorching 552 houses, and burning 134 tons of paddy. Nguyen-vo estimates that Cambodians experienced equal losses through Vietnamese violence.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge had strengthened their ties with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), who had antagonistic feelings toward a pro-Soviet Vietnam. This alliance allowed the Khmer Rouge to receive large quantities of arms, ammunition, and other military equipment from China.²⁰

Democratic Kampuchea finally collapsed when some 100,000 Vietnamese troops, together with the Kampuchean United Front of National Salvation (KUFNS) (which comprised former DK’s officials who had defected to Vietnam in 1977 and 1978, and other Cambodians who had stayed in Vietnam during DK’s

rule) took over Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979. A pro-Vietnamese government, comprising members of the KUFNS, known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was established in 1979, although it was not recognized by any non-Communist countries, except India.²¹ Despite losing hold of the country, the Khmer Rouge were still far from complete defeat, as they were able to retreat to the Thai borders and eventually strengthen themselves with the support of Thailand, China, ASEAN and the United States. Likewise, Sihanouk managed to escape to China before the arrival of the Vietnamese.²² The period 1979–1991 marked the combination of the politics of the Cold War and regional conflicts that, once again, were to shape the fate of Cambodia and its people.

The Regional and International Factors

By early 1979, the conflict in Cambodia had gained momentum and international attention. In February 1979, viewing the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as an act of Soviet encirclement, China accused Vietnam of “militarism, wild aggression and expansion” and launched an attack on the northern parts of Vietnam that would eventually cause heavy destruction on both sides. The Khmer Rouge, who had recently retreated to western parts of Cambodia, managed to receive shelter along the Thai borders because Thailand also feared Vietnam's expansionism. The Khmer Rouge army was not the only resistance force to the Phnom Penh government after 1979. The Royalist group known as FUNCINPEC²³ led by Prince Sihanouk and the republican group led by Sonn San were the other two major groups resisting the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The perception of Vietnam's invasion to Cambodia as a threat to the security of the region also led ASEAN to oppose the PRK. In 1982, ASEAN, together with China, was able to persuade the three Cambodian resistance factions to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK).²⁴ Fear of Vietnamese and Soviet aggression in this period eventually internationalized the Cambodian conflict and produced two camps of rivals: the Cambodian CGDK (who continued to retain its seat at the UN), China, ASEAN, and the United States on the one side, and Phnom Penh's People's Republic of Kampuchea, Vietnam, and the Soviet bloc on the other.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the conflicts between the Phnom Penh government and the resistance forces and their respective supporters was the creation of the “K5 Plan,” adopted by the Phnom Penh government, presumably under pressure from their Vietnamese advisors. While the PRK was trying to consolidate their power and credibility inside the country, fighting continued between the People's Army of Vietnam and the resistance forces, who were sheltered by Thailand and received military support from China. In 1984, the Politburo in Phnom Penh discussed “the mobilization of several hundred thousand Cambodian civilians to chop down forests, construct more roads, and lay down hundreds of kilometers of earthen walls, two-and-a-half-meter-deep spiked ditches, barbed wire, and minefields.”²⁵ This policy was codenamed the “K5 Plan” (*Phenkar Kor Pram* in Khmer). Evan Gottesman stated that the plan's ultimate motive was to “build a Berlin Wall of sorts that would stretch along the Thai-Cambodian border and prevent resistance soldiers from infiltrating.”²⁶ The attempt to seal the 829-Km long Cambodian-Thai border presumably required a great number of laborers. In fact, in the first phase alone, 90,362 laborers were involved in building the defense line.²⁷ At the end of 1985, Vietnamese officials estimated the total K5 workers for the year at 150,000.²⁸ There seemed to be no clear figure of the total number of people conscripted for the K5 Plan, but Margaret Slocomb estimated the total number of conscriptions between late 1984 and mid 1987 at 380,000.²⁹ It is important to note here that a high number of people conscripted for the K5 Plan lost their lives to malaria and landmines. This strategy of border defense was not something new. During the reign of Minh Mang, between 1820 and 1841, Vietnam colonized Cambodia, and, to enhance its security against Thai attacks, Minh Mang ordered the digging of the Vinh Te canal in 1820–21. The harsh treatment of the Vietnamese overlords caused deep resentment among the Cambodians in a similar way that the K5 undermined the popularity of the PRK and the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia.³⁰

The K5 Plan was not the only manifestation of geopolitical cruelty that caused misfortune among Cambodians. Immediately following the Vietnamese invasion, tens of thousands of Cambodians in the west fled the country and took refuge in Thailand. Facing

the influx of refugees without immediate support from the international community, Thai authorities forcefully repatriated as many as 45,000 Cambodian refugees back to their country through the cliffs full of landmines at Preah Vihear, the “no man’s land” between the two countries. Horrifically, those who refused to go down the cliffs were mercilessly shot by Thai soldiers.³¹ After making their way through minefields and enduring extreme hunger, receiving food aid from Thai villagers and sometimes by the Vietnamese soldiers and Khmer villagers on the other side, only about two thousand refugees were eventually rescued by the U.S. Embassy and the UNHCR.³²

Another harsh effect of geopolitical conflict facing Cambodia during this period was the heavy use of landmines by all sides. The history of planting landmines dated back to the Vietnam War when Vietnam, and the U.S. in response, planted landmines on neutral Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge also set up mines during the early 1970s to seal off their “liberated zones” against the Khmer Republic’s army, and along the borders with Vietnam and Thailand once they were in power. The number dramatically rose during the Vietnamese occupation, especially after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese army from Cambodia in 1989, which left the Phnom Penh government to defend itself against the CGDK’s forces. In fact, Eric Stover (a freelance writer and consultant to Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights) and Rae McGrath (director of the Mine Advisory Group) wrote a report in 1992 and referred to this process of heavy planting of landmines by all fighting forces as “the cowards’ war.”³³ The sheer magnitude of devastation for Cambodian civilians is so remarkable that one out of every 240 Cambodians is estimated to be the victim of a landmine in modern Cambodia.³⁴

Only with the end of the Cold War did the conflicts in Cambodia gradually come to an end. The decline of Soviet aid made the stationing of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia difficult, for Vietnam was experiencing both its own problems at home and international isolation during the last decade thanks to its invasion of Cambodia in 1979. Peace talks among Cambodians in the late 1980s finally resulted in the Paris Peace Agreement in October 1991, which was designed to allow the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia as a peacekeeping force to ensure the peaceful process of the 1993

National Election. Cambodia’s politics thereafter were largely dominated by internal conflicts that resulted in the 1997 coup, while regional cooperation was further enhanced when Cambodia became the tenth member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in April 1999.

Conclusion

This paper was written with an attempt to illustrate the relationship between Cambodia’s tragedies and its geopolitical position during the Cold War period. After gaining independence, Sihanouk’s efforts to keep Cambodia neutral were undermined by its complex geopolitical situation. The Vietnam War that erupted in the 1960s spilled over into Cambodia, which eventually led to the rise of Democratic Kampuchea, the deadliest regime Cambodia had experienced in its entire history. Once in power, the Khmer Rouge provoked border disputes—a legacy of French colonial rule in Indochina—with Cambodia’s neighbors that would lead to its own demise. The invasion by Vietnam into Cambodia and the establishment of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea did not leave Cambodia at peace, for the country became a battleground that served the interests of bigger powers in the region and beyond. It is not the aim of this essay to attribute responsibility for the conflicts described to purely geographical or ideological factors occurring in Cambodia. Neither does this paper wish to suggest that external actors and circumstances are solely responsible for this tragic era in Cambodian history. Clearly, geographical and political factors, both internal and external to Cambodia, shaped this chapter in history. It is therefore necessary to examine the whole matrices of Cambodia’s geopolitical position in the Cold War era, in order to better understand and contextualize the misfortune of the country and its people.

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End Notes

- 1 See Leifer (1975), p. 531.
- 2 William Shawcross's report on Cambodia, *Cambodia's New Deal* (1994), p. 5.
- 3 Microsoft Encarta 2007 DVD. Definition of "geopolitics."
- 4 See Chandler (1992), p. 192.
- 5 Tully (2005), Pp. 143-44.
- 6 Gottesman (2003), p. 18.
- 7 Chandler (1992), p. 194.
- 8 Tully (2005), p. 167.
- 9 Ibid., p. 167.
- 10 Chandler (1992), Pp. 204-05.
- 11 Ibid., p. 206.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 For more details on the border disputes with Thailand during the 1970s, see Rowley & Evans (1984), Pp. 113-121.
- 14 After Cambodia gained her independence, the most remarkable dispute between Thailand and Cambodia was over the ancient Khmer temple of Preah Vihear, which is located on the Thai-Cambodian border. In October 1959, Cambodia brought the case to the International Court of Justice, which in 1962, voted in favor of Cambodia, thereby placing the temple under Cambodian jurisdiction. The issue only re-emerged and still going on when Preah Vihear Temple was enlisted in the World Heritage Sites in July 2008; in protest of Cambodia's claim over the territory, hundreds of Thais troops confronted with their Cambodian counterparts in various sites along the border. Thus far, while talks have been held between the Cambodian and Thai commissions, the dispute has not been solved. For discussion of Thai conflicts with Cambodia during colonial time, see Tully (2002), *France on the Mekong*.
- 15 Chandler (1992), Pp. 219-220.
- 16 Leifer (1961-1962), p. 361.
- 17 Ibid., p. 120.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 See Nguyen-vo (1992), chapter 5.
- 20 Ibid., p. 221.
- 21 For the discussion of the PRK, see for instance, Evan Gottesman's *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge* and Margaret Slocumb's *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*.
- 22 Becker (1986), p. 439.
- 23 FUNCINPEC is the French acronym for "National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia."
- 24 See Lau Teik Soon (1982), Pp. 548-560
- 25 Gottesman (2003), p. 231.

26 Ibid.

27 Slocomb (2003), p. 231.

28 Gottesman, p. 232.

29 Ibid., p. 236. Esmeralda Luciolli, a Western medical worker, estimated the number at one million, which seemed excessively exaggerated. See Esmeralda Luciolli, *Le Mur de bambou: Le Cambodge après Pol Pot*.

30 See Nguyen-vo (1992), Pp. 7–8.

31 For further details, see Shawcross (1984), *The Quality of Mercy*, Pp. 88–92.

32 Ibid.

33 For the impacts of landmines on civilian Cambodian, see also Davies & Dunlop (1992), *War of the Mines*.

34 Gottesman (2003), p. 237.

Thailand: The Symbolic Center of the Theravada Buddhist World

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Introduction

The Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok is considered the most sacred temple in Thailand. The temple's sanctity is derived from its enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha, the nation's religious and political palladium, for which the temple is named. Chronicles explain that the Emerald Buddha was fashioned from the *Chakkavatti's* (Universal World Ruler) wish granting jewel, so that the image came to embody potent symbols of Buddhism and kingship through its form and medium. Its enshrinement in Bangkok symbolically marks the Temple of the Emerald Buddha as a Buddhist center, and its keeper, the King of Thailand, as the ultimate religious and political leader.

Prior to its enshrinement at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in 1784, the Emerald Buddha was described in chronicles as having traveled to important Buddhist centers throughout South and Southeast Asia. This paper focuses on the sacred geography that the Emerald Buddha has created through its movements, arguing that this geography, along with the royal patronage of the temple where it is enshrined, is an important religious and political tool for the self-promotion of Thai Kings and the promotion of Thailand as the sacred center of modern-day Theravada Buddhism.

Mapping the History, Significance and Movements of the Emerald Buddha

The importance of the Emerald Buddha image as a religious and political palladium is derived, in part, from descriptions of it in chronicles.¹ These chronicles include the *Ratanabimbavamsa*, *Jinakalamali*, and *Amarakatabuddharupanidana*.² It is important to note that these chronicles all have their origins in modern-day Thailand and Laos. While these chronicles and later commentaries would like the reader to believe that the Emerald Buddha has importance throughout the Theravada Buddhist world, it is only in Thailand and Laos that the icon has had any real religious and political impact.³

Overall, the chronicles vary slightly on details of the Emerald Buddha's travels, but they unanimously agree on matters of the icon's genesis.⁴ The chronicles explain that the crafting of the icon was intended to preserve the teachings of the Buddha after his *parinibbana* (final nirvana). With the help of the god Indra and the celestial architect and craftsman Vishnukamma, a jewel belonging to the Universal World Ruler was secured by the monk Nagasena in 44 BCE.⁵ On this same date, Vishnukamma carved the jewel into the likeness of the Buddha in the Deva heaven (heaven of celestial beings), and proceeded to descend to the ancient Buddhist capital of Pataliputra,

India, where the king prepared offerings to the image in the monastery of Asoka.⁶ It is here that the chronicles begin to diverge on matters of the Emerald Buddha's movements through important South and Southeast Asian cities. Generally, the chronicles agree that the image remained in India for over three hundred years until a civil war broke out in Pataliputra, and it was decided that the icon would be safer in Sri Lanka. The image was sent to Anuradhapura in 257 CE and housed in the royal temple of an unnamed king.⁷ After two hundred years in Sri Lanka, the image began its journey to Pagan, Burma in order to be protected by King Anawartha (r. 1044-1077)⁸ but, through a series of mishaps, landed in Angkor, Cambodia.⁹ After its arrival in Angkor, dates become vague and inconsistent among the different chronicles and are not mentioned again until the image's discovery in Chiang Rai in 1434. During this four-century lapse in dating, the Emerald Buddha traveled to the Siamese cities of Ayutthaya and Kampaeng Phet prior to its discovery in Chiang Rai. The chronicles go on to further explain that the image remained in Chiang Rai until 1468, when King Tilok (r. 1442-1487) of Chiang Mai begged for the image to be sent and enshrined in his city.¹⁰ The Emerald Buddha remained in Chiang Mai for eighty-four years, before it was moved to Luang Prabang and later to Vientiane in 1570.¹¹ The Emerald Buddha remained in Vientiane until 1778, when it was transported to the new Siamese capital, Thonburi, in 1782 and later to Bangkok in 1784, where it currently resides.¹² Descriptions of the Emerald Buddha's enshrinement in these cities not only trace its movements through space and time, but also map a sacred geography that is created through the image's travels.

The Emerald Buddha's movements to and from these specific cities were the direct result of political and religious instability. When a decline in practice and/or faith of a particular king and his kingdom was noticeable, the image was transported, either willingly or by force, to a new city. Here, the chronicles imply an intimate connection between Buddhist religiosity and political stability. A king was able to maintain political stability through his active worship and sponsorship of the Buddhist faith. In instances where he falters, political havoc ensues and the image is removed. In an example described in the Amarakatabuddharupanidana, King Senaraja¹³ of Angkor was unable to suppress his desires and fury,

leading him to murder his son's playmate, and thus provoking the gods to send a deluge wiping out the kingdom and its inhabitants.¹⁴ As a result, a monk removed the image from Angkor and the king of Ayutthaya claimed the image for himself. In an excerpt taken from the Amarakatabuddharupanidana, the author¹⁵ makes it clear that King Senaraja's faith was lost but that the king of Ayutthaya, who had greater merit, became the new and rightful keeper of the Emerald Buddha.

Then a venerable priest took away the Emerald Buddha in a junk and with the guardians of the statue went to the North. They arrived at a village in which place the image was deposited. At that time a king, Addidkaraja as he was called, who was reigning over Sri Ayutthaya, went to Indapatha Nagara. Having got the Emerald Buddha in his possession, he brought it to Sri Ayutthaya. The inhabitants of this town, like their king, were harboring an extreme faith and they made preparations for offerings of all sorts.¹⁶

These events described in the chronicles impart importance to the Emerald Buddha through its ability to validate a particular king by its willingness or unwillingness to be enshrined in a kingdom at a certain place and time. Agency is divided between the Emerald Buddha and the king who possess the image. If a king is able to prove his great merit and religiosity, the Emerald Buddha avails itself to the king in order for him to spread the *dhamma* (Buddha's teachings), and protect his position and kingdom. Consequently, the Emerald Buddha image has become a political and religious palladium sought out by kings to legitimate themselves and their rule.

With the absence of pre-modern accounts and descriptions of Thai history,¹⁷ it is tempting to rely on the Emerald Buddha chronicles as historical documents; however, the events described in the chronicles are not completely supported and reveal a body of literature that goes from a mythical to a more historical narrative. For example, the Emerald Buddha's travels to India, Sri Lanka, Burma and Cambodia cannot be substantiated by the archaeological record or by inscriptional evidence.¹⁸ Indeed, descriptions of the Emerald Buddha's origins and travels dating prior to the fifteenth century and outside of modern-day Thailand and Laos are not historical, and should be read as an effort to ascribe religious and political meaning to the Emerald Buddha.

Inclusion of Pataliputra, Anuradhapura, Pagan, and Angkor help to create a sacred geography for the image because they were important religious and political centers. This sacred geography is meant to impart symbolic meaning to the image so that whomever became the keeper of the image was able to legitimate themselves through its history and their possession of it. The Emerald Buddha's current enshrinement in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha implies the religious fortitude of the temple's keeper, the King of Thailand, and the importance of Bangkok as a religious center as it has become a part of the Emerald Buddha's sacred geography.

The importance of Bangkok as a religious center is implied by the chronicles, as it is the current home of the Emerald Buddha. Its arrival into Bangkok follows the pattern of power and legitimacy crafted by the author(s) of the Ratanabimbavamsa, Jinakalamali, and Amarakatabuddharupaniḍana. However, because the chronicles date to no earlier than the late fifteenth century and have had no impact beyond the borders of modern day Thailand and Laos, the importance of Bangkok as a sacred center may only be viable in these countries.

While there are disjunctions between historical events associated with the Emerald Buddha image and the events described in the chronicles, it is clear that the author(s) and users of the texts had fully intended for the image to be used as a tool for religious and political legitimization.¹⁹ The carefully crafted narrative makes sure to include both important religious centers such as Pataliputra, the site of the Third Council convened by King Asoka, and Anuradhapura, the site of the Fourth Council and the first time the Pali Tipitaka is documented textually. The texts also include important political centers, specifically kingdoms that were significant to the Southeast Asian region, such as Angkor and Pagan. In addition to these regionally important kingdoms, the chronicles also include a number of chief polities within modern day Thailand and Laos, grounding the image and its influence within a more localized geography and time period. As the geographical sphere of influence of the Emerald Buddha icon became more localized, the events described in the chronicles became more historically accurate, and thus more pertinent to its modern function as a national palladium.

The Emerald Buddha in Bangkok

Prior to its enshrinement in Bangkok, the Emerald Buddha was placed in Wat Phra Kaeow (Temple of the Emerald Buddha) in Vientiane, Laos.²⁰ In 1778 a general by the name of Thong Duong, who later became the first king of the Chakri dynasty, captured the Emerald Buddha from Vientiane and brought it to King Taksin (r.1767-1782) of Thonburi. The Thonburi period began and ended with King Taksin who was forcefully removed, in part, for his unorthodox interpretation of Buddhist kingship and perceived decline of religious merit. In following with descriptions in the chronicles, Taksin's lack of merit resulted in the loss of his political office and the removal of the Emerald Buddha from Thonburi. Taksin was replaced by his general, Thong Duong, who reclaimed the image for himself.

Upon claiming the throne, Thong Duong took the title of King Ramathibodi²¹ (posthumously referred to as Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok but generally referred to as King Rama I; r. 1782-1809) and moved his capital to Bangkok, where he immediately began construction of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to house the new capital's palladium. Construction of the temple began in 1782, and two years later the Emerald Buddha was enshrined in the *ubosot* (ordination hall).²² The Emerald Buddha, if we recall, was carved into the likeness of the Buddha from the Universal World Ruler's wish-fulfilling jewel, thereby imparting the image with potent royal and religious symbolism through its form and material. The temple, much like the Emerald Buddha, serves both a royal and religious function, as it is at once a dynastic chapel and a Buddhist temple.

Since its construction in 1782, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha has been generously supported by each successive Chakri king in the form of artistic renovations and conservation, architectural additions and the addition of *objets d'art*.²³ In its current state, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha includes an *ubosot*, image halls, reliquary mounds, out-door pavilions, belfries and libraries, all typical structures found in monastic architecture. The temple buildings, however, make up just one part of a collection of buildings found at the complex, which includes the Grand Palace, a royal pantheon dedicated to the Chakri dynasty, and a museum. This collection of royal and religious structures is not typical of Thai monastic architecture

nor is the lack of monastic spaces within the complex. Unlike most temples, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is not located within a monastery. Likewise, there are no permanent living quarters for monks in the complex. The lack of a monastic presence suggests that the temple functions primarily as a repository for the meritorious giving of Chakri kings in addition to serving as a commemorative space for the preservation of the Chakri dynasty and the Buddha's teachings.²⁴

The Temple of the Emerald Buddha as it stands today has been greatly altered by the subtraction and addition of buildings, monuments and *objets d'art* both religious and non-religious in subject. These additions by each Chakri king, presumably, reflect each individual king's taste and political agenda. However, certain buildings and decorative elements such as the *ubosot* and overall painting program of the temple space have remained unchanged. These unchanged details of the temple play a pivotal role in creating a cosmically charged space for the temple's main icon, the Emerald Buddha, while also designating the temple itself as a sacral center.

Enshrining the Emerald Buddha

Unlike Hindu temple complexes, such as Angkor Wat, Theravada Buddhist monastic architecture—specifically the Temple of the Emerald Buddha—do not make direct symbolic references to cosmogonic or cosmological planning.²⁵ Instead, Buddhist cosmology is expressed in the decoration of temple buildings, typically in the form of painted wall murals. This is suggested at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha where painted murals in the *ubosot*, which include the *Traiphum* (Three Worlds), *Jatakas* (Previous Life Stories), and Life Stories of the Buddha—coupled with the sculptural image of the Emerald Buddha—is meant to designate the temple in general, and the *ubosot* specifically, as a sacral center. A sacral center is a space where the Buddha is made present through his teachings, the *sangha* (monkhood), and his physical presence in the form of images or relics. Paintings of the Buddha's lives in the ordination hall are one such mechanism that creates a biography for the Buddha by making him physically and spiritually “present” in the space. Robert L. Brown has argued for such in his article “Narrative as Icon: The *Jataka* Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture.”

They [*Jataka* and Life stories] are there to indicate, to make “actual,” the Buddha through his life and history. They do this simply by being there, and perhaps are best seen as allowing the Buddha through his “history”: to participate with the monks and lay worshipers. The purpose is to make the Buddha's presence felt, his forms and teachings manifest.²⁶

The Buddha's physical presence in the *ubosot*, manifest in the green jewel icon, situates the temple as a sacral center as it is a place and a space where the Buddha is actualized. Paintings that are found directly behind and flanking the Emerald Buddha include images of the “Three Worlds”. In one particular painting, the Buddha is seen descending from the *Tavatimsa* heaven. What this suggests is that the Emerald Buddha, seated on his throne, with an image of the *Tavatimsa* heaven behind him is acting as an axis-mundi, connecting this world to that of heaven and thereby locating the *ubosot*, specifically, and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, generally, within the Buddhist cosmography. This relationship between the temple's *ubosot* and the Buddhist cosmos is further inferred by the Emerald Buddha's elaborate five-tiered throne, which is meant to symbolize the five peaks of Mt. Sumeru.²⁷ A mountainous landscape is created for the image's throne by arranging Buddha images in tiers ascending towards the Emerald Buddha. Royal five-tiered umbrellas are strategically located on each corner of the throne's five tiers further emphasizing the verticality of the Emerald Buddha's throne and the image's status above all other Buddha images both absent and present. All of these factors aide in the creation of an internal cosmology at the temple, one that does not rely on an external sacred axis. And, thus, further implies the sacrality and centrality of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to modern Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Laos.²⁸

Magnifying the World Axis

While it can be argued that all Buddhist monastic architecture designates a sacred space—one that is articulated by its decoration, architectural planning and/or enshrinement of holy objects—the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is unique in that it houses the Emerald Buddha. The mytho-history and travels associated with the Emerald Buddha allows the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok to exist on its own internal sacred axis because the Emerald Buddha is an

axis-mundi. As the chronicles state, and as history has indicated,²⁹ the Emerald Buddha's enshrinement in a particular location situates that place as a sacred center because it is the presence of the Emerald Buddha icon that marks the country, city or temple as an apex of Buddhist learning and living.³⁰ As described in the *Amarakatabuddharupanidana*:

Nagasena had through his supernatural knowledge a prescience of future events, and he made this predication: "This image of the Buddha is assuredly going to give to religion the most brilliant importance in five lands, that is Lankadvipa (Sri Lanka), Ramalakka (Cambodia), Dvaravati (central Thailand), Chieng Mai (northern Thailand) and Lan Chang (Laos)."³¹

The Emerald Buddha's symbolism as an axis-mundi is highlighted and magnified in the *ubosot* of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, where paintings and decorative and religious objects are used to create a well orchestrated visual program that has, for the most part, been present since the temple's conception. During the first reign King Rama I commissioned and had installed in the *ubosot* paintings of the Buddha's previous and historical life, paintings of the Buddhist cosmology, the icon's throne base and two seasonal outfits for the Emerald Buddha (one for summer and one for the rainy season).³² As previously discussed, inclusion of paintings depicting the *Jatakas* and the life stories brought the Emerald Buddha image to life, making him physically present in the temple space. Likewise, the inclusion of the Buddhist cosmology helped to directly associate the icon as an axis-mundi.

To further emphasize the Emerald Buddha's cosmological aspects, the two seasonal costumes associated the icon with natural and cosmic forces.³³ All of these efforts taken by Rama I were meant to magnify the Emerald Buddha's importance, and, by association, the king's own significance. The ritual changing of the two seasonal outfits were officiated by the king and symbolized his mediation between the physical world and the cosmos.³⁴ Additionally, the seasonal costumes visually manifested the royal nature of the icon as a *Buddha-Chakkavatti*. This association is made apparent by the rich materials used to fashion the costumes and the royal crowns and decorations that complete each outfit. This detail becomes significant in the third reign where a direct connection between the Buddha and Chakri kings is made.

Over time, each Chakri king has successively added to the visual program in the *ubosot* through the donation of Buddha images and decorative objects. Each individual king's contribution to the temple was inspired, in part, by the temple's need for reconstruction or conservation, the political or religious climate in Bangkok, and the pure enjoyment of adding to the beauty and religious significance of the complex. While Rama II (Phra Phutthaloetla; r. 1809-1824) was a patron of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, his major contributions to Thai architectural building took the form of domestic structures and city planning. This makes sense as the Chakri dynasty had, for the first time, an opportunity to focus on domestic and internal urban infrastructure building.³⁵ His son and successor, King Rama III (Phra Nangklao; r. 1824-1851) was the most active patron of the temple: major renovations were done and buildings were included during his reign.³⁶ His most notable additions to the *ubosot*, for the purposes of this paper, were the inclusion of the five-tiered throne, a third seasonal costume, and two large royal Buddha or *Buddha-Chakkavatti* images. The addition of the throne, as previously discussed, marked the *ubosot* as a sacral space as it represented Mt. Sumeru. The addition of a third seasonal costume gave the king another opportunity to have physical contact with the image, further linking his association with the icon.³⁷

Moreover, the two *Buddha-Chakkavatti* that flank the Emerald Buddha were named after the first and second Chakri kings.³⁸ The inclusion of these sculptures helped to further solidify the intimate relationship between the Chakri kings and the Emerald Buddha image by associating all three images to a particular event in the Buddha's life. The event represented by these types of images (*Buddha-Chakkavatti*) conveys a particular moment in the Buddha's life where he transformed himself into the Universal Ruler to subdue an unruly monarch.³⁹ The common iconography between all three sculptures suggests that they have a shared history, and that the enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha is not only a sign of the Chakri's religious merit in the present, but also a sign of the icon's shared karmic destiny with the Chakri kings.

In order to ensure that the karmic legacy of the Chakri dynasty is favorable, continued support of the Buddhist faith is necessary. While patronage of the

Temple of the Emerald Buddha is not the only form of support that Chakri kings provide, it is a very public display of their continued commitment to Buddhism.

In examining the patronage habits of the Chakri kings at the temple, certain patterns become clear. During the first three reigns, a concerted effort is made to create cosmically charged and symbolic spaces at the temple complex. This is made apparent by the aforementioned painting program in the *ubosot*, the Emerald Buddha's throne and its seasonal costumes. This is logical as the main purpose of a Buddhist temple is to provide a space for the worship, learning and dissemination of the Buddha's teachings: as the appearance of this place becomes more symbolic and cosmically charged, it is perceived to be increasingly effective in disseminating the Buddha's ideas.

By the fourth and fifth reigns, a well-programmed architectural and visual program was created at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, leaving Kings Rama IV (Mongkut; r. 1851-1868) and Rama V (Chulalongkorn; r. 1868-1910) with an altogether different agenda than their predecessors. During these reigns, efforts were focused on visually expanding the Emerald Buddha's, and by extension the king's, religious and political sphere of influence. These efforts were achieved through the colonization of regional religious symbols and icons such as a miniature model of Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Javanese Buddha images from Candi Plaosan. The stone replica of Angkor Wat was commissioned by King Mongkut, and finished by his son King Chulalongkorn. After its completion the model was installed outside of the Phra Mondop (library) at the temple complex. Its inclusion was intended to display Cambodia's vassal status to Thailand at the time. It was also during the fifth reign that Buddha images from Candi Plaosan were brought to the temple and again installed outside of the Phra Mondop.⁴⁰ The inclusion of Javanese Buddhas at the temple may be less a statement of political colonization and more an effort of beautifying the temple space, as Java was never a Thai vassal state. Nonetheless, the inclusion of the Candi Plaosan Buddhas highlights their subordinate status to the temple's main icon, the Emerald Buddha.

The inclusion of these and similar objects can be read as an effort to elevate the importance of the Emerald Buddha icon, the temple where it is enshrined, and Thailand as a religious center. Their placement outside

of the temple's most important building, the *ubosot*, suggests their inferior importance to the Emerald Buddha icon.⁴¹ Furthermore, their location outside of the library may further indicate or symbolize Thailand's self-perceived status as a nineteenth century center for Buddhist learning. To return to the Javanese Buddha images, there are a total of four directional Buddhas each with a different *mudra*. Their placement at the four corners of the Phra Mondop refer to the four cardinal directions making the library a centralized space, a center of Buddhist studies, if you will. By appropriating and exhibiting these symbols, one can argue that Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn were implying their political, religious and cultural authority over Cambodia and Indonesia, and the importance of Thailand as the new sacred center of Southeast Asia.⁴²

Patronage since the fourth and fifth reigns at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha can be characterized by an interest in reaffirming the king's support of the Buddhist *sangha* and maintaining the temple complex. During the sixth reign, King Vajiravudh (r.1910-1925) had turned the royal pantheon hall into a space dedicated to Chakri kings. Near life-size images of past Chakri kings were placed in the hall, and were intended to be commemorated in the same manner as Buddhist images found at the temple complex.⁴³ The inclusion of images of past and present Chakri kings, a tradition that has been maintained through to the present reign, makes a direct connection between kingship and Buddhism. As the chronicles suggest, the Chakri kings must continue to support the *sangha* or they will lose their authority to rule and presumably their ability to keep the Emerald Buddha. Their images, located in the Chakri image hall, physically place them at the temple at all times. The images can be read as proxies worshipping the Emerald Buddha and looking after the temple complex on their behalf. Furthermore, the public display of these images demonstrates the kings' meritorious giving and patronage of the temple to worshippers and visitors. The Chakri kings continued patronage through the donation of funds for restoration and conservation and through the donation of objects are further signs of their meritorious giving and continued support of the Buddhist *sangha*. The most recent projects include large-scale restoration and conservation of temple buildings and decorations under Kings Rama VII (Prajadhipok; r. 1925-1935) and Rama IX (Bhumibol

Adulyadej; r. 1946-present) who readied the temple for the country's 150th and bicentennial celebrations, respectively.⁴⁴

Conclusion

As keepers of the Emerald Buddha, Thai kings must demonstrate that they have greater merit and moral authority than others in order to maintain both their right to rule and possession of the Emerald Buddha. Continued patronage of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha by Chakri kings has become a very public means of demonstrating their moral authority.⁴⁵ As discussed, patronage in the form of temple restoration, conservation and donation of buildings and images is a visual display of their support of the *sangha*. Indeed, visitors to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha are intended to be inspired by the generosity and devotion of the kings to Buddhism. Using the Chakri kings as their role models, Thai Buddhist practitioners should follow in their footsteps and support the *sangha* according to their means. Active support of the *sangha* by all Thais ensures that the Emerald Buddha continues to be enshrined in Bangkok.

The importance of the Emerald Buddha as a palladium to the nation is not lost to most Thais. Its significance is seen in the Chakri kings' and court's continued patronage of the temple where the image is enshrined, and in its active worship by the Thai people. Today, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha has become the top destination for visitors, both local and foreign, traveling to Bangkok. This is no doubt the result of the king's active patronage of the temple and its containment of beautiful art and architecture including the Emerald Buddha. The casual visitor or tourist is most likely unknowing of the significance of the Emerald Buddha and the sacred geography that it has created through its travels throughout important Buddhist centers; however, by traveling to the temple they continue to mark the temple as a place of pilgrimage, religious or otherwise.

As the various chronicles have suggested, the king who possess the favor of the Emerald Buddha can claim his superior religious and political authority to all others. The enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok for over two centuries has been used by the Chakri kings to demonstrate their moral rectitude and the importance

of Thailand as a sacred center of modern-day Theravada Buddhism. Furthermore, unlike other Theravada Buddhist temples, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is unique in that it does not need to be a part of an external sacred axis because of its very enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha, and the internal cosmology that has been created around and for the icon. The visual program orchestrated by the Chakri kings is a testament to their religious and political savvy, which will without a doubt ensure the Emerald Buddha's enshrinement in Bangkok for years to come.

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End Notes

¹ There exist a number of chronicles, which describe the Emerald Buddha. Scholars including Frank Reynolds believe there was a chronicle originally written in Pali that is no longer extant, but we have later versions in Thai, Khmer, Lao, Burmese and English.

² Frank Reynolds, George Coedes, Hiram Woodward and Robert Lingat notes that *Ratanabimbavamsa* was probably written during the Sukhothai period sometime around 1450 while the chapter relating to the Emerald Buddha in the *Jinakalamali* was written in Chiangmai in the first half of the sixteenth century. The *Amarakatabuddharupanidana* was written some time in second half of the sixteenth century in Vientiane.

³ Nowhere in the Indian, Sinhalese and Angkorian annals is the Emerald Buddha mentioned. Instead, accounts of the Emerald Buddha are mentioned in the Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, Ratanakosin and the Vientiane chronicles.

⁴ Frank E. Reynolds, "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Some Aspects of Buddhist Symbolism And Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (ANIMA books, 1978), 176-178.

⁵ The inclusion of Indra in the chronicles is important because the god, described and depicted with green colored skin, carrying a *vajra* (thunderbolt) and riding on his elephant mount, is associated with bringing forth rain. The importance of rain to rulership is evident in the *Vessantara Jataka*, which retells the last of Shakyamuni's previous births before becoming the Buddha. The story explains that a prince by the name of *Vessantara* sought to perfect the virtue of giving. Along with giving away his own worldly possessions, he gave away his kingdom's rain producing white elephant, which led to the prince's expulsion and eventual asceticism. Here the story makes an explicit link between rain and rulership.

⁶ Karen Schur Narula, *Voyage of the Emerald Buddha* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7. In addition to: Camille Notton, trans., *The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Press, 1931), 16-18.

⁷ Camille Notton, trans., *The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok: The Bangkok Times Press, 1931), 21. The exclusion of King Gathabhaga (r. 254-267 CE), the monarch whose reign dates coincide with the 257 CE date mentioned, from the Chronicles may indicate his unimportance to Theravada Buddhist history. What is mentioned is that the image was deposited in the Meghagiri temple.

⁸ It is interesting to note that there is a six hundred year lapse between when the Emerald Buddha image is purported to have arrived in Pagan and the king with whom the image is associated. Most likely, this association is due to the importance of King Anawartha's fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka and subsequent reformation of the Pagan *sangha*.

⁹ The chronicles explain that King Anawartha, through his own action, flew to Sri Lanka and had the Emerald Buddha along with a copy of the *Tipitaka* (Pali canon) placed in a boat bound for Pagan; however, the boat went astray and landed in Angkor. After some dispute with the Angkorian king, it was decided that both the Emerald Buddha image and the *Tipitaka* would be returned to King Anawartha; however, upon departure from Cambodia King Anawartha forgot the Emerald Buddha image and so it remained in Angkor Thom.

¹⁰ The Emerald Buddha was enshrined in Wat Chedi Luang in 1481.

¹¹ In 1522 King Jethavansaraja's father died. His father was the king of Luang Prabang and it was decided that King Jethavansaraja would leave Chiang Mai and become king of Luang Prabang. Upon his departure he took with him the Emerald Buddha image.

¹² Prior to 1939, Thailand was referred to as Siam and its people the Siamese. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term Siam and Siamese when talking about events in history that took place prior to 1939.

¹³ It is unclear when King Senraja ruled Angkor as the name "Senraja" does not correspond to any official titles or posthumous names used by Angkorian kings.

¹⁴ The chronicle explains that King Senaraja's son had a pet fly which he loved and cared for. One day the king's son was playing with a friend who accidentally killed the fly, which deeply upset his son causing him great pain. Upon hearing the news the king became enraged and had his son's playmate drowned in a lake. The underlying Buddhist message, here, is that neither the King nor his son were able to suppress their desires and attachment to the material world.

¹⁵ The author of this text is unknown; however, several scholars including Frank Reynolds, George Coedes and Robert Lingat have argued that the author was most likely from Vientiane.

¹⁶ Notton, 27.

¹⁷ The devastating defeat of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767 led to the burning and sacking of the capital city, which also resulted in the loss of historical documents, religious texts and other valuable cultural materials.

¹⁸ There exists an early Khmer inscription dating to the eleventh century that states that a holy stone was worshipped in Cambodia during the reign of Suryavarmen I (r. 1001-1050); however, there is no conclusive evidence at the moment to confirm that the Cambodian holy stone correlates to the Emerald Buddha. Earliest confirmation of the Emerald Buddha's possession is dated to the rule of King Tilok of Lannathai (r. 1442-1487), who brought it from Chiang Rai to Chiang Mai in 1468. Stylistic characteristics of the image such as its rounded body and fleshy torso, along with its heart-shaped face suggests that it is a late fifteenth century Chiang Saen object.

¹⁹ The original author or authors of the Emerald Buddha Chronicles is unknown.

²⁰ The title of "Wat Phra Kaeow," which translates to the "Temple of the Jeweled Buddha" is used in both Laos and in Thailand to refer to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha temple in Vientiane continues to attract practitioners who go there to worship the empty throne where the Emerald Buddha was once enshrined.

²¹ The title of Ramathibodhi is a direct reference to the first king of the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767). At this juncture of time, the glory days of the former Thai capital was a desired ideal, one that was replicated in the architectural building of Bangkok's government and royal structures.

²² The *ubosot* is the most important building in a Buddhist temple as it's a space dedicated to the ordination of new monks. The *ubosot* at the Temple of the Emerald was used exclusively for the ordination of princes and kings into the monkhood. The current king, King Bhumibol, and his son the crown prince were both ordained at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

²³ Under the sponsorship of King Rama III (r. 1824-1851), the Temple of the Emerald Buddha was completely restored because of fire and decay in order to make it presentable for the fiftieth year anniversary of the Chakri dynasty. The temple continues, up to the present, to be renovated every fifty years.

²⁴ Within the context of Buddhism, merit is the product of rightful action and thought. The collection of merit throughout one's lifetime determines the outcome of an individual's karmic destiny. Merit can be collected in a number of ways one of which is in the form of alms giving to the monkhood.

²⁵ Many art historians including Betty Gosling and Daigoro Chihara have argued that the architectural plan of Theravada Buddhist monasteries lack the same cosmological symbolism seen in Hindu temples, which are organized to represent a microcosm of the universe. See Betty Gosling, *A Chronology of Religious Architecture at Sukhothai, Late Thirteenth to Early Fifteenth Century*, (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies. Reprinted, Chiang Mai: Silkwood Books, 1998), and Daigoro Chihara, *Hindu-Buddhist Architecture in Southeast Asia*, (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1996).

²⁶ Robert L. Brown, "The Jataka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Tradition of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 73.

²⁷ Mt. Sumeru is located at the center of the celestial and terrestrial world.

²⁸ There is still great contention in Thailand and Laos over the Emerald Buddha. Many in Laos have argued that the Emerald Buddha was stolen by the Thais.

²⁹ The chronicles have made it very clear that the Emerald Buddha's presence in a particular place marks it as a center of Buddhism. Take for example the inclusion of India and Sri Lanka. India, the home of the Buddha and of Buddhism, was the first center of the faith and upon its decline Buddhism became centered in Sri Lanka. Later and more historically accurate accounts of the Emerald Buddha in Thailand and Laos can also be interpreted as markings of Buddhist centers as proper Buddhist kingship in Southeast Asia was almost always followed by a reformation of the *sangha*. This type of reform was seen in Pagan under King Anawartha, King Tilok of Lanna and later King Mongkut of the Ratanakosin sought to purify Buddhism during their rule in order to claim that under their kingship the purest and truest form of the *dharmma* was being practiced. King Tilok's Buddhist reform was enacted at the time of his possession of the Emerald Buddha; this is substantiated by both the chronicles concerning the Emerald Buddha and the Chiang Mai chronicles.

³⁰ The perceived apogee of Buddhist learning and living by the enshrinement of the Emerald Buddha in a particular location is the result of the icon's importance to the legitimization of kings in mainland Southeast Asia.

³¹ Notton, 16

³² Frank Reynolds notes that the Emerald Buddha was outfitted with seasonal costumes as early as the mid fifteenth century when it was enshrined in Chiang Mai.

³³ Brahmanic ceremonies and rituals adopted by Thai kings vest them with the powers of regulating the seasons, and with agricultural fertility and productivity. The Chakri king's changing of the Emerald Buddha's seasonal costumes represents the syncretism of this particular Brahmanical ritual and Buddhism in Thailand.

³⁴ Traditionally, it had been the king who officiates the ritual changing of the seasonal costumes of the Emerald Buddha; however, recently the HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn and his sister HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn have officiated the changing of the costumes when their father, HM King Bhumipol Adulyadej, was unable to attend the ceremonies.

³⁵ During the first reign, much effort was placed on erecting state buildings and protecting the new capital from ever present threats from the Burmese.

³⁶ His activities were the result of a fire that broke out at the temple and the fiftieth year anniversary of the Chakri dynasty.

³⁷ During the changing of the robes, the king removes the Emerald Buddha's existing costume and lustrates it with holy water before placing a new costume on the image.

³⁸ Maurizio Peleggi has argued that the two royal Buddhas were intended to be "portraits" of Kings Rama I and II. See Maurizio Peleggi, *The Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

³⁹ Reynolds, 183; also, Alexander B. Griswold, "Dated Buddha Images of Northern Siam," *Artibus Asiae*, Supplement 16 (1957).

⁴⁰ The Candi Plaosan Buddha images currently located outside of the Phra Mondop are copies of the originals, which are now displayed in the museum. It should also be noted that the *History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha* guidebook, written by M.C. Subhadradi Diskul, claims that the Buddha images are from Borobudur; however, stylistic analysis confirms that the Buddha images outside of the Phra Mondop are from Candi Plaosan.

⁴¹ The *ubosot* is the heart of any Buddhist temple, and is considered by Buddhists to be the most important structure in a monastic complex. It is the place where monks are ordained. Without the proper ordination the faith cannot exist because it is the *sangha* that perpetuates the teachings of the Buddha and provides a field of merit for lay worshippers to participate in the religion.

⁴² Angkor Wat and Candi Plaosan are important religious monuments, and represent important religious and political centers in the Southeast Asian region.

⁴³ The Chakri image hall is opened twice a year to the public, once during the New Year (Songkran) and again during Chakri day. During the hall's opening, visitors prostrate in front of the images and usually pray in their presence.

⁴⁴ At this juncture of my research I have found little information regarding King Rama VIII's (Ananda Mahidol; r. 1935-1946) role at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. This is most likely the result of the 1932 coup d'état, which abolished absolute monarchy in Thailand, the king's youth, and his residence in Switzerland.

⁴⁵ The Temple of the Emerald Buddha was once only accessible by the royal family, members of the court, political dignitaries and Buddhist monks. The temple has been open to the general public since the 1960s.

Interrogating National Identity

Ethnicity, Language and History in K.S. Maniam's *The Return*
and Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Joss and Gold*

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Introduction

In this paper, I examine how two Malaysian authors, ethnically Chinese Shirley Geok-lin Lim and ethnically Indian K.S. Maniam, challenge the Malay identity that the government has crafted and presented as the national identity for all Malaysians. In their novels in English *Joss & Gold* (2001) and *The Return* (1981) respectively, Lim and Maniam interrogate this construct through the lenses of ethnicity, history and language. In critiquing the government's troubling construction of a monoethnic and monolingual national identity, Lim and Maniam present both the alienation and the unstable existences of ethnic minorities that are purposely excluded from the national identity by the Malay nationalist culture.

Malaya attained independence from Britain on the 31st of August 1957. "Malaysia" came into existence after the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman convinced Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, three British crown colonies, to join Malaya in a federal union. Singapore would later leave the union on the 9th of August 1965. When the British left Malaya, they transferred political power to the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), a right-wing political party that continues to be a powerful advocate of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy). The

organization believes that the Malay ethnic majority are the rightful citizens of Malaysia and deserve to be given special political, economic and educational privileges. Then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Malay himself, created this concept as well as the practice of giving special privileges to Malays. He also coined the term *bumiputera* (sons/princes of the soil) to refer to Malays. Both the term and practice came into official use in 1965 and are still in existence today. Two years later, the predominantly Malay government established Malay as the national language of the country. In 1970, the government made Islam the state religion. Today, all Malays are required by law to profess Islam as their faith or lose their status as *bumiputera*¹. By making special allowances for Malays based on their status as *bumiputera* and institutionalizing Malay as the national language and Islam as the state religion, the government constructed a national identity that was Malaysian in name, but Malay in spirit. Both *Joss and Gold* and *The Return* are two decades apart but their relevance to the recent political and social turmoil in Malaysia is undeniable. They speak to a burgeoning dissatisfaction among Malaysian ethnic minorities who have become far less willing to tolerate a government and national identity that denies them the full privileges of their citizenship.

The Politics of Literary Development in Malaysia

It is difficult to discuss any form of Malaysian literature in English without first examining how Malaysia's linguistic and literary spaces were shaped by the government's nation-building process after the end of colonization. The years between 1969 and 1972 marked the government's step-by-step implementation of Malay as the national language in multiethnic and multilingual Malaysia. This is evident in Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman's pronouncement in 1969: "It is only right that as a developing nation we should want to have a language of our own. If the national language is not introduced our country will be devoid of a unified character and personality – as I could put it, a nation without a soul and without a life."² In 1971, the Constitutional Amendment Act was passed, which made it illegal to question the status of the national language as provided for in Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution.³ By passing this act, the government codified the supremacy of one ethnic group, one history and one language above all others.

The government's linguistic policies influenced how literature was and is perceived in Malaysia. Professor Ismail Hussein, who is frequently called the Father of Malay Literature, was one of the foremost voices in the 1960s and 1970s on the role of Malay literature in unifying the nation. In 1973, he said in a speech that Malay had to be the national literature of Malaysia because: Malay can be understood by all the citizens; Malay is the *bahasa bumiputera* (language of the indigenous people); Malay has a long literary tradition, and finally, literatures in Chinese, Tamil [spoken by South Indians], or English are foreign literatures because they are written in non-indigenous languages.⁴ Hussein had no qualms about sharing his particular feelings on literature produced in Chinese and Tamil. He alluded to the themes of exile, uncertainty, loneliness and a lack of belonging in early Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Tamil literature. The word Hussein used to describe literature created in minority mother tongues was "*merbahaya*," which means dangerous. He wrote:

"This literature is 'Aimless Literature' and literature of this character is extremely dangerous to be made the basis for the new national culture which requires the individual to have an unshaken confidence in the future of the nation."⁵

Perhaps Hussein chose to ignore the possibility that it was difficult for ethnic minorities in Malaysia to have an "unshaken confidence" in Malaysia's future when they were being confronted by legislation and state propaganda that undermined and called into question their very position as Malaysians.

Had he been alive today, Hussein would most certainly call Shirley Lim's *Joss and Gold* and K.S. Maniam's *The Return* "*merbahaya*" because fifty years into Malaysia's independence, Lim and Maniam do not display the confidence in Malaysia's future that Hussein demanded. Ironically, Malaysia's "multicultural promise"⁶ is what is so readily featured in promotional tourism brochures whenever the government launches a campaign to boost tourism. However, it is this very "multicultural promise" that the government is erasing with its construction of a uniformly Malay national identity. With the end of British imperialism in Malaysia in 1957, the predominantly Malay government has systematically replaced one hegemony with another.

Lim and Maniam tease out the nuances of alienation and instability that the ethnic minorities in their novels face; these authors do so by interrogating the government's construction of the national identity through the lenses of ethnicity, history and language, three categories that signify difference in Malaysia. In "Becoming Nations: Nigeria, Malaysia," the author writes:

"... [A]lthough ethnic minorities in Malaysia know that they are legal citizens of the country but are treated as something else, they continue to act in their daily lives as if they do not know, as if it is somehow 'anti-Malay' or 'unpatriotic' to point out that the playing field is tilted against them by virtue of their race."⁷

However, Lim's *Joss and Gold* and Maniam's *The Return* present ethnic minorities that do not pretend to be oblivious to this unjust treatment.

Ethnicity

If the concept of special privileges for Malays is not obvious enough, the official use of the term "non-Malay" and the use of "nons" in the Malaysian-English lexicon to describe anyone who is not ethnically Malay reveal that ethnicity is the key signifier of difference in Malaysia. In this section of the paper, I explore Lim's

and Maniam's examination of ethnicity as a marker of difference in Malaysia.

Lim's *Joss and Gold* is situated for the most part in Malaysia and Singapore, spanning the 1960s to the 1990s. It is told from the perspective of Li An, a young Chinese Malaysian who teaches Anglophone literature at a Malaysian university. The novel chronicles Li An's life as she navigates first singlehood, married life and then single motherhood against the backdrop of a politically shifting Malaysia. The first section of the novel titled "Crossing" centers upon the May 13th riots that erupted in 1969 between Chinese and Malays. Lim does not thrust us immediately into the riots but intricately patches together the rumblings of ethnic unrest in Malaysia. Since the novel is told from the perspective of a Chinese protagonist, we get a glimpse of the mental and emotional anguish that Li An experiences in the face of a government that has created a national identity where only a Malay is an authentic Malaysian. The buds of Lim's interrogation begin to surface somewhat gingerly. They first emerge through one of Li An's best friends, Gina. The Chinese Gina advises her unmarried friends at the beginning of the novel, "Everyone should marry Malay, because that's the future of the country."⁸ To Gina, the only way to succeed in post independence Malaysia is to align one's self with the one ethnicity that the government validates.

Gina's cheeky remark is but the beginning of Lim's portrayal of the Malay political culture's definition of what makes a Malaysian. The reader continues to see the escalation of ethnicity-based politics from Li An's perspective. Her early observations are marked by denial and a desire to envelop herself in obliviousness amidst a Malaysia systematically altered into the land of the Malays:

[Li An] seldom read the new paper; it was too political, and it published daily editorials demanding special rights for Malays. Reading it made her feel she was in danger of attack in an alien country, and she refused to buy it. If enough Malaysians refused to buy the new paper, she hoped, it would simply stop publishing.⁹

Li An's naiveté is laughable, yet it belies an incredulity at the suggestion that only by being a Malay was one a valid Malaysian. Lim juxtaposes Li An's childlike hope that the new paper would simply go away with the ominous feeling that "she was in danger

of attack in an alien country." Indeed, Li An's premonition prefaces the May 13th riots where the Chinese become the targets of an ethnic pogrom. Li An's perception that she is in this other country is mirrored by Lim's own poignant response in a personal interview with me:

The generation that came into maturity after *Merdeka* (Independence) thinking they were going to inherit the Malaysian world and turned around and discovered that they were disenfranchised and these are, of course, the non-Bumis [slang for non-Bumiputeras or non-Malays]. There is immense loss and confusion and sadness. It's such a loss; it's such a pain that you know this country you grew up in and which you deeply, deeply love could be this other country, this other country that it is now.¹⁰

Li An's denial is temporary, especially after the occasional virulent editorial launched against the Chinese in Malaysia becomes a regular feature in the media. This is revealed in Li An's reaction to these bitter verbal assaults when she next comes across a later edition of the same paper. Li An thinks to herself:

It was the usual call for unity against a common enemy. The elections must change nothing, the editorial said, unless it was for the benefit of the real people, the *ra'ayat*. The *ra'ayat* must assert their power in whatever way necessary. Let the enemy be aware of pushing the people too far.¹¹

Her familiarity with this invective and the jadedness of her response are evident in her description of the editorial as "the usual call." Li An's fear of being attacked in an "alien country" is linguistically realized when non-Malays, and Chinese in particular, are referred to as the "common enemy" in the newspaper. The largely Malay government backs this propaganda that draws a clear dichotomy between the "enemy" and the "real people" or "*ra'ayat*" (citizenry). The use of the Malay word "*ra'ayat*" reminds us that there is no ambiguity at all about who the "real people" are. According to the government, the "real people" are Malays. Li An's angry perplexity at the idea that Malays are the only real Malaysians is reflected in the lines, "I'm confused. Are the Chinese not true Malaysians? Is the problem that we are not Malays? Maybe Gina was right after all. Maybe everyone should marry Malay. Then we'll all be one people."¹² As baffled as Li An is, she comes to the understanding that the national identity that the government has constructed is based on excluding non-Malay ethnicities.

The status of the non-Malay, and particularly the Chinese as exile, reveals itself in a conversation between Li An and the staunch Malay nationalist Abdullah after the May 13th riots. Abdullah tells Li An, “I told you the Chinese cannot push us too far. This is our country. If they ask for trouble, they get it.”¹³ Li An then quietly thinks to herself: “She had known, and she hadn’t known. Abdullah, she knew now was telling her his truth. We/ Our country. They/ No country.”¹⁴ Abdullah takes his linguistic cues from the Malay political culture. He claims sole ownership of Malaysia with the phrase “our country.” Although Li An recognizes this to be “his truth” and not the truth, she cannot help but begin to buy into Abdullah’s perspective. Not only is Li An seen as an exile by the nationalist Abdullah, she begins to internalize his perception of her. Li An starts to identify herself as an exiled figure within Malaysia when she connects the words “[t]hey” and “[n]o country” to herself. She begins to speak herself into exile.

Lim portrays how the government’s construction of a national identity that privileges Malays poisons the interactions between different ethnic groups and firmly entrenches the categories as well as the boundaries of ethnicity in Malaysia. When Abdullah discusses interracial marriages in Malaysia with Li An, he cautions

“(t)o be husband and wife must share same religion, same race, same history. Malay and Chinese also cannot mix, like oil and water. Malays have many *adat*, Islam also have *shariat*. All teach good action. Chinese have no *adat*, they eat pork, they like gamble, make money.”¹⁵

Abdullah uses the imperative “must” to forewarn Li An that there is no flexibility in his argument. To Abdullah, the behavior of the Chinese marks them as unclean and lacking in tradition, unlike the Malays who have *shariat* (Islamic jurisprudence) to govern their lives and a rich legacy of *adat* (customs). The ease and speed with which Abdullah reels off this litany of reasons to explain the incompatibility of Chinese and Malays suggests that he did not develop these ideas on his own. He does not carefully deliberate over these thoughts or debate them with Li An. Perhaps he has learned these reasons by rote from governmental propaganda that elevates Malay traditions and customs above that of other ethnic groups. In my conversation

with Lim, she spoke of the undercurrents of sexual tension between Li An and Abdullah. She said

“I tried to intimate, although not too strongly, had Li An been Malay, he might have fallen in love with her. You know that there was a certain affection that was a possibility, but of course it couldn’t be a possibility because someone like Abdullah could never cross the boundaries of ethnicity and language.”¹⁶

Abdullah’s reaction to relationships that cross these boundaries reflect a fear of blurring the lines of ethnicity that delineate for the government, who is Malaysian and who is not. There is no room for ambiguity in Abdullah’s Malaysia. Even a relationship between non-Malays from different ethnic groups is not viable. Early in the novel, Li An is excited by the prospect of her Chinese friend Gina’s romance with the Punjabi Paroo. Li An sees this romance as a means of subversion, as a way of creating ethnically uncategorizable Malaysians. Lim writes:

“[Li An] thought she now could imagine Gina as Paroo’s wife. As teachers, Gina and Paroo would serve as models of a new kind of Malaysian...She would have light-brown children who look both and neither Indian and Chinese, the new Malaysians.”¹⁷

Yet, Li An’s hope for a new Malaysian, untainted by an ethnic label, is dashed when Gina and Paroo decide to take their lives rather than live as an interracial couple in Malaysia. Gina dies while Paroo is briefly hospitalized before settling down to marry a fellow Punjabi. However, it is Li An herself who will produce an uncategorizable child through her extramarital affair with the American Chester, a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia.

Like Lim’s novel, the child comes out of the fateful May Thirteenth Riots. Li An and Chester’s child is conceived during the apogee of violence between Chinese and Malays during the May Thirteenth Riots and marks the moment when Li An is most uncertain about her position as a Chinese Malaysian. In fact, her daughter Su Yin prompts Li An’s exit out of Malaysia. Li An decides to raise the uncategorizable Su Yin in Singapore. With the failure of the Gina-Paroo relationship and Li An’s decision to raise Su Yin as a Singaporean, the potential for these new types of Malaysians is erased. With this pessimistic ending to the novel, Lim illustrates that in a country where the

government builds a national identity upon only one ethnicity, ambiguous ethnic identities are even more unlikely to survive than established ethnic minorities like the Chinese and Indians. Furthermore, Li An's decision to move to Singapore demonstrates how alienation from the government's construction of the national identity can lead to an exodus of ethnic minorities out of Malaysia. In such a scenario, the government's creation of an exclusionary national identity becomes a 'bloodless' form of ethnic cleansing. In our conversation, Lim confirmed the pivotal role ethnicity has in her novel. "I think *Joss and Gold* came out of May 13th."⁸ It is no surprise that Lim suggests that her novel was birthed by the most violent ethnic conflict that Malaysia has ever seen, since she places ethnicity at the very core of her novel and directs all activity around it.

In this respect, K.S. Maniam's *The Return* cannot possibly be any further from Lim's *Joss and Gold*. This is because, at first glance, Maniam appears to shy away from the issue of ethnicity in Malaysia. *The Return* follows the tumultuous lives of three generations of Tamil Indians settled in a rubber plantation in the town of Bedong in Malaysia and is told in the first person from the vantage point of the protagonist, Ravi, a member of the youngest generation in the novel. Like Lim's novel, *The Return* is set against the backdrop of a rapidly transforming Malaysia. In "Ralph Ellison and K.S. Maniam: Ethnicity in America and Malaysia, Two Kinds of Invisibility," Tang Soo Ping criticizes Maniam for solely following the lives of this Indian family in Bedong without incorporating the perspectives of other ethnic groups in Malaysia. Tang calls the narrative "inward-looking" and gives the novel the back-handed compliment that despite this one failing, it is "successful on its own terms."⁹ Perhaps aware of similar criticisms that were being leveled against him, Maniam responds in his essay "The Malaysian Novelist: Detachment or Spiritual Transcendence:"

The Return, to take the novel which confines itself to a restricted thematic concern, refers the reader to Malaysian problems and conflicts through *omission rather than inclusion* [emphasis added].²⁰

Maniam acknowledges that he omits rather than includes in order to "refer the reader to Malaysian problems and conflicts." His omissions are tools through which he illuminates the government's problematic construction of a national identity that

alienates ethnic minorities like Indians. While Lim firmly steers the reader's attention to the isolation and exclusion of the Chinese in her novel, Maniam leaves the reader with the particularly difficult task of uncovering precisely what he excludes in order to reveal the underlying tumult beneath a society that is frequently lauded for its peacefulness.

For any reader who is familiar with the diverse ethnic landscape of Malaysia, *The Return*'s monoethnic cast of characters may appear to be a mistake or an act of insularity. Unlike Lim's *Joss and Gold*, we do not hear from a range of ethnicities. For the most part in *The Return*, we hear from an Indian cast of characters; the only substantial non-Indian character being Ravi's British teacher, Miss Nancy. Occasionally, we get a glimmer of other ethnic groups in Malaysia through a few of Ravi's playmates.

This omission of other ethnic groups is both intentional and striking on Maniam's part for it effectively conveys how alienated the Indian community in this town of Bedong is from the larger Malaysian society, and how unstable their existence is in Malaysia. While Lim draws upon the May 13th riots to portray the alienation of the Chinese community in Malaysia, Maniam presents the Bedong ethnic enclave as a powerful sign of the Indian community's exile within Malaysia. The absence of the physical and ideological conflicts between ethnic groups in *The Return* that are present in Lim's novel reflect a community that is separate unto itself, a part of Malaysia, yet apart from Malaysia. Rather than showing an ethnic minority at odds with Malays like Lim does with Li An and Abdullah, Maniam portrays a community that functions as if it were an independent country within Malaysia:

These festivals, together with Thaipusam and Ponggal, created a special country for us. We were inhabitants of an invisible landscape tenuously brought into prominence by the lights, mango leaves strung out over the doorways, the pilgrimages to Sri Subramanya temple in Sungai Petani on Thaipusam day, the painting of the bull horns the day after Ponggal and the many taboos that covered our daily lives.²¹

Nostalgically looking back on his childhood, Ravi describes how his community celebrated the South Indian-Hindu festivals of Thaipusam and Ponggal. Ravi claims that these festivals carve out a specific space for

the Bedong Indians in Malaysia. There is a need to outline a space for themselves in the face of a government that has pushed out non-Malays in its creation of the national identity. This space is conveyed by Maniam's phrase "a special country for us," which leaves the reader imagining an invisible border around the area of Bedong.

Maniam never tells us that he is presenting an ethnic enclave but we cannot miss it. A corollary of living within an enclave is the building of a society with a very distinct hierarchy of its own. At the top of this social ladder are the characters of Menon and his wife. In fact, these two are rarely called by their names. Instead, they are referred to as "Ayah" and "Amah" throughout the novel. These terms are honorifics that have been conferred upon them because of their caste. These are the hints that Maniam gives to the reader that the Bedong community lives segregated from the rest of the country. The hierarchy within the Bedong community becomes even more evident when Ravi begins attending the same English school as Ayah's son, and Ravi starts to outstrip him in his studies. As the son of the man who washes Ayah's clothes, he should not be outdoing Ayah's child, who is of a higher caste. However, in doing so, Ravi transgresses the caste laws that the Bedong Indian community lives by. Ravi himself understands that there is a hierarchy that must be observed in his "special country" when he receives a chiding from Ayah for his overreaching ways. Ravi recalls, "I stood, as had been dictated by the social laws of the community, waiting for him to dismiss me."²² Ravi's phrasing is particularly significant because he does not say "this community." Ravi uses the article "the" because that particular community is the only community he has known his entire life. To him, the Bedong Indian community is *the* community. Despite being born in Malaysia, he remains somewhat alienated from the rest of Malaysia.

Ravi's transgression prefaces that of his father, Naina, who decides to open a laundry service outside this ethnic enclave of Bedong. Unfortunately, Naina's desire to do well materially in Malaysia and to step out of this enclave is fraught with difficulty. Naina ultimately meets with failure. Upon Ravi's return from completing his teaching degree in England, his brother informs him that their father "has given up everything."²³ Faced with financial insolvency, Naina loses every laundromat that he has. His brother's words

are particularly ironic because when Malaysia achieves independence, Ravi optimistically says, "Possession wasn't exclusive anymore: it was everyone's prerogative."²⁴ Unfortunately, his brother's "everything" powerfully deflates his use of the word "everyon[e]." Success in Malaysia is not for everyone, especially not for the Bedong Indian Naina.

The reader never quite understands why Naina's business fails. Since our eye into this world, Ravi, is abroad during this period, we gain little insight into the reasons behind Naina's failure. Once again, we come to an omission on Maniam's part. What we do know is that Naina fails once he leaves the enclave. Even Ayah, who disapproves of Naina's decision, like a benevolent liege, offers to give him a position laundering clothes at the hospital that Ayah runs when he sees Naina's business failure and mental degeneration. Ayah says to Ravi, "You're an educated young man. Advise your father. I'm ready to give him back his job."²⁵ Implicit in the phrase, "Advise your father" is Ayah's belief that Naina can only succeed within the borders of Bedong and that Ravi should be reiterating this belief to his father. Outside of the Indian country that this community has created for itself, Naina is unable to survive, despite wanting to do so.

It is at this juncture, when Naina begins to lose his mind, that the reader begins to understand what Maniam's ultimate omission is in *The Return*. While the Bedong Indians live in an ethnic enclave and by a specific set of laws and customs that they have brought from India, their society is a necessary crutch because their existence is invalidated by a nationalist culture. Naina's failure and subsequent descent into madness is but a taste of what is to happen to the well-meaning Bedong Indian who decides to set that crutch aside. He sets it aside only to discover that he cannot stand without the crutch. Furthermore, Maniam omits any interactions Naina has with those outside this enclave. He refrains from portraying what could happen should the community confront characters like Lim's Abdullah and Samad and a government that sends the message that non-Malays are not Malaysians. Maniam does not give us an answer but leaves us to imagine the frightful possibilities that Lim presents in her novel through the May 13th riots.

History

From the perspective of the government, a corollary of non-Malays' illegitimate ethnicities is their illegitimate histories. In Malaysia, the phrase "*pendatang asing*" ("foreign comer") has most frequently been used to refer to illegal immigrants. However, in recent years, the phrase has been reinvented to pejoratively refer to non-Malay Malaysians. One's imperfect or incomplete national identity is attributed to one's foreign ancestral roots, and to have foreign roots is to have alien loyalties.

Lim and Maniam's treatment of history reflect that the past is an inextricable part of the life of an ethnic minority in Malaysia. Lim presents both sides of the debate through a heated exchange between Chester and Li An. Meanwhile, Maniam illustrates the turmoil and instability that Ravi's grandmother and father experience since they are torn between the India they come from and the Malaysia that they want to build a life in.

Lim examines how the histories of ethnic minorities, as opposed to the supposedly flawless history of the Malays, deem them less Malaysian by the standards the government has set. It is striking that Lim chooses the American Chester rather than any other character in her novel to draw attention to this construction of an indigenous history versus an immigrant history. At a dinner hosted by Li An and her husband, Henry, Chester casually says, "You know, Malay is the only real culture in this country."²⁶ The word "real" grabs the reader's attention immediately. Chester, who has been in Malaysia for little over a year, has been quickly influenced to read the Malay culture as authentic in comparison to other cultures. The very fact that Chester voices this opinion at a dinner hosted by two Chinese Malaysians suggests that he presumes that the originality of the Malay culture is accepted by other communities in the country. When the soft-spoken Henry pushes Chester to explain his reasoning, Chester responds, "The Chinese aren't really Malaysian, are they? They're here for the money. They speak Chinese and live among themselves. They could as easily be in Hong Kong or even New York's Chinatown."²⁷ Chester's opinion that the Chinese are merely mercenary immigrants who are not real Malaysians is reminiscent of Abdullah's earlier comment to Li An, "Chinese have no *adat*, they eat pork, they like gamble, make money."²⁸ Chester's first

line of reasoning, "[The Chinese are] here for the money," is not an opinion he has developed by himself. Chester has been influenced by the nationalistic sentiments of his roommates, Abdullah and Samad, who author articles "which preac[h] that there [is] only one kind of people that count, that anyone who disagree[s] should be imprisoned or sent back to China or India."²⁹ In our conversation, Lim herself said, "Chester came to Malaysia through a *bumi* point of view, that the country belonged to Malays, that Chinese were just visitors."³⁰ Chester's second line of reasoning pertains to the language that the Chinese speak. However, Chester does not simply say, "They speak Chinese." He adds to his already flawed reasoning, ". . . and they live among themselves." In Chester's mind, he connects the act of speaking Chinese with a desire to disassociate from other Malaysians and to retain a foreign history and culture rather than embrace a Malaysian present.

Li An responds to Chester's unfounded judgments:

My mother's family has been in this country for five or six generations, and some of the Malays are really immigrants who have arrived from Indonesia in the last few years. You can't make any judgments on who or what is "original." Sure the Chinese traditions came from China, but Islam came from Saudi Arabia, didn't it? And no one says it's not original. Everything in Malaysia is *champor-champor*, mixed, *rojak*.³¹

Here, Li An questions the ideology that marks the Chinese and Indians as "immigrants." She challenges Chester's misinformed understanding of immigration as a stain on one's citizenship. By using the example of Malay immigrants from Indonesia who have only been in Malaysia in the "last few years," Li An dismantles the fixity of Malay rootedness and history. She highlights that although Islam originated from Saudi Arabia, Chester would never think of calling Malay enclaves Little Saudi Arabia or Saudi Arabia Town.

Try as she might, Li An finds it impossible to understand the polemic surrounding immigrants in Malaysia. In what is her most articulate statement on the history of the second-generation minority Malaysian, Li An says:

"You cannot be born and live in a place all your life without that place belonging to you. How could you not grow roots, invisible filaments of attachment that tied you down to a ground, a source of water?"³²

Lim takes this worn out metaphor of the tree and recasts it in the Malaysian context. Her use of this image is particularly thought-provoking because a number of Malaysia's chief exports like rubber have foreign roots like Li An, but now have a place in the Malaysian landscape, unlike Li An. Li An's history remains a sign of her illegitimacy.

While Lim tears down the myths about an immigrant ethnic community through Li An's conversation with Chester, she neglects the turmoil and instability that is inherent in the lives of this community by only portraying the life of a sixth-generation Malaysian. However, Maniam presents the reader with precisely the tumult that surrounds the recently arrived immigrant in the form of Ravi's grandmother, Periathai; the first-generation Malaysian, Naina; and Ravi, the second-generation Malaysian. Maniam's portrayal of these three different experiences reveals a need for a more nuanced understanding of this complex relationship rather than the government's construction of the national identity.

The litany of possessions that Periathai brings from India, despite being a single woman travelling with three little children, is not simply a marker of her desire to start anew in Malaysia, but is also a sign of her need to preserve something of her Indian past as well. Not only does she bring these physical reminders of India, Periathai brings "her Indian skills and heritage"³³ to Malaysia as well. Her trades range from peddling traditional Indian garments from village to village, tinkering, and using her "special touch" to cast away the "evil eye."³⁴ However, Periathai's most poignant recreation of India is through the architecture of her house, particularly, the pillars. Maniam describes these intricately designed pillars:

"Some of the Ramayana episodes stood out . . . The sculptured fold-like flames envelope Ravana's palace and threaten to engulf Sita's tender, shapely limbs and breasts. One pillar carried the creation of the Ganges, the cascading water stilled, another the typical, rustic look of the Indian village."³⁵

Both the artisan and Periathai attempt to capture the geography, topography, literature and religion of India.

In Periathai, Maniam presents the newly arrived immigrant in Malaysia. In Naina, her son, Maniam portrays a first-generation Malaysian Indian with a pronounced desire to establish a place for himself in

this country. The battle to establish a permanent home and to develop a sense of belonging in a new land persists into this next generation. Ravi recognizes the tragic similarity between his father and Periathai. Ravi observes:

"...I began to understand the simple mechanism, I thought of the Malaysian Indian. I recognized the spirit that had touched Periathai and now possessed Naina. He continued the battle Periathai had begun: to drive some stake into the country."³⁶

There are different valences in the verbs that Maniam uses when Ravi speaks of the spirit that "touched" Periathai and now "possess[es]" Naina. Unlike Periathai, Naina is raised in Malaysia and has a far more urgent need to plant his roots in this country by building a home. This first-generation Malaysian is determined to build a house so as to "drive some stake into the country." Naina is convinced that he must ground his search for acceptance as a Malaysian in something as concrete and solid as a house. His obsession with building a house of his own in Malaysia is catalyzed by the repetition of his mother's fate when Naina also begins receiving eviction notices from the Town Office. Upon receiving these notices, Naina begins to ritualize the house-building process in the lines, ". . . [Naina] also brought pebbles, clay and *lallang* (weeds) to the house. These he laid out on a leaf before Lord Nataraja. 'Breathe your spirit into them!' he chanted. 'Make them the clay and grass of my body!'"³⁷ Those very lines preface Naina's act of uniting both his body and house with the Malaysian land when he razes it to the ground with himself in it. Overcome by insanity, he meshes his body with the "clay and grass" of Malaysia. Right before Naina immolates himself, he attempts to speak to this Malaysian environment in what Bernard Wilson calls "polyglot ramblings."³⁸ Ravi observes, ". . . [Naina] began to chant in a garbled language. It embarrassed me to hear him recite a rhythm mounted on Tamil, Malay and even Chinese words."³⁹ Naina amalgamates these different tongues in the hope of getting some kind of primeval response from the multi-tongued Malaysia in which he finds himself. He receives none.

In Naina's son, Ravi, Maniam presents the second-generation Malaysian. While to Periathai, living in her newly built house "was like treading Indian soil once more,"⁴⁰ Ravi sees the pillars of this house as telling "strange stories."⁴¹ To Ravi, a member of a younger

generation of Malaysian Indians, these carvings tell fantastic tales that fascinate his youthful mind, but they remain “strange” to him. Although Ravi cherishes Periathai, there is a clear boundary that separates the Malaysian-born child and the Indian-born grandmother. Maniam reveals this through Ravi’s narration of Periathai’s weekly Friday prayers. The narration begins, “We waited for her, seated on the *thinnai*, observing the other houses, hemmed in by hibiscus hedges, isolated by a life of their own.”⁴² As the grandchildren wait for Periathai, their attention is not centered upon her Indian house. Instead, they are drawn to the other houses that surround hers. These other houses are separated from Periathai’s by “hibiscus hedges,” forming a makeshift national border since the hibiscus is Malaysia’s national flower. To Ravi and the other children, Periathai’s India sits like an impenetrable anomaly within the middle of Malaysia.

In Maniam’s presentation of these three different generations of Malaysian Indians, Maniam portrays the multiplicity of the ethnic Indian’s experience in relation to their histories. In doing so, Maniam challenges the single master narrative that the Malay nationalist culture presents as the immigrant history rather than the many histori(es) of the ethnic Indian in Malaysia.

Language

By appropriating the English language for their novels and subjecting it to a negotiation with the Malaysian landscape, Lim and Maniam efface the boundary between the formerly colonized and the former colonizer. This is precisely the boundary that the nationalist culture has sought to impose by rejecting literatures written in English from the Malaysian literary canon. In “Hegemony, national allegory, exile: The poetry of Shirley Lim,” Eddie Tay writes, “The appropriation of language from the British center is an act of defiance against the cultural and social order prescribed by Malay nationalism.”⁴³ Writing these novels in the English language becomes a means of writing back to a new hegemony, a Malay hegemony.

It is ironic that Naina’s final words in *The Return* integrate different Malaysian languages when the Malay government has officially established only one national

language of the country. Bernard Wilson addresses the importance of the government’s decision when he writes, “In the Malaysian context, language shapes national consciousness and individual identity to an overwhelming extent.”⁴⁴ In both *Joss and Gold* and *The Return*, Lim and Maniam portray the multilingual reality of Malaysia that is negated by the nationalist culture in which Malay alone is prized. The multilingual universe that Lim and Maniam show us, challenge exclusive slogans such as “*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*” (“Malay Language is the Soul of the People”) that continue to air on public television and radio.

In *Joss and Gold*, Li An is forced to confront her inadequacy as a Malaysian in the eyes of the government because of her love for the English language. There is no room for Li An who wishes to straddle both worlds at once, the world of the British past and the world of the Malaysian present. The novel opens with Li An’s first day teaching English literature at a Malaysian university. Lim writes, “This morning [Li An] had prepared a prose passage from D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, and she had read it aloud, relishing the overflow of sibilants like spiced chickpeas in her mouth.”⁴⁵ With the phrase “she had read it aloud,” Lim depicts a woman who is compelled to vocalize Lawrence in order to savor his work in its entire splendor.

What is most striking is that Li An’s instinctual response to and love for English is that it is inseparable from her connection to Malaysia. To her, the sound of Lawrence’s sibilants taste decidedly local. She likens them to “spiced chickpeas,” a fiery dish brought to Malaysia by Indian immigrants. While the simile of “spiced chickpeas” is in the English language, to Li An, the taste that comes to her mind is simultaneously Indian and Malaysian. Her love for the English language and its literature is framed by her understanding of the Malaysia that she has grown up in. Lawrence is tied to “spiced chickpeas,” “touch-me-nots” and “Li An[s]” rather than “Lee Ann[s].” In fact, her love for English is enriched by Malaysian sights, sounds and tastes.

However, for Malay stalwarts like Abdullah, one cannot love English and Malaysia at the same time. In a discussion at Li An’s house, Abdullah says, “Like English. Don’t want you to feel bad, yah, Li An, but English is a bastard language. In Malaysia we must all speak national language.”⁴⁶ Here, Abdullah blatantly

juxtaposes the “bastard language” with the “national language,” clearly outlining the legitimate identity of a Malaysian. Lim explained her choice of the word “bastard” in our conversation. She said, “In Malaysia, English was seen as illegitimate because it had a white father.”⁴⁷ Abdullah’s clear articulation of what “we must all speak” triggers a knee-jerk reaction from Li An:

What would happen if they all switched to Malay right now? How would [Li An] express herself? Like a halting six-year-old, groping for light in a darkened world? Her world was lit by language. The English ingested through years of reading and talking now formed the delicate web of tissues in her brain. Giving up her language would be like undergoing a crippling operation on her brain.⁴⁸

In light of the intensity of Li An’s response, the initial tenderness and accommodation in Abdullah’s tone when he says, “Don’t want you to feel bad,” followed by the empathetic “yah,” now sounds trivializing. As good-natured as Abdullah is, he cannot see the gravity of his suggestion that all Malaysians must speak Malay. While Abdullah makes it seem as if there is a choice to be made between the “bastard language” and the “national language,” Li An’s reaction suggests that it is far from a choice. In my conversation with her, Lim spoke to precisely this moment in the novel:

“The English language is what Li An grew up with and she cannot forswear it. It’s in her synapses, in her brain cells. If someone came up to Li An and said, ‘Li An, from now on you are forbidden from speaking English and you can only speak *Bahasa*,’ will she be the same Li An, could she still have the same feelings?”⁴⁹

While one may be tempted to read Li An’s as well as Lim’s reaction as individuals being overtaken by the colonizer’s language, Lim highlights that it is Li An who is in possession of the language. We see this in the ownership that Li An displays when she keeps repeating the phrase “her language” to refer to English. Here, it is not English but Malay that is pressing down upon her actual identity.

When Li An asks, “What if [Malaysians] believe they need English as well as Malay?” Lim artfully depicts the lack of nuance in the Malaysian government’s approach to the language question. Lim writes, “As soon as Li An stopped her rush of questions, she saw she had

done something wrong. Samad had hooded his eyes in a blank expression, Abdullah was frowning. . .”⁵⁰ The “hood[ing] of Samad’s eyes and the “blank expression” prevent any debate in the same way that the Malaysian constitution has been written by the government to protect its monocultural creation.

Like Li An, Maniam’s Ravi has no connection to the Malay language. In fact, Ravi is enveloped in the worlds of Tamil and English. Ravi initially resides in the realm of his mother tongue, Tamil. He comes into the Tamil language informally. Ravi hears the rich orality of Tamil through the voice of the matriarch in his life, Periathai. Maniam writes:

“Then, with only a tier lamp placed in the centre of the most complicated *kolam* in the cowdung-plastered compound, Periathai told us stories. Her voice transformed the *kolams* into contours of reality and fantasy, excitingly balanced.”⁵¹

In the same way that Lim’s Li An describes her world as being “lit by language,” it is impossible to miss how Ravi’s world is illuminated by Periathai’s Tamil stories. The undeniable link that Maniam draws between light and the language that one loves is further made evident with the lines, “The [Tamil] primer I took off the shelf-shrine every Friday evening, after the *Puja*, had the gloss of a mysterious rich world. The ornamental oil lamp, with leaf motifs, the back domed, threw a cool band of yellow light on the cover and my hands.”⁵² Like Li An and her relationship with English, Ravi’s world is literally lit by the Tamil language. However, Maniam takes Lim’s image of language as light a step further by imbuing Tamil with a divine quality. He writes, “The Tamil Primer was placed before the picture of Saraswathi, the goddess of learning. The incense-brazier trembled in my hands as I waved it three times around the shrine and book.”⁵³ Not only is the Tamil Primer installed within the house shrine, the primer and the shrine become one in the same. Ravi treats both the primer and the shrine with equal reverence when his hands tremble as he waves the incense brazier around *both* the shrine and the book. This is further emphasized by the fact that his formal inductor into the Tamil language, Murugesu, is described as looking like the “pot-bellied” elephant god, Ganesha. Ravi recalls, “On such nights my voice deepened as I reeled off the [Tamil] alphabet. Murugesu looked like a god himself, pot bellied, remote and radiant with warmth.”⁵⁴ Thus, from the very beginning of the novel, the Tamil

language is depicted as both illuminating and divine in Ravi's world.

Maniam is careful not to create a monolingual universe. Despite its celestial quality, the Tamil language is not elevated above all other languages in the novel. Owing to his wife's insistence, Naina sends Ravi to a school where English is the medium of instruction. While Ravi is initially reluctant to leave his world of Tamil, he soon finds himself enticed by the English language and the English world that his teacher Miss Nancy creates in the classroom. He becomes absorbed with the adventures of Ernie, an English character far removed from his own Malaysian life in the Bedong community. Ravi even begins to miss English during his vacation from school. Ravi says, "I remembered my anxiety to speak English again, to revive Miss Nancy's world, during that bleak holiday period."⁵⁵ Naysayers may be tempted to pounce on the word "bleak" and suggest that there is a hierarchy of languages at play here. However, this world causes any semblance of hierarchy to collapse immediately for Ravi says on that very same page; "The language we spoke in the long verandah of the houses was a defiant version of English, mingled with and sounding very Tamil."⁵⁶ To Ravi's ear, English begins to sound like the Tamil language.

There is an even more distinct meshing together of languages and identity later in the novel when as an adolescent Ravi affixes "James" to Ravi and becomes "James-Ravi" to correspond with female penpals from Britain and America⁵⁷. With the hyphen, Ravi injects his experience with the English language into his name and, by extension, his identity. The hyphen also unites two discourses rather than privileging one discourse over the other. In creating such a protagonist, Maniam reflects the truth of the multifaceted linguistic identities of Malaysians and rejects the nationalist culture's belief that a single language comprises national identity.

Conclusion

In *Joss and Gold* and *The Return*, Lim and Maniam present the alienation and instability of Chinese and Indian communities that are systematically excised from the Malay government's construction of a national identity. While Lim engages in an open and direct

attack of this construction in *Joss and Gold*, Maniam engages in a more veiled critique in *The Return*.

Lim's and Maniam's portrayal of the alienation of Chinese and Indian minorities at the hands of the Malay government unconsciously anticipates Malaysia's current state of social tumult. In late 2007, in an unprecedented show of civil disobedience, 30,000 Indians took to the streets of the capital to protest against discriminatory policies that have kept them at the bottom of the social ladder in Malaysia. Such a large number of Indians took to the streets because of the government's sudden decision to demolish thirty Hindu temples in the country. While neither Lim nor Maniam claim to speak for the ethnic minorities in Malaysia, their novels present literary spaces where the reader begins to question the three master signifiers of difference in Malaysia that act as alienating forces in the hands of the government. In writing these novels, Lim and Maniam have made room for readers to question not only rabid Malay nationalism, but to see through what Lim aptly calls in her memoirs the "vacuous political fiction" and the "public relations performance" of "[t]he 'Malaysian,' that new promise of citizenship."⁵⁸ The truth behind Lim's cynicism is hard to swallow, but harder yet are her poignant words in my conversation with her, "You just want to weep for the Malaysia that could have been and is not."⁵⁹

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End Notes

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- ² Qtd in Gill, 137
- ³ Chee, 219
- ⁴ Chee, 234
- ⁵ Qtd in Chee, 249
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- ⁵⁶ Maniam, 80
- ⁵⁷ Maniam, 118
- ⁵⁸ Lim, 122
- ⁵⁹ Personal communication.

When Malakas Met “The Greatest”

Marcos’ Philippines and the Thrilla in Manila

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”I’m the king of the world, I am the greatest, I’m Muhammad Ali. I shook up the world. I am the greatest; I’m king of the world!”¹

Muhammad Ali—born Cassius Clay and then changing his name early in his professional career—was undeniably one of the greatest self-promoters to occupy the stage of American sports. Often dubbed “The Mouth” or “The Louisville Lip” by the press, Ali never backed down from bold statements about his own importance and his place in the pantheon of boxing, athletic and societal heroes. Ali provided countless journalists with a constant supply of fresh material as he was politically outspoken, proud of his African-American heritage and devoted to his new faith of Islam. His critics, too, never lacked ammunition in lambasting Ali for a myriad of his perceived shortcomings. In short, Ali was a one-man propaganda machine.

More than 8,000 miles away from Ali’s hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, Ferdinand Marcos, President of the Philippines, had begun an equally promising career as a polarizing public figure and shameless self-promoter. Elected to office in 1966, Marcos would preside over the Philippines for almost 20 years. He commissioned portraits of himself and his wife, Imelda, portraying the couple as *Malakas at Maganda* (Strength and Beauty)—the mythical first parents of the

Philippine nation. Never averse to making bold pronouncements, Marcos claimed, falsely, to have been the head of a daring and successful guerilla unit which fought against the Japanese in the Philippines during World War II. For his efforts, Marcos insisted he had been decorated for valor by no less a figure than Douglas MacArthur.² Upon becoming president of the Philippines, Marcos spoke of having been endowed with a “mandate for greatness.”³ As such, Marcos ordered a huge bust of himself to be carved into a mountain in Northern Luzon.

Though their homes were separated by the world’s largest body of water, Marcos and Ali were set on a collision course in 1974 when Ali, fresh off a bout with George Foreman in Malaysia, announced his intention to defend his heavyweight crown. His title defense against challenger Joe Frazier—one of his greatest rivals—would be held on October 1, 1975 in the Philippines capital of Manila. The “Thrilla in Manila,” as it would come to be called, would become one of the legendary boxing matches of the twentieth century and one of the defining victories of Ali’s storied career as a pugilist. Equally as fascinating as the boxing match, however, was the unprecedented interaction between American sport’s greatest self-promoter and the equally outspoken President of the Philippines. For several weeks leading up to the match in the fall of

1975, the Marcos propaganda machine had the Louisville Lip at its service. Grand pronouncements about the skill and wisdom of Marcos, the greatness of his regime, and the glory of the Philippines filled airwaves and newspaper columns. Both men and their public relations entourages never seemed to lack for an energetic sound-byte about the importance of themselves and the other.

A look at newspaper coverage in the Philippines of the Thrilla in Manila provides a particularly clear window into the Marcos presidency and the Marcos vision of the Philippines. Having declared Martial Law in 1972, Marcos was able to curtail the freedom of the press in the Philippines. The major English language dailies from before the time of Martial Law ceased publishing, replaced by a group of English language papers over which the Marcos machine had more or less complete control.⁴

With the arrival of Ali, the heavyweight champion of the world, in September 1975, the Philippine press, ever loyal to Marcos, had a unique opportunity to gush over a visiting celebrity and praise the presidential administration. The coverage of the preparations for the title bout and the reporting on the fight itself provided many excellent illustrations of the image of a progressive Philippines, as well as the self-image of a dedicated leader that Marcos wished to project to both a domestic and international audience.

The Setting

The projection of a positive image was of critical importance to Marcos in 1975. Three years earlier, his declaration of Martial Law had brought participatory democracy in the Philippines to an abrupt halt. Citing internal security concerns of Marxist as well as Islamist insurgencies, Marcos suspended the democratic process, curtailed civil liberties, jailed opposition leaders and put a vice grip on the once free press. Prominent opposition figure Benigno Aquino was whisked out of his Manila hotel suite and imprisoned.⁵

A curfew was put in place and the armed forces and Philippine National Police wielded previously unheard of levels of power. Marcos enjoyed the support of the United States, having cited concerns with a communist insurgency as a cause for the martial law declaration. United States officials and the American media, fresh off a humiliation in Indochina, showered praise on

Marcos as a strong ally in the cold war struggle to check the spread of communism and prevent the developing world from falling under Moscow's sway.⁶

In addition to his anti-communist credentials, Marcos sought to propel the Philippines towards modernity and an international standing. Martial Law was the president's instrument of choice for making sweeping changes in Philippines society. He assembled a team of western-educated technocrats tasked with bringing an economic boom to the Philippines.⁷

Together with his very visible wife Imelda, Marcos inaugurated the "New Society" movement in the Philippines. Marcos' New Society would show the world that Filipinos and the Philippines were worthy of international attention after centuries spent under the thumbs of colonial powers. Increased efficiency, law and order, and visible signs of economic growth and prestige were the key features of the New Society which the Marcos clan sought to craft. A visit from the international sporting elite and the staging of a world-class boxing match fit nicely into the overall Marcos goal of visible progress. Ringing endorsements of the positive changes wrought in the Philippines provided the Martial Law president with greater legitimacy and buttressed the administration against criticism for its heavy-handed policies.

The Guests of Honor

On September 13, 1975—almost three years into martial law—the residents of Manila, upon opening their morning copy of the *Philippines Daily Express*, discovered something that had become a common sight in the papers: a picture of first lady Imelda Marcos holding a child. Readers of the *Daily Express* that day found a large headline announcing that the challenger for the heavyweight championship, Joe Frazier, would be arriving at Manila International Airport later that day.⁸

This announcement of Frazier's arrival marked the beginning of a remarkable three weeks for English-language Manila-based newspapers. A full page advertisement later in the publication proclaimed, "Welcome to the Philippines Smokin Joe!"⁹ The excitement for his arrival was not merely a one-sided infatuation with an international star. The *Express* quoted the challenger as declaring prior to his

departure from the United States, “I am looking forward to this trip to Manila and am very eager to meet the Filipinos. I’ve heard they are a great people.”¹⁰ This theme of the greatness and hospitality of the Filipino people would become a common theme in the press coverage of the title bout. A day later, Frazier’s trainer was quoted as saying “you [the Philippines] have a very efficient organization and we’re happy about that.”¹¹

The arrival of Muhammad Ali in Manila on September 15 brought more attention to the upcoming fight. Though the soft-spoken Frazier would receive a great deal of notice from the press, the gregarious Ali was the media darling. For a Philippine press that was beholden to the Marcos clan, Ali was a particularly useful visitor owing to his international status, and, of particular interest to the Marcos regime, because of his Muslim faith. By 1975, the Armed Forces of the Philippines were heavily mired in an increasingly violent conflict with Muslim insurgents on the island of Mindanao.¹² Ali’s visible and vocal embrace of Islam provided the Marcos-loyal media with ample opportunity to show the regime’s acceptance of adherents to Islam. The *Express* declared, “Ali has uplifted Muslim people’s plight all over the world.”¹³ Prompted by a reporter, Ali gushed over the regime’s progressive views towards people of all faiths, “[In the Philippines] I see Muslims and Christians together huggin and kissin.”¹⁴ A hastily convened “Christian-Muslim Brotherhood Conference” bestowed an award on the visiting champion. A leading Manila mosque conferred upon Ali the honorable title of “Datu.”¹⁵

Ali’s unique usefulness to the Marcos regime did not entirely force Joe Frazier from the pages of Manila’s newspapers. Daily detailed accounts of his training regimen and other activities offered sportswriters plenty of material and provided opportunities to trumpet the Marcos regime’s vision of a New Society in which hard work and efficiency would bring progress and growth. Citing his early morning training routine, humility, and overall work ethic, one commentator proclaimed “Joe Frazier is worthy of emulation by the youth of our land.”¹⁶ Detailed reports of Frazier’s jogging route appeared daily along with accounts of Filipinos rising early to accompany the challenger for parts of his morning exercise.¹⁷ When polled about their feelings on the fighters, Filipinos frequently cited Frazier’s humility as the quality that they admired.¹⁸

Ali was also the recipient of lavish praise from officials and journalists. Three days before the fight, the *Express* declared, “Ali is humble and has a strong, big heart.”¹⁹ The *Baguio Midland Courier*, a weekly publication based in the northern university city of Baguio, reported exuberantly on Ali’s reception of an honorary doctorate from one of the city’s prestigious universities.²⁰ Quezon City and the nearby city of Pasay made Ali, as well as Frazier, an adopted son citing Ali’s contributions “to the promotion of the international image of Manila and of Philippine tourism.”²¹ Front page as well as sports section articles spoke daily of Ali’s compassion, energy, and extraordinary ability.

The boxers and their entourages were not the only internationally recognizable faces seen in Manila for the Thrilla. The weeks leading up to the fight saw frequent blurbs in the Manila papers announcing that an assortment of big-name celebrities would visit the city for the title bout. That the singing sensations, the Temptations, planned to attend the boxing match was news of particular excitement.²² Newspapers rejoiced that the Philippines was receiving its due international attention and an increase in foreign visitors. Of particular interest to the Manila press was the swarm of foreign sportswriters which descended upon Manila in the days leading up to the title bout. The *Daily Express* informed its readers that nearly all of the “top US sportswriters are in town.”²³ The likes of Howard Cossel, Red Smith, Ed Skyler, and Norman Mailer received much attention from the Philippine media as they arrived in Manila. Mailer’s status as an American literary icon made him the recipient of much interest from Filipino journalists. In 2007, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* remembered Mailer’s visit as the newspaper eulogized the recently deceased American writer, “There is wide eyed disbelief, the usual big ‘Wow!’, whenever it is stated that Norman Mailer was here!”²⁴

In Praise of Marcos and the Philippines

The media coverage leading up to the championship fight stressed the importance of the upcoming event and the prestige of the match’s hosts: the Marcos family. In addition to the influx of foreign money, international media exposure, and public goodwill generated by the boxing match, the title bout provided the Marcos government with numerous glowing

endorsements. Ali, Frazier, and their entourages showered the Marcos government with lavish praise and the heavily censored press dutifully reported every word of admiration expressed for the president. Several days after their arrivals, Ali and Frazier met President Marcos in the presidential palace. Ali gushed, "We accept this as a big honor, President Marcos being such a real loved man."²⁵ The heavyweight champ expressed approval of Marcos' taste in women upon seeing Imelda, "Mr. President, I respect you now more than I did at first. Looking at your wife I can tell you're not a dull man. You sure know how to pick."²⁶ Given the attention that was paid by the media and the Filipino people to every move made by Ali and Frazier, the personal rapport between Marcos and the visiting pugilists demonstrated that the president was, indeed, an internationally great man worthy of the respect of other internationally great men. In its issue covering the week of the Thrilla, the *Baguio Midland Courier* praised the administration's handling of the big event commenting that the Marcos government had "ridden [the fighters'] popularity for priceless publicity for the country."²⁷

Ali, Frazier, and those in their traveling party often endorsed Marcos and his policies for the Philippines. The timing of their visit was legendary in this regard. The day following the fighters' visit to Malacañang palace, The Philippines celebrated the three year anniversary of Marcos' declaration of Martial Law. The festivities surrounding the anniversary included a parade, a huge rally in Manila, lengthy speeches, and numerous newspaper articles vocally praising the government's policy.²⁸

The *Daily Express* serialized a book penned by a prominent Filipino historian and statesman that gave historical arguments for the benefits of Martial Law. A chapter of the work appeared every day for several weeks following the Martial Law Anniversary celebration. Following on the heels of his State of the Nation speech during the anniversary festivities, Marcos began a large scale purge of several government departments. More than 2,000 officials were sacked on September 19; 100 judges resigned on September 21; on September 23 more than 70 Customs officials were fired. Days before the fight, another 1,100 government employees were terminated.

As the government celebrated the anniversary of Martial Law and as the purges thinned the ranks of the

civil service and the judiciary, the visiting athletes provided the Marcos government with numerous ringing endorsements. Ali was particularly vocal. "Marcos is a great man...He is humble. He is peaceful. He is loving. I am sure he will lead his people always with the best decisions."²⁹ After meeting the President, Ali continued, "President Marcos knows how to solve the problems here better than we could. I'm sure he's doing something to help his people."³⁰ The champion's comments reaffirmed critical themes: The Philippines was a nation and Marcos was that nation's true and inspired leader. Reacting to the purges, Ali told a reporter, "Marcos is some man. He really is the right man for the country."³¹

Ali's lavish praise for the Marcos regime may have been upstaged only by the incomparable boxing-promoter Don King. Never one to turn down an opportunity to make grand pronouncements into a microphone, King used his arrival in the Philippines as an opportunity to offer his two cents on the administration. He praised Marcos for "taking the initiative to make [the fight] possible. When you are emerging it is the invincible spirit and indomitable courage that you display that makes little big. Where the Philippines has been little in the eyes of the world you have been a giant in our heart."³² In a separate interview, he declared emphatically, "The Philippines has emerged!"³³

The theme of advertising the Philippines to the world appears heavily in newspaper coverage of the title fight. This emphasis on the emerging Philippines was very clear to American journalists reporting on the contest. Mark Kram remembered, "That was the whole purpose of the fight, access and exposure to the rest of the world, to show that Manila was no more an outlaw city, that foreign investment was secure, that martial law, for all its connotations, was a cleansing instrument: Martial Law with a smile."³⁴ The order and efficiency that the Marcos regime so desperately wanted to demonstrate as a part of its international face appeared in many commentaries on the fight preparation. Reports in the *Daily Express* and the *Bulletin Today* praised government preparations to accommodate the traffic and other logistical demands. Marcos' right hand man, Fabian Ver, was placed in charge of logistics for the event.³⁵ On the day after the Thrilla, reports heaped praise upon the administration for the big day's efficiency. Calling the day a "triumph of the

organizational ability of the Filipino,” the *Bulletin Today* lauded the orderly traffic pattern. Even the clearly labeled busses received praise.³⁶

Building projects were a popular undertaking for the Marcos regime. As such, any praise given to the practice facilities and to the fight venue was featured prominently in press coverage.³⁷ Both Ali and Frazier were allotted practice time in the Philippines Folk Arts Theater which had been constructed for the 1974 Miss Universe Pageant. The training venue drew excellent reviews from the Ali and Frazier camps; both proclaimed that the facilities were “better than in Malaysia and Zaire.”³⁸ The international boxing community was so impressed with the training facilities in Manila that the *Daily Express* reported that other American heavyweights, including Ken Norton, had expressed a desire to fight in the Philippines.³⁹ Ali’s camp praised the Aranetta Coliseum, the fight venue, as “a great arena for a world class event.”⁴⁰ In addition to their praise for the existing facilities, Ali and Frazier endorsed and helped break ground for a large scale sports complex project in Metro Manila. Sports, according to Frazier, “contribute to economic growth,” and as a “social investment constitute a sign of progress.”⁴¹

The role played by Filipinos in the preparation for and conduct of the match were sources of national pride and figured prominently in the newspaper coverage of the title bout. The *Bulletin Today* praised Filipino technical staff and engineers who worked to make the broadcast of the fight to a record worldwide audience possible.⁴² Luis Tabuena, Chair of the Philippines Games and Amusements Board, received a nomination shortly before the fight for a “*Malakas at Maganda* Award” for his public relations efforts surrounding the match.⁴³ On the day of the fight, Manila papers proudly announced that the officials in charge of the conduct of the fight would be Filipinos. Venerated Filipino sports announcer Joe Cantada would call the fight from ringside. *Bulletin Today* explained that the American fighters, their managers, and the fight promoters had not objected to the list of all Filipino nominees to referee the bout.⁴⁴ Carlos Padilla, a veteran referee and part-time movie actor, was chosen to stand in the ring with the two fighters. He remembered the honor of being chosen, “When my name was announced, I turned and bowed to Marcos

and Imelda who were at ringside, to give them respect. I wanted him to bless me with a wave.”⁴⁵

The Fighters Were Welcome in the Philippines

The intense newspaper coverage of the daily routines of the champion and the contender stressed how well the two men were fitting into Filipino society. Frazier broke the tension at an early press conference by breaking into some pre-rehearsed Tagalog. “*Kumusta? Kumusta Kayo?*” (How are you? How are you all?) Frazier asked an assembled crowd.⁴⁶ Muhammad Ali was photographed reading the *Philippines Daily Express* in the lobby of his hotel, providing the daily with an image of the paper’s international relevance. The use of this photograph in the *Daily Express* seemed to be saying that if the paper was good enough for the visiting hero, it was worth reading. The Marcos government made grand pronouncements about how well the two boxers fit into life in the Philippines. Imelda Marcos was particularly outspoken with regards to their visitors’ race, “We have provinces here Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental. There is no racial discrimination here. We Filipinos think black is beautiful.”⁴⁷ Newspaper reports spoke of how crowds assembled for the fighters’ visit to the Malacañang Palace “oohh’d and ah’h’d” over the sight of the striking men dressed in tradition *barong Tagalog*.⁴⁸

The pugilists’ recreational activities and their budding friendships with ordinary Filipinos received much attention in the Manila dailies. Joe Frazier was photographed autographing the jeans of a female admirer. An entire article, complete with pictures, devoted to Frazier’s trip to a Manila dance hall appeared several days into the challenger’s stay in the Philippines. Ali’s participation as a judge of a Manila Beauty pageant also became the subject of a newspaper piece. The boxers’ attendance at a number of social events and parties hosted by the Manila elite also was deemed newsworthy, especially if a member of the Marcos clan was spotted in attendance. The friendships formed during the several weeks of training prior to the fight even made the news as, two days before the fight, the *Daily Express* proudly reported that Frazier would be providing complimentary tickets to the title bout for some of his new close Filipino friends.⁴⁹

Even a moment of great embarrassment for Ali provided the press with opportunities to gush over the champion. Ali arrived in the Philippines with a beautiful woman in tow whom he introduced as his “wife.” She accompanied him on his visit to the presidential palace and was the subject of positive press coverage and several compliments from President Marcos. When photographs and video footage of the Malacañang reception reached the United States, Muhammad Ali’s actual wife was understandably enraged. She flew to Manila and created quite a stir upon her arrival. On September 27, just days before the title bout, the front page of the *Daily Express* informed readers that Mrs. Ali had confronted her husband upon her arrival in Manila. A front page headline and article the following day explained that Ali was downplaying his marital troubles and that the spat would not affect the upcoming boxing match.⁵⁰ Political cartoonists took the opportunity to poke fun at the champ, emphasizing the familiar relationship with Ali that the media had been striving to portray.

The Glory of the Marcos Family

Reporting on the fight and the preparation was often supplemented with extreme detail regarding the Marcos clan’s participation in the events. Pictures and descriptions of the first couple appear early and often in recaps of the thrilling events. This was something to which Filipinos had probably grown accustomed to by 1975. The pages of the *Bulletin Today* and *Daily Express* frequently featured multi-page picture spreads of First Lady Imelda engaged in state business. It stood to reason then that newspaper coverage of Ali and Frazier’s visit to the presidential palace included a complimentary description of Imelda’s choice of dress for the event. Ali warned President Marcos to make sure his beautifully dressed wife was kept safe with the undisciplined Frazier in town. In case Filipinos were still struggling to create a mental picture of the glamour of the event and of the first lady, the *Daily Express* further explained that Imelda’s gown was the same one she had worn for her historic meeting with Fidel Castro of Cuba.⁵¹

The first paragraph of the fight recap in the *Daily Bulletin* described the green dress which the first lady wore ring-side.⁵² President Marcos’ relevance in the presence of two international superstars was also a

focus of coverage in the daily newspapers. At a time in which his presidency was under an international microscope, the local press coverage of the Martial Law President stressed his charisma and international appeal. Reports of the boxers’ palace visit included comments from the ever garrulous Ali that the peaceful and pleasant meeting between the two combatants was made possible only because Marcos stood in between them. Marcos was a worthy man to preside over the meeting of “the two most famous fighters in the history of boxing” for, as the reports proclaimed, the President himself was a “former Varsity boxing champ.”⁵³

Conclusion

The newspaper coverage in the Philippines of the 1975 heavyweight title fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier provides fascinating insights into the then-empowered regime of Ferdinand Marcos. Themes which appear heavily in newspaper reporting reflect the goals and ideals of the Marcos administration as well as the image which the regime wished to project to both a domestic and an international audience. Beholden to Marcos under the terms of Martial Law, newspaper staff wrote articles emphasizing the progress towards modernity of the Philippines, which was a favorite topic of the administration. Reporters saw in the two boxers many of the virtues and values which Marcos hoped would define Filipinos as well. The various Manila dailies regularly reported on positive statements made by the athletes regarding the president and his vision for the Philippines. Similarly, the Philippine press stressed the glamour and international prestige of the First Couple as Ferdinand and Imelda basked in the international sporting spotlight. As an endorsement of the cosmopolitanism of Manila, newspapers emphasized that Frazier and Ali were fitting in nicely into Filipino society. The flood of international guests and international money into the Philippines was presented to newspaper readers as proof of the progress and growing international clout of the Marcos-led Philippines. Ali may have been “the greatest.” However, for the weeks leading up to the Thrilla in Manila, the brightest star shining in the Manila newspapers was not the heavyweight champion of the world but rather, the man hosting the champ, President Ferdinand Marcos.

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- ¹Interview with Howard Cosell. Quote available online at a number of sources. "Muhammad Ali Quotes," http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/celebrity/muhammad_ali/im_the_king_of_the_world_650 is one such internet site.
- ²James Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, London: Granta Books, 1999. p. 86. Hamilton-Paterson also explains that prior to his 1965 presidential campaign, Marcos hired an American writer to compose a heroic biography which "was more like a 'B' movie script than a serious account of one man's odyssey."
- ³Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), 365.
- ⁴Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 205.
- ⁵Karnow, 359.
- ⁶Ibid. 205.
- ⁷Abinales and Amoroso, 208
- ⁸Marcos' dealings with the Soviet Union as well as his wife's meeting with Cuba's Fidel Castro at first glance seem out of step with Marcos' desire to project a staunch anti-communist stance. Manila newspapers' boasting of those events seems to support the image of the Marcos clan as having access to all prominent international figures.
- ⁹*Philippines Daily Express*, 13 September 1975, A20.
- ¹⁰"Frazier Arrives Today," *Philippines Daily Express*, 13 September 1975, A20.
- ¹¹"Frazier Says Ali Won't Last 15 Rounds," *Philippines Daily Express*, 14 September 1975, A22.
- ¹²D.R. Sar Desai, *Southeast Asia Past and Present* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), 214.
- ¹³"Ali, Frazier Made 'Adopted Sons' of Manila," *Philippines Daily Express*, 16 September 1975, A19.
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- ¹⁶"Frazier Puts on More Speed," *Philippines Daily Express*, 16 September 1975, A19.
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- ¹⁸Throughout September the *Philippines Daily Express* frequently featured short blurbs containing the opinions of Manila residents concerning the upcoming title bout.
- ¹⁹"Ali-Frazier Highlights: 'I Talked to a Great Boxer and a Great Poet'," *Philippines Daily Express*, 28 September 1975, A22.
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- ²⁵Ted Lerner, "Hey Joe; When Ali and Frazier visited the President." *Business World*, 22 August 2000, 23.
- ²⁶"Ali, Frazier call on First Couple," *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A6.
- ²⁷"Ali-Frazier," *Baguio Midland Courier*, 5 October 1975, A4.
- ²⁸There is more than a little irony in the scene described in detail by the Manila papers of throngs of happy Filipinos filling the streets of Manila to celebrate the Marcos administration and Martial Law. Hardly more than 10 years later, the crowds which

filled Manila's streets were singing a very different tune and the Marcos clan was forced to flee the Philippines.

²⁹"Ali, Frazier call on First Couple," *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A6.

³⁰"Filipinos 'Sweetest People in the World,' says Ali," *Philippines Daily Express*, 20 September 1975, A24.

³¹"Ali says I'm a Miracle Man," *Philippines Daily Express*, 21 September 1975, A23.

³²"Frazier can start calling Ali 'Kuya,'" *Philippines Daily Express*, 26 September 1975, A23.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Mark Kram, *Ghosts of Manila* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 173.

³⁵"Traffic Rerouted for Ali-Frazier Fight," *Philippines Daily Express*, 29 September 1975, A12.

³⁶"Manila 'Thrilla' had many firsts," *Bulletin Today*, 2 October 1975, A6.

³⁷The running joke among commentators outside of the Marcos circle was that first lady Imelda had an "edifice complex."

³⁸The countries listed are two previous Ali title fight venues. The quote appears in the "Ali, Frazier men inspect fight site," *Philippines Daily Express*, 21 September 1975, A24.

³⁹"Norton wants to fight in Manila," *Philippines Daily Express*, 29 September, A23

⁴⁰"Ali, Frazier men inspect fight site," *Philippines Daily Express*, 21 September 1975, A24.

⁴¹"Elorde Sports and Tourism Development Complex Launches Sports-Commercial Complex," *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A18.

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⁴⁵Dave Anderson, "The Marcos Thrilla," *The New York Times*, 10 March, 1986, C3

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⁴⁹"Frazier receives gift, Gives artist 3 tickets," *Philippines Daily Express*, 29 September 1975, A24

⁵⁰"Women trouble doesn't bother me, says Ali," *Philippines Daily Express*, 28 September 1975, A1

⁵¹*Philippines Daily Express* September 19. The irony in Ali's comments on Frazier's savage lust for women would become very obvious several days after the meeting in Malacañang when, upon seeing pictures of Ali and his female traveling companion in American newspapers, the actual Mrs. Muhammad Ali flew to Manila in a rage, confronted her husband, and returned to the States.

⁵²"Manila 'Thrilla' had many firsts," *Bulletin Today*, 2 October 1975, A1.

⁵³"Ali, Frazier call on First Couple," *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A1.

Consumerism and the Emergence of a New Middle Class in Globalizing Indonesia

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Introduction

Most analysts of the middle class agree that the emergence of a new middle class in Asian countries was the inevitable result of economic reform in the developing states.¹ The emergence of this new middle class in Asian countries took place in the 1980s and 1990s during the third wave of economic development and industrialization in the region, resulting not only in economic modernization, but also leading to the implementation of important economic policies. Apart from increasing economic growth, those policies encouraged export-led industrial transformation and further facilitated the growing movement towards a new economy driven by financial globalization, market liberalization and the globalization of products.

As a result of these economic policies, the process of economic growth and industrialization has produced improvement in absolute living standards. This can be seen in the state-led industrialization policy of South Korea, whose rapid economic growth in recent decades continuously improved people's living standards, and a large number of people were able to move into the expanding middle class.² Rapid industrialization accompanied by modernization and market liberalization created affluent and prosperous groups in society. A range of indicators reveal improvements in living standards. For example, ownership of cars, telephones, televisions, refrigerators, and other such material possessions has

increased. In addition, safe water supplies and healthy foods have become more accessible.

Indonesia is experiencing a similar trend of economic and social change. The country's economic modernization and development was initiated and promoted by the New Order (1966-1997). The 1980s were an important period as economic progress at the time led to the emergence of the Indonesian middle class. People obtained work as business executives and managers, stock analysts, engineers, bankers, lawyers, accountants, white-collar office workers in city centers and other professional jobs often associated with a booming middle class. This state-led industrialization was intended to stimulate the emergence of a new middle class in Indonesia. William Liddle, a prominent Indonesianist, has suggested that Indonesia's liberalizing economic policy during the New Order regime is largely responsible for the growth of the middle class.³

Clifford Geertz's work, *Peddlers and Princess: Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns*, is one of the first attempts to examine the Indonesian middle class, providing a preliminary stepping point for later works on the middle class in Indonesia. However, Geertz conducted his research in 1952-1958, which was in pre-liberalizing Indonesia and a few years after the Indonesian revolution. His research is primarily concerned with

social change and economic modernization, instead of any specific and comprehensive study of the middle class in Indonesia. Nonetheless, Geertz's research makes the important point that it is relatively difficult for a middle class to emerge during this pre-liberalizing and industrializing period. The problems of traditional trading patterns, lack of capital, the shortage of skilled and disciplined labor, the insufficiency of markets and other limiting factors hindered the rise of the middle class.⁴

Since Geertz there have been more recent academic studies and public discourse on the new Indonesian middle class, which have concentrated on the political aspects and democracy or political participation (Tamagola: 1993, Zulkarnain: 1993, Sarjadi: 1993, Siagian: 1993, Robison: 1990, Abeyasekere: 1990, Liddle: 1990, Mackie: 1999, Crouch: 1999, Sudarsono: 1999, research project of Center for Information and development studies: 1998, and others), economic aspects or determinants (Mackie: 1990 and Shiraishi: 2006), or difficulties and problematic issues faced by the Indonesian middle class (Raharjo: 1999 and Lubis: 1993). But much less attention has been given to the cultural practices, consumption middle class and lifestyle of the emerging middle class in Indonesia. The continuous process of cultural globalization and modernization is affecting and constructing the consumer culture of the middle class in developing countries. Mass media is contributing to the transportation and stimulation of new global and modern values and lifestyles.

In this paper, I will argue that the new Indonesian middle class is not structurally pre-determined, but is in the continual process of production and reproduction through the cultural practices of class. In other words, ownership of economic and material resources does not automatically determine class; instead, culture and a lifestyle of consumerism must be seen as important cultural processes through which an emerging middle class actually creates itself as a socio-cultural entity. The emerging new middle class, the primary product of the economic modernization and globalization policies of the New Order (1966-1997), is a prosperous and affluent group of people with a certain level of economic resources. However, they must be understood as a never-ending cultural project.⁵

This paper is an attempt to further understand the processes of new middle class formation during globalization and deregulation in Indonesia through the culture of consumerism. The new Indonesian middle class will be viewed through a socio-cultural lens that focuses on the culture of consumerism and lifestyle in Indonesia. It will also examine the emergence of the Indonesian middle class in the context of the economic development of the New Order regime. Methodologically, this paper will focus on middle class consumption in contemporary Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. Richard Tanter and Kenneth Young, working on politics in Southeast Asia, suggest that any discourse on class formation in Indonesia requires "either rashness born of ignorance or a willingness to bear the inevitable consequences of overgeneralization on the basis of either inadequate information or over-reliance on one part of the society-usually Java".⁶

I will first discuss the approaches to the conceptualization of the middle class to give the theoretical basis of this paper. Then, I will examine the structural process of the emergence of the Indonesian middle class in the context of the economic "developmentalism" of the New Order. In the final section, I will explore the middle-class culture of consumption in Indonesia. The data presented here is mainly drawn from secondary statistical sources, published academic studies, and my personal observations while living in Jakarta for 10 years (1995-2005).

Defining Middle Class

Class analysts have long discussed different approaches to conceptualizing class. Mark Liechty, working on consumer culture and class formation in South Asia, suggests that class research theoretically always takes one of two approaches. One might treat class as a given—something that is natural, universal, and taken for granted by most people. One can also treat class as a cultural concept.⁷ Thus, some class researchers use a structuralist and deterministic approach in their efforts to understand and conceptualize class. Others might consider a constructivist/historicist/cultural conception of class as a more appropriate and adequate approach to a discussion of class.

A structuralist approach, or reading, of class strongly assumes that class is structurally predetermined. In other words, class is viewed as a given (ontologically prior to); class is a thing that exists by itself, prior to its actual performance in everyday life. For example, Loic Wacquant, a French urban sociologist, refuted both Weberian and Marxist class approaches, primarily pointing to the unitary and universal model of the middle class. Consequently, this type of class approach often disregards the diversity and dynamic aspects of class character, bringing them into a static and ahistorical position.⁸

In contrast to the structuralist approach to class, a constructivist approach views class as fluid, intangible, processual, and unformed. Class is not structurally pre-determined, but it is in the continual process of production and reproduction. For example, Jurgen Kocka, a German social historian, argued that class is never a thing, but is always in the process of making, production, and reproduction⁹. According to Edward Thompson, an English social historian, class is not predestined, but “happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.”¹⁰ Thus, class identity, practices, and lived experience are not tacked on; they enter into the very making and remaking of class.

I find that this constructivist and cultural concept of class is more helpful in addressing the issue of this study—the process of new middle class formation during the globalization of Indonesia through the culture of consumerism. Sociologically speaking, it is often referred to as a processual way of understanding the nature of social entities.¹¹ Understood in this sense, this paper makes an effort to locate the concept in the cultural terrain out of which class identities and class culture emerge. The constructivist approach to class provides an analytical instrument for understanding the way the new middle class in Indonesia emerged and constructed their social identity through consumption.¹²

The Indonesian middle class will emerge as a never-ending cultural project that is simultaneously at odds with itself and with the other classes. It does not happen prior to its symbolic and cultural practices and organization. Put in another way, being middle class

happens when people share and feel common experiences and interests, articulate their identity, and at the same time distinguish themselves from class “others.”¹³

The relationship between class and consumption should be viewed as mutually constitutive. The culture of consumption, Mark Liechty argued, has a more complex meaning than simply the act of purchasing products. A person’s act of buying reflects just one moment in the cultural process of consumption.¹⁴ In the same fashion, economic structures do not solely determine class. Although it may be the initial determinant of class, it is an insufficient measure. Economic structures are manifested and expressed through cultural aspects of consumption and lifestyle, and in this way contribute to the formation of class. Seen another way, the culture of consumption is not the side effect or consequence of the middle class, but instead is among the cultural processes through which an emerging middle class actually creates itself as a socio-cultural entity.

Middle class people are those who are “carving out a new cultural space which they explicitly locate, in language and material practice, between their classes ‘others’ above and below.”¹⁵ Through lifestyles and consumption, people manifest a kind of class consciousness in a very practical way.¹⁶ Consumption patterns and lifestyle mainly serve as new performative mediums.¹⁷ Henceforth, wearing the proper clothing or driving a car constitutes an important part of a middle class claim to and maintenance of their middle-class membership.

New Economic Order, Liberalization and the Emergence of a New Middle Class

August 17, 1945 is a turning point in the modern history of the Indonesian people, the date when independence was gained from the Dutch. It is after this that the discourse of development in Indonesia gained momentum and filled the minds of Indonesians. For Indonesia’s leaders, the improvement of living standards for their people was the primary goal to be achieved in order to create conditions for a middle class to emerge. Promoting a developing middle class meant opening opportunities to build and increase middle-class jobs. As Dawam Raharjo, a theorist of Indonesian economic development, argued, economic

development was absent before Indonesian independence, but independence provided more opportunities to develop and improve living conditions, and create middle-class jobs.¹⁸ It is in this moment that early economic developments in Indonesia can be grasped.

To account for economic development in Indonesia, it is important to understand the conventional divisions of regime in Indonesian politics that influenced its economic system. From 1945-1997, Indonesia was ruled by two different regimes. The first regime, from 1945-1966, termed the Old Order, was under the guidance of Soekarno as president. The second, from 1966-1998, is termed the New Order, defined by the presidency of Soeharto. The rapid growth of the Indonesian economy, resulting in the rise of a new Indonesian middle class, was primarily achieved during the period of the New Order. The authoritarian President Soeharto was in power for 32 years until the student movement and the economic crisis in 1997 forced his downfall.

Throughout the Old Order era, there was almost no significant growth in the Indonesian economy because post-independence conditions were not conducive to development, and perhaps more importantly, resources were mostly put into the political realm to consolidate independence.¹⁹ Consequently, the failure of economic development dominated the economics of the Old Order.²⁰ The first Five Year Plan (a list of economic goals that were designed to strengthen the country's economy between 1955-1960) and its implementation were filled with pessimism and uncertainty, despite demonstrating distinct improvements.²¹ As a result, the desired effects did not take place and the middle class was unable to effectively emerge in this period.

The New Order regime, also known as the "New Economic Order", began with the transfer of executive political power from Soekarno to General Soeharto on March 12, 1966. This represented a significant philosophical shift regarding what constituted the fundamental mission of the government. For the New Order, the mission could be summarized with the words "economic development."²² The discipline of economics gained a prominence that was almost unimaginable in Indonesia's earlier years. The regime change did not merely mean an executive power change, but also marked a radical change in economic

policy. In the New Order era, economic development became a central doctrine and a high priority. The New Order based its economic development on the national motto of the Development Trilogy, referring to the expected goals of stability, growth, and equality.²³ Thus, rapid economic growth and export-led industrialization became the main themes of economic policy. In this way, the New Order created a new economic culture.

The 1980s are widely recognized as a major turning point in Indonesian economic development, leading to important changes in Indonesian consumption patterns. Indonesia adopted a new economic paradigm of deregulation and market liberalization, which was far more open and outward-looking. Indonesia had become an ardent advocate of deregulation. The basic tenets of this new approach were: deregulation, export-led growth, the creation of a regulatory climate conducive to foreign investment, and the transfer of economic power from the government to the private sector.²⁴

The adopted policy of deregulation, with all its effects and consequences, marks the openness of Indonesia to the global world. The adaptation of Indonesian economic development to the forces of globalization had an effect on shifting oil-led growth to trade-led growth and providing more access to the global culture of consumerism. Through deregulation, Indonesia became an integral part of the global economy. It has made the world its marketplace and reciprocated by inviting the world to take a stake in the nation's development.²⁵ Middle class consumers in Indonesia can be viewed in the context of this market globalization.²⁶

The liberalization and deregulation policy of Indonesia had significant effects on its systems of finance, banking, and production by helping to stimulate the structural changes of occupation and creating various middle class jobs. The increase in these kinds of jobs has been a primary factor in the rise of a new middle class in Indonesia, and this growth of the middle class was the targeted goal of Indonesian economic development.

According to Takashi Shiraishi, an analyst of comparative development in Southeast Asia, the emergence of a middle class in Indonesia can be traced back to the economic boom years of 1987-1997. The

1996 census data indicates that those who were classified as professionals and technicians, executives and managers, and white-collar office workers constituted 8.6 percent of the total working population and totaled 7.4 million people.²⁷ However, it is important to keep in mind that, compared to the working population, the census-based number of middle class in Indonesia was relatively small. Concerning jobs and lifestyle, the Indonesian people who could have been categorized as prosperous and urban were less than 5% of the population, or approximately 7.3 million people in 1980.²⁸

In Jakarta, where Indonesian economic development is more centralized, the new middle class is growing more extensively than in other cities in Indonesia. According to Shiraishi, economic development has transformed Jakarta into an emerging middle-class city, with the biggest growth from 1987-1997, and a current population of 10 million. Most of the middle-class people in Jakarta consist of professionals.²⁹ The consumption pattern and lifestyles of those middle-class people are featured in weekly and monthly magazines and appear on TV talk shows: young banking professionals are shown dressing in brand name suits, driving expensive cars, and eating out in posh Italian, French, and Japanese restaurants.³⁰ These new members of the middle class will be examined on the basis of their consumption and lifestyle as an indicator of class culture, focusing specifically on their emergence and growth in contemporary Jakarta.

New Middle Class Consumption Cultures

Some might categorize people as middle class on the basis of personal income or wealth. However, such statistical categorization does not necessarily take into account the culture of consumerism through which the emerging middle-class creates itself as a socio-cultural entity. Instead, it is the processual way the middle class is produced and reproduced that establishes this entity. Thus, middle class culture is not simply the product of economic determinations, but also a reflection of the profound role that culture plays in producing and reproducing hierarchies of economic privilege. Culture and economics are mutually constitutive and cannot be understood in isolation. Yet, they are also not reducible to each other.

The extensive discourses of lifestyle in Indonesia are enhanced through commercial advertisements, fashion journalism and lifestyle magazines featuring an international manufactured culture.³¹ More importantly, however, is that in everyday life, people judge other members of Indonesian society by means of lifestyles,³² like social relations, consumption, entertainment, and dress. In this sense, the class membership of the Indonesian people is evaluated through one's consumption patterns and lifestyle.

The phenomena of *kafe tenda* (tented cafés) and Mall Culture in Jakarta are good examples through which one can examine how the middle class in Jakarta is produced and reproduced through cultures of consumption. I will pay especially close attention to the process of making the Jakartan middle class by explaining both the phenomena of *kafe tenda* and Mall Culture as performative mediums for Jakartan middle class people.

Kafe Tenda

The economics and culture of *kafe tenda* should be seen as mutually constitutive. The culture of Kafe Tenda is a space through which the middle class is produced and reproduced. Dining in a *kafe tenda* involves much more than simply the act of eating, because eating is only one moment in the cultural process of consumption. The conscious choice of a specific place and food for the diner is another integral part of the process. In this section, I will examine how middle class formation and production emerges through the culture of *kafe tenda*.

A friend of mine who recently moved to Jakarta from Surabaya is a good example of the new middle class and their relationships with *kafe tenda* in Jakarta. He lives in an expensive apartment around the Semanggi district—a milestone of Indonesia's development and advancement towards being a metropolitan city and a nice place for fun shopping, and also a dining center containing some of the hippest hangouts for youngsters—which is equipped with luxurious goods and consumer durables, such as TVs, a video deck, stereo sets, a washing machine, a refrigerator, and an air conditioner, and he also drives a new car and always dresses in a brand name suit. He is one of the Jakartan new middle class. One day he invited me to go to a *kafe tenda* for dinner, but I refused his invitation. Then he

said to me, “Ansori, you should go to *kafe tenda* occasionally to mingle and socialize with the important and rich people. You are really *kuno* [traditional]. You just keep studying.” Based on the constructivist perspective of class, his behavior exhibits his class tastes, because his words demonstrate a level of middle class consciousness. For him, going to a *kafe tenda* and having dinner and fun is important for the maintenance of his class membership.

Eating at fancy restaurants instead of cooking at home has become a lifestyle symbol and an integral part of Indonesian life for decades. Many middle and upper-class people in Jakarta spend much of their leisure time trying out the many various international restaurants. Yet, Jakartan middle-class people have created a specific place for having dinner, *kafe tenda*, where they can manifest or mimic the culturally prescribed tastes of their class.

It should be noted that *kafe tenda* (tented cafés) are different from *warung tenda* (tented roadside stall). *kafe tenda* were initially made popular by Indonesian celebrities and artists, and became a new trend after the economic crisis hit Indonesia in 1997. For many Jakartan people, the establishment of *kafe tenda* became an alternative source of potential moneymaking during the economic crisis. *kafe tenda* spread in certain places, such as the Plaza Senayan parking lot, the Central Business District, the Mega Mall Pluit, Monas, Semanggi, outside Plaza Senayan on the weekends, and on Raden Fatah Street, Kamayoran. In *kafe tenda* a wide range of food and drinks are served, which are accompanied by high prices compared to the many tented roadside stalls. *Kafe tenda* are equipped with different entertainment, music, and karaoke, and decorated with colorful lights. Almost all the visitors are middle class, and there are hardly any upper class or lower-class people there. The diners at *kafe tenda* drive new and fancy cars, dress in brand name suits and wear modern fashions.

By contrast, *warung tenda* (tented roadside stalls) or semi-permanent *warung* (using semi-permanent buildings), which are easily found along the streets of Jakarta, are mostly visited by lower class residents, blue-collar workers or other passers-by. *Warung tenda* tend to sprout up in the late afternoon and evening on roadsides, on sidewalks, in parking lots, and in open spaces. Due to low overhead, *warung tenda* offer

cheaper fare than *kafe tenda*. A *Warung tenda* consists of a simple tent structure tied to poles or a nearby fence, and can quickly be set up with wooden tables and benches. A *spanduk* (cloth with ads or the menu printed on it) serves as the wall between the dining area and the street or nearby *warung tenda*.

Dining at *kafe tenda* is essentially determined by class taste and not necessarily by one's income. Thus, even though upper class people may have more money, they might not dine at *kafe tenda* simply because it is a middle class cultural space. Instead, they primarily dine at fancy and expensive restaurants. At *kafe tenda*, the Jakartan middle class is able to balance their efforts to construct a class identity and to create class distinction. In this sense, *kafe tenda* are a class cultural project, a never-ending effort to make a middle class culture through consumerism.

In addition to serving to distinguish the middle class from elites, *kafe tenda* also help those “in the middle” to distinguish themselves from those below them on the social scale. The lower classes eat out at *warung tenda* because dining at *kafe tenda* requires disposable cash, effectively excluding those below the middle class. Thus, poorer or lower-class people who have dinner at *kafe tenda* might be considered unsuitable, weird, or immoral. In the collective mindset of the Jakartan people, those of the lower class should stay in their own culturally designated place—*kafe tenda*. By framing *kafe tenda* in a class between below and above, Jakartan middle class people construct a moral distinction, implying conformity to the culturally constructed and established class behavior codes of being appropriate and inappropriate, suitable and unsuitable. In this sense, working class people are considered out of place when eating at *kafe tenda*. Class distinction emerges clearly as moral distinction through this social performance at *kafe tenda*.

The New Order economic development has brought about the improvement of the living standards of Indonesian people by creating and increasing middle-class jobs. That is, New Order economic development has brought about a structural change of occupations. All the middle-class jobs make a contribution to increasing the income level and the emergence of the middle class.

A person or group's access to financial resources determines their ability to purchase and to consume. Having access to a certain amount of financial resources determines the ability of people to consume at *kafe tenda*. However, it is only one moment in the cultural process of consumption, and does not automatically determine class. Economic structures and material resources are expressed through cultural aspects of consumption and lifestyle to create a class. Thus, through the culture of *kafe tenda*, middle class identity is produced and reproduced. But *kafe tenda* are not simply the products of economic determinants.

In *kafe tenda* people can meet other businessmen and professionals and have the chance to meet Indonesian movie stars. *kafe tenda* are a public space³³ where people share their common interests and feelings with other people from the same class. Going to a *kafe tenda*, therefore, is as much an expression of middle class identity as it is a consumption choice. In this sense, *kafe tenda* are the cultural spaces of class, a space in which specific claims to value, meaning, and reality are lived out and naturalized in everyday practice. People in Jakarta's social middle produce this cultural space of class.

The culture of *kafe tenda* opens up new ways of imagining oneself and one's community in consumption terms and are, at the same time, a performance of class. Thus, the cultural atmosphere of the restaurant transforms it into a public space where people stake a claim and confirm their class membership. Middle class membership is not about fixing rank, but about claiming and maintaining a place in the ongoing competition. As noted by Veven Wardana and Herry Barus, much working on the lifestyle of Jakartan rich people, "*kafe tenda* is a symbolic lifestyle".³⁴ It is a new performative medium through which people attempt to synchronize their lives with those of others.

Mall Culture

A second phenomenon of middle class practice in Jakarta is mall culture. Similar to the culture of *kafe tenda*, mall culture cannot solely be seen as a consequence or a product of economic privilege. Economics and mall culture should be seen as mutually constitutive,³⁵ and in the same vein as *kafe tenda*, mall culture can be considered a cultural practice of class.

In what follows, I will examine how the phenomenon of mall culture assists in the emergence of middle class formation and production.

At the most fundamental level, malls are simply shopping centers which function to facilitate the consumption of a modern lifestyle.³⁶ The overwhelming prevalence of malls in Jakarta is partly due to more recent globalization, which has transported a global view of a modern lifestyle to the Jakartan people. Daniel Ziv, who has engaged in research on Jakartan malls, notes that the malls "contain lots of bright glitzy things on display. Malls have food courts galore and awful live bands and overflowing cineplexes. Malls have pricey cafes and noisy video arcades and trendy salons and obnoxious kiddy pageants."³⁷ The shopping mall can serve as a venue through which Jakartan people can fulfill their needs by socializing with friends, enjoying entertainment, or by simply visiting.

However, in the last few decades, it has become apparent that malls in Jakarta do not only serve as shopping centers for Jakartan people, but also reveal certain elements of cultural practice. As Ziv said, "less fortunate cities make do with parks, beaches, playgrounds, outdoor promenades or even stuffy cultural centers as the places where their residents meet and interact. Jakartan people are far luckier. They have the mall...Most of all, malls are the places Jakartan people go to see and be seen."³⁸ In addition to functioning as shopping centers, malls in Jakarta are built mainly to provide public spaces where people can engage in activities related to their class.

For Jakartan people, visiting the mall does not necessarily mean shopping or buying household goods. Jakartan people, especially Jakartan youths, often visit the mall for the cultural purpose of "*mejeng*". "*Mejeng*" refers to behaviors that purposely display a certain level of consumption, such as wearing the most up to-date fashion trend and meeting with other people of the same class in public spaces. In the mall, they hang around different areas and go from one place to another. They do not really need to buy something because that is not their main purpose. Instead, the cultural meaning of visiting the mall is to articulate and demonstrate their identity and share that interest with other people. In this way, for Jakartan people, visiting the mall is a symbol of consumption and lifestyle.

The public phenomenon of mall culture has developed rapidly over the last two decades in Jakarta. It is a new public space that is designed for the display and consumption of modern commodities. This new public space dictates what kind of clothing one wears or should wear to be accepted. Those who fail to conform “don’t count” in the eyes of their peers. Thus, the culture of the mall should be viewed as a space of the new middle class because it is at the mall that they are put on display and negotiate their claims to middle-class membership.

By transforming this public space into a commoditized zone and then claiming moral legitimacy³⁹—implying a class justification of being modern, honorable, and decent—the Jakartan middle class claims the malls as its own legitimate class domain. This act of transforming public space into consumer space serves to exclude those who cannot participate in its consumerism. In a sense, mall culture is the productive work of the middle class that produces itself and its external existence from the raw materials of consumer goods. Thus, through the culture of the mall, the Jakartan middle class is produced and reproduced. The middle class in Jakarta is truly a cultural project of class; it never exists outside of the continuous production and reproduction through cultural practices.

The fact that the income level and living standards of the Jakartan people have risen as the result of the policies under New Order economic development does not automatically determine class. Although it is true that having a certain level of material or financial resources determines one’s ability to participate in consumption, it is not merely the financial element that defines the middle class. Many in Jakarta are unable to make a claim to middle class membership because they are unable to display their lifestyle in the mall. This is not to say that mall culture is in any way simply the product of economic determinations. Mall culture is a never-ending process of cultural production and middle-class formation.

Conclusion

Economic modernization and the policy of rapid economic growth for Indonesian development have made important contributions to the massive growth of white-collar workers. Such an economic improvement

has significantly increased per capita income and, as a result, has improved the living standards of the Indonesian people. It is in this situation that a new middle class in Indonesia emerged as the beneficiaries of economic development. The 1980s were an important period, marking the integration of Indonesia into the global world. The period signaled the rapid influx of consumer commodities and the transformation of a modern lifestyle.

Throughout this paper, I use a constructivist approach in examining the emergence of the middle class in Indonesia. The cultural process aspect of class analysis articulates the dynamic and ongoing making of class. The reality of class is that it is something that is always in continuous production and reproduction through cultural practices. The phenomena of *kafe tenda* and mall culture exemplify the processes of middle class production in Indonesia.

My analysis has shown that the “newness” of the Indonesian middle class is closely associated with commodity consumption and the social practices of taste. These properties serve as the social markers of a new cultural standard that is specifically linked to globalization and the opening of Indonesian markets to the global economy in the 1980s. The invention of the Indonesian middle class involves the construction of a new cultural image and the entry of a new social group as the affluent beneficiaries of the Economic New Order, rather than a product of the Old Order and the colonial context of the Dutch.

Compared to the middle classes in other Southeast Asian countries, the Indonesian middle classes are mainly characterized by their dependence on the state. This condition leads them to a great dilemma. On the one hand, they are expected to be the locomotive of democratization in Indonesia. On the other hand, democratization will bring about significant structural changes that may disadvantage their class position. Rather than being critical of the authoritarian regime of Soeharto that is often seen as corrupt, arbitrary, and nepotistic, they make maximal efforts in preserving their relationship to the state and maintaining the status quo. Thus, as Crouch has suggested, democratization in Indonesia cannot be seen as a byproduct of middle-class revolt against the authoritarian regime of the New Order, but instead, the middle class significantly develops thanks to the rapid economic growth of the regime.⁴⁰

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- 5 It is conceptually referred to as the process of ongoing refinement of the individual living standard of Indonesian middle class, mainly through education, consumerism/lifestyle and political behavior.
- 6 Tanter, & Young, Introduction of the politics of middle class in Indonesia, pp. 1-10.
- 7 Liechty, Suitably modern: making middle class culture in a new consumer society, p. 8. Class is seen as comprising individual attitudes, belief and behavior that depends upon the formative capacity through social learning and social interaction.
- 8 Wacquant, Making class: the middle class (es) in social theory and social structure. In McNall, S., Levine, R. & Fantasia, R (eds.). *Bringing class back in*, p. 51. It is important to bear in mind that Wacquant's critique to both Weberian and Marxist class approaches additionally describe the general nature of structuralist approach.
- 9 Koo, Korean workers: the culture and politics of class formation, p.13.
- 10 Ibid, p. 8.
- 11 Liechty, Suitably modern: making middle class culture in a new consumer society, p. 21.
- 12 Brubaker, Rethinking classical theory: the sociological vision of Pierre Bourdieu, p. 761. A class approach which shifts focus from objective, structuralist-economic abstraction of class territories to the processual and constructivist formation of class can take Bourdieu's work "Distinction" as an example. Bourdieu argued that "class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning and differing endowments of power or capital... age, sex and ethnicity are not principles of divisions that cross-cut class divisions. Class is not mode of social grouping among others: it is the generic name for all social groups distinguished by their conditions of existence and their corresponding dispositions". On the most concrete level, Bourdieu, equating class with his central concept of Habitus, "is concerned with class based differences in the ensembles of consumption habits, leisure, time activities, and taste in work of art, food, dress, and home furnishings, etc."
- 13 The Jakartan Middle classes definitely conduct simultaneous projects of making class and distinguishing their class with other working class and bourgeois.
- 14 Liechty, Suitably modern: making middle class culture in a new consumer society, p. 30.
- 15 Ibid, p. 5.
- 16 See Dick, "Further reflections on the middle class". In Tanter, R. & Young, K. (eds.). *The politics of middle class Indonesia*, p. 74. As he said, "the consciousness is rather identification with a class of people pursuing modern, westernized lifestyles that has, to a considerable extent, been based on role models fashioned and propagated by the national mass media and especially television".
- 17 Liechty, Suitably modern: making middle class culture in a new consumer society, p. 115. Liechty argued that consumption and lifestyle, as class culture, "is a new performative medium through which people attempt to synchronize their lives with those of others". Needless to say, "middle class is a kind of performative space characterized by constant alignment and realignment with class others and where goods play active role". As a consequence, "middle class membership is not about fixing rank but about claiming and maintaining a place in the ongoing debate".
- 18 Rahardjo, *Perokonomian Indonesia: Pertumbuhan dan Krisis*, p. 51.

End Notes

- 1 See Macki, 1990; Hart 1993 quoted by Gerke, 1995; Fernandes: 2000, Koo: 2006, Robison: 1995, Liechty: 2003, Shiraishi: 2006.
- 2 Koo, The changing faces of inequality in South Korea in the age of globalization. Korean Studies Journal, Vol. 30.
- 3 See Liddle, "New middle class in Indonesia", In Tanter, R. & Young, K. (eds.). *The politics of middle class Indonesia*, pp. 56-67. The high rate of industrial development has been the main goal of New-Order Regime through their state-led modernization and liberalization policy in the 1980s; a policy that is more outward-looking. The primary byproduct of such policy is the production of significant number of new middle class that will expectedly serve as the agent of national development.
- 4 See Geertz, Peddlers and princess: social change and economic modernization in two Indonesian towns.

19 See Pond, *Development investment in Indonesia, 1956-1963*, p. 93. For him, the history of Indonesian economy during the first fifteen years of political independence must be viewed against a background of low levels of material welfare and economic resources, decades of colonial domination and eight years of military occupation and war. Annual per capita income was about 100 dollars (U.S.) or below, and might have declined during 1949-1964. About 80 per cent of population earned livelihood in the agrarian sectors, which used relatively little capital.

20 See Djamin, *Perokonomian Indonesia*. p. 2. For him, the failure of economic development Old-Order is caused by some factors. First, the Strategic Committee of Development, formed in 1947, could not apply all the planned programs of development as all the national efforts were directed mainly toward political diplomacy and war against Dutch that intended to re-colonize Indonesia. Second, Banteng Program established on August 14, 1950 and mainly intended to serve as the development of indigenous entrepreneur, also failed to make a radical economic changes for some reasons, the colonial structure of economy and the absence of BNI (National Bank of Indonesia) nationalization.

21 Pond, *Development investment in Indonesia, 1956-1963*, p. 96.

22 Prawiro, *Indonesia's struggle for economic development: pragmatism in action*, p. 2.

23 Ibid, p. 87. As he further argues that, "this trilogy epitomized Indonesia's vision of development. The Development Trilogy is a simple but powerful idea, which more than anything else expresses the New Order's pragmatic and ideological standard against which all economic policies could be measured".

24 Prawiro, *Indonesia's struggle for economic development: pragmatism in action*, p. 257.

25 Ibid, p. 280.

26 Ibid, p. 313. He argued that "globalization implies having ready access to the products of the world at international prices"

27 See Shiraishi, *The rise of new urban middle classes in Southeast Asia: what is its national and regional significance?*

28 See Mackie, *Money and the middle class*. In Tanter, R. & Young, K. (eds.). *The politics of middle class Indonesia*. P. 127.

29 See Shiraishi, *The rise of new urban middle classes in Southeast Asia: what is its national and regional significance?*

30 Gerke, *Symbolic consumption and the Indonesian middle class*, p. 8.

31 For example, many national and local magazines, newspapers, TVs and Radios in Indonesia show and display modern consumption patterns and lifestyles, either for teenagers or adults, such as *Anita* magazine, *Bintang* magazine, *Popular* tabloid, *Hai* magazine, *Kawanku* magazine, *Senior* tabloid, *Wanita Indonesia* tabloid, and many others, or certain sections of some newspapers, such as *Perempuan* section, showing certain lifestyles and consumption for Indonesian women, on *Kompas* cyber media, *De-Style* section in *Jawa Pos* newspaper, *detikfood* section on *Detik* media, or on some TV shows, such as the *metrolife* and *E-life* sections on *Metro TV*, and many others.

32 Ibid, p. 3.

33 Public space is always referred to as a public space refers to an area or place that is open and accessible to all citizens, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_space

34 Wardhana, & Barus, *Para superkaya Indonesia: sebuah dokumentasi gaya hidup*, p. 113.

35 The aspects of economics exert a power to form a part in the establishment of mall culture and mutually mall culture offers a foundational space of which economics could operate.

36 The modern shopping mall (or simply mall) is often referred to as a huge building or set of buildings that contain stores, with interconnecting walkways enabling visitors to easily walk from store to store.

37 Ziv, *Jakarta inside out*, p. 88.

38 Ibid

39 The concept of moral legitimacy is mainly adopted from Liechty's *Suitably modern: making middle class culture in a new consumer society*.

40 See Crouch, "The Perils of Prediction: Understanding the Indonesian Transition, 1998-1999". In Embong, A.R. (ed.) *Southeast Asian Middle Classes: Prospects for Social Change and Democratization*.

Code-switching in Kuala Lumpur Malay

The “Rojak” Phenomenon

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Introduction

In this study, code-switching in Malay is investigated by isolating and concentrating on Kuala Lumpur Malay (KL Malay). Native speakers of KL Malay were interviewed and recorded, and their responses were transcribed and glossed. Analysis of these responses suggests a significant percentage of English words have been imported into the KL Malay lexicon and are being used in various contexts to replace their KL Malay counterparts. Moreover, it is found that morphemes from KL Malay can attach themselves to borrowed English words. It is also discovered that female speakers use more English words than male speakers. Overall, this study provides concrete evidence of the occurrence of code switching in KL Malay. The results of this study raise significant questions about the acquisition of KL Malay as a native language, as well as whether KL Malay has transformed into a creole. From a language planning standpoint, this may be related to the superimposition of English as a second language for all Malaysians, as mentioned by Hassan (2005). Other issues that are connected to this matter are the premature selection of Malay as the instructional medium in schools despite the lack of certain terminology and widespread bilingualism in the

society. This paper invites a reexamination of the current linguistic situation in Malaysia, especially in the peninsula where KL Malay is spoken.

Kuala Lumpur Malay and Bahasa Rojak

In Peninsular Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur specifically, there is uncertainty when referring to the spoken Malay variant, as it is laced with lexical items from other languages. The Kuala Lumpur speech community is multi-ethnic and polyglossic,¹ consisting of speakers of various languages such as English, Cantonese, Hokkien, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and many more. Since the Malay variant spoken is not the one taught in schools, the term *bahasa rojak*² (lit. “rojak language”) is used among the speech communities in Malaysia to refer to the eclectic nature of the spoken language, using the metaphor of the local mixed fruit and vegetable salad.

However, the term *bahasa rojak* in the Malaysian context is also used to refer to any mixture of two or more languages in communication, with any of the languages being the base language. A famous example is Manglish (Malaysian English), in which words and phrases from Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, Tamil and a few other languages are juxtaposed with English

words. The target of much negative attention, *bahasa rojak* has been banned from national TV stations, labeled as “undisciplined” language use and deemed a threat to the national language and national identity.³ Ironically, local scholars and linguists have kept it at arm’s length, never examining the linguistic traits of the widely spoken variant so as to ascertain the nature of this so-called threat. Thus, the Malay variant examined in this study has not been analyzed extensively, as linguists have focused more on the standard Malay variants. Another possible reason for this exclusion is the transcription of data into the standard orthography that leads to the assumption that it is standard Malay being spoken and not KL Malay.

Part of the problem is also a larger, more general trend of obscuring non-standard variants of a particular language and treating them as “incorrect.” Proponents of this view tell us how a language should be spoken, instead of how it is spoken. An example of this in English usage is the rule against prepositional stranding (ending a sentence with a preposition) taught in grammar school, which does not always apply in everyday speech. We hear sentences such as “What is he talking about?” or “Who did Genie give the present to?” on a regular basis, and they sound natural and comprehensible. Prescriptive rules, such as the one mentioned, are often determined by an authority and must be explicitly learned by the speakers. More importantly, these rules do not depict how language works and how it is spoken in speech communities, such as the Malay speakers in Kuala Lumpur.

A similar disjuncture is apparent in Malay linguistics in Malaysia. There has always been a strictly imposed good-bad dichotomy between Standard Malay and *bahasa rojak* by the linguistic authority, with the latter being considered as not the “real” Malay and the former being considered as the variant spoken in Kuala Lumpur and the southern part of the Malay peninsula. Here, I suggest that the Malay variant spoken in Kuala Lumpur is distinct from Standard Malay. While retaining some of the features such as the final /a/ → /ə/ alternation in the word-final position, Kuala Lumpur Malay (henceforth KL Malay) is not identical to the Standard Malay defined by Teoh (1994), Nik Safiah Karim (1986) and Asmah Haji Omar (1977), who assume that the variant is free from any code-switching and only includes words from the prescribed lexicon, the official dictionary of the Malay language, *Kamus*

Dewan. Code-switching, as well as other features shown in the findings, is an inevitable phenomenon for most speakers of KL Malay.

A possible reason for the lack of acknowledgement of the prominence of code-switching in spoken Malay is the prescribed bad reputation of code-switching by *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (translated by Hassan [2005] as “Language and Literacy Agency,” henceforth DBP) through academic articles published on and in the Malay language. Below is an excerpt from one of them:

Maggi 2 minute noodles
Maggi 2 minit mee

3 jam servis
3 hour service

Dalam hubungan dua contoh yang akhir ini, dapat dipertanyakan mengapa BM yang mesti diperkosa? Apakah tidak mungkin mereka beranggapan bahawa bahasa Inggeris ialah bahasa yang utama sedangkan BM bahasa sambilan atau bahasa yang boleh diperlakukan begitu sahaja.

(Junus, 1996: p.33)

Translation:

With regard to the two examples above, it is reasonable to question why is it the case that BM [*Bahasa Melayu*, lit. “Malay language”] must be raped? Is it not the case that they think English is the prominent language, while BM is a trivial language or “the language that can be used or abused.”

The examples given in the article above illustrate how English has “corrupted” the structure of Malay through structural borrowing via direct translation. As a large portion of Malay vocabulary is borrowed and incorporated from other languages, synchronically and diachronically, the process is often over-generalized beyond lexical borrowings to structural patterns, resulting in the lament of the linguist mentioned above.

Far from being objective, some research papers published by DBP on Malay adopt a preachy tone, and are chiefly concerned with preserving the “purity” and “quality” of the Malay language and shielding it from

undesirable polluting influences, including colloquialisms and unassimilated lexical items from other languages (mainly English), instead of giving an unbiased account of the linguistic situation. Spoken Malay in the Kuala Lumpur area is perceived to have remained unaffected by any language change or contact and is almost always equated to Standard Malay. Both dialects are seen as free from any unprecedented phonological, morphological and syntactical alternations. The closest attempt at describing the real complexity of spoken Malay is the diglossic categorization of Standard Malay and Bazaar Malay, the latter being the low variety with its main characteristics being mispronunciation by non-Malay speakers and simplified pidgin-like structures.⁴ Bazaar Malay, however, is a vast category, referring to numerous non-standard regional variations of Standard Malay, not only the colloquial language used in the Kuala Lumpur area. KL Malay does not fit into either the Standard Malay or Bazaar Malay categories, one is too constrained and the other is too broad. High-low distinctions which conventionally have been used in Malay linguistics are now becoming obsolete. In order to accommodate KL Malay, the descriptions and categorizations mentioned above have to be revised in order to consider how the Malay language is really spoken in contemporary Kuala Lumpur, based on concrete linguistic data.

Malay-English code-switching in context

Malay and English are both Subject-Verb-Object languages (referring to sentential word order). There are a number of studies that have been done on code-switching in Malay. Nik Safiah Karim (1981, 1986) has cited the examples below for Malay-English code switching, for which I have provided glossing/word-by-word translations:

You nampak I
2sg. see 1sg.⁵
You see me.

I panggil you.
1sg. call 2sg.
I call you.

Pilihan yang best.

choice rel.⁶ best

The best choice/The good choice.

Nik Safiah Karim, 1981 & 1986

In the examples above, we can see that Malay is the base language as the English pronouns used were not conjugated to object pronouns in direct object positions (the second example does not specifically show this, however, as the 2sg form for subject and object pronouns are the same). Another sign is the preservation of Malay word order apparent in the third example (the same phrase with English as its base and an imported Malay word would be “the best *pilihan*”). Below are examples showing more imported English words in longer sentences:

Saya start kerja pukul tujuh...

1sg start work hit seven

I start work at seven o'clock.

*Kita menaip skrip, stensilkan, check stereo
recording before rakaman.*

1pl. meN-type script stencil-kan check stereo
recording before recording.

We type the script, stencilize it, and check the
recording stereo before recording.

Wong Kheng Seng, 1987

The examples above are interesting in the sense that they have both borrowed and imported words. Here, I provisionally use the term “borrowed” to refer to words which have been assimilated into the Malay lexicon, often with significant phonological and spelling changes. The term “imported” is used to refer to words which still retain the phonological and orthographic features of the source language, in this case English. In the second sentence, we can see a string of imported words, “check,” “stereo,” “recording,” and “before,” in the same sentence as borrowed words, such as *skrip*, *taip* (*menaip*), and *stensil* (*stensilkan*). The word “stereo” may be confusing to classify, as it is both a Malay word and an English word, and it retains its spelling and

pronunciation from English. However, from the word order prevalent in the sentence, it seems more likely that it is an imported word as it modifies the noun “recording” while preceding it. Also noteworthy are the occurrences of the word “recording” and its Malay counterpart *rakaman* in the same sentence, which shows that the English words are not imported due to the unavailability of words with the same meaning in Malay.

Figure 2:
Location of
respondents’
hometowns



Methodology

For the purpose of this study, I use the definition of code-switching given by Heller in Nilep (2006), which is “the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode.” The scope of this study is restricted to Malay-English code-switching, with KL Malay being the base language or code. Sixteen (eight male and eight female) native speakers of KL Malay aged 18–20 were selected to be interviewed. As this is a pilot study, the number of subjects was relatively small. Subjects then participated in a recorded interview, in which they were asked seven

questions about school and college life. All the questions were asked in KL Malay and the subjects were only told that they were participating in a social study. The recordings of the interview responses were then transcribed and glossed. Imported lexical items were analyzed according to their respective parts of speech and tabulated. Responses were also analyzed phonologically and morphologically.

Findings

In this section, I present all the imported words tabulated and categorized according to their parts of speech, the two types of code-switching that occur, and some phonological and morphological processes that follow the import of the English lexical items. The imported lexical items consist of verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions. Table 1 shows the imported English words and their parts of speech and that nouns are the most commonly imported lexical items, followed by verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and determiners. There were no pronouns found in the responses, as all the subjects refrained from using pronouns in answering the questions. All the words in Table 1 have counterparts in Malay, with some of them being borrowed from English such as *nota*–‘note’, *nasional*–‘national’, *sesi*–‘session’ and *informasi*–‘information’.

There are two types of code-switching found in the data: individual words and strings of words⁷. Below are some of the responses for each type⁸:

individual words:

a) ...*zaman s@kolah dulu macam pressure siket s@bab ap@...*

era school former like pressure little.bit because what

...school was more pressuring because...

b) *Oh kat sini tido buat homework, layan komput@ stay kat s@kolah*

oh prep. here sleep do homework serve computer stay prep.⁹ school

Oh, here (I usually) sleep, do homework, use the computer and stay on campus.

c) *kat universiti ni lain siketlah sebab culture die lain so macam biasanyə kalau kat Malaysia...*

prep. university this other little.bit-lah because culture 3sg. other so like normally if prep. Malaysia

In this university it is a little different because its culture is different, so, like, usually in Malaysia...

The imported English words in the examples above are “pressure,” “homework,” “stay” and “culture.” All these words have counterparts in Malay.

strings of words

d) *...form four sampai form five kat Perlis.*

form four until form five prep. Perlis

(I studied from) form¹⁰ four until form five in Perlis.

e) *...bangun pagi pukul tujuh cam tu and then mandi.*

get.up morning hit seven like that and then bathe

(I) get up at around seven in the morning and then (I) bathe.

f) *...tengah hari pagi lunch after that pagi prep.*

middle day go lunch after that go prep(aratory class).

go to lunch at noon, after that I go to preparatory class.

The imported English words in the examples above are “form four,” “form five,” “and then,” “lunch after that” and “prep,” all of which have respective Malay counterparts.

Rojak Phonology

Phonologically, there are several characteristics of imported English words that have been observed in KL Malay:

Consonant cluster simplification

Deletion of final consonant in word-final consonant clusters.

e.g. “predict” - [' predik]

“breakfast” - [' brekfəs]

Deletion of non-stop consonant in word-medial consonant clusters

e.g. “library” - [' laɪbəri]

ii) Vowel weakening

e.g. “management” - [' menedʒmən] æ -> e

“responsible” - [rɪsponsɪ ' bəl] ɒ -> o

iii) Stress shifting

e.g. “responsible” - [rɪsponsɪ ' bəl] (second syllable to final syllable)

Although the processes above are by no means exclusive to imported English words in KL Malay, it might be the case that they are influenced by the phonology of KL Malay in which stress and tense/lax vowels are non-contrastive. Further research is needed to make phonological statements as to how much the sounds of imported words are affected by the phonemic inventory of KL Malay from a theoretical standpoint.

Rojak Morphology

It is found that imported lexical items can attach to KL Malay morphemes, mainly ‘-kan’ and “-lah,” as shown in the examples below:

the verbal “-kan”

lepas tu kənə ensurəkan səmuə orang masuk

after that must ensure-kan all people go.in

After that (I) must ensure everyone goes in.

Figure 3:
Consonants of
KL Malay.

	labial	dental/alveolar	postalveolar	palatal	velar	glottal
stop	p b	t d			k g	
fricative	f	s z	sh			h
affricate						
nasal	m	n		ny	ng	
lateral		l				
rhotic		r				

The morpheme ‘*-kan*’ turns adjectives into verbs and verbs into imperatives in KL Malay. The first function is the same as the English morpheme “en-” in “ensure,” which makes the form ‘*ensurekan*’ redundant morphologically.

ii) the emphatic “*-lah*”

Bezə diə aku rasə macam basically ko punyə
time, time managementlah

difference 3sg 1sg feel like basically 2sg own
time time management-lah

The difference, I think, like, is basically your time management.

...pas tu continuelah.

after that continuelah

...after that (I) continue.

The emphatic “*-lah*” is often added at the end to utterances when the speaker expects the listener to empathize. Sometimes it is also added for emphasis. In the examples above, the attachment of “*-lah*” to imported English words which happen to be at the end of the utterance show that the morpheme usage

transcends codes. This morphological feature might also be an indicator of a creolization process within KL Malay, by the incorporation of English words into Malay morphology.

Other Findings

After tabulating the data and calculating the frequency of imported words from male and female respondents, it is found that female speakers import more English words in their speech than male speakers, who produced longer responses. Below are the total number of imported English words and KL Malay words and the calculated average percentage of imported words in the responses:

Males, 157/1278 words, average 8.5%

Females, 121/872 words, average. 11.75%

Several definitive features of KL Malay also surfaced in the responses, such as contractions of certain forms of Standard Malay, e.g., *lepas* to *pas* and *macam* to *cam*, and diphthong simplification, e.g., *kau* to *ko*. Some respondents also used *macam*, which means “like,” as fillers, reminiscent of the Southern Californian “valley girl” sociolect, which has now become widespread among English-speaking teenagers.

Figure 4:
Vowels of
KL Malay.

	front	central	back
high	i		u
mid	e	ə	o
low		a	

Discussion

a) Code-switching in the Malay Historical Context

Code-switching is by no means a new linguistic phenomenon in the Malay speaking world. Since the days of the ancient Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms of Srivijaya and Langkasuka in the seventh century—and possibly some earlier kingdoms—language contact has occurred between Sanskrit (and other Indic languages) and the indigenous languages spoken in the Malay archipelago. After the establishment of a Sanskrit-influenced substratum, Perso-Arabic influences brought by Muslim merchants from the Middle East in the late fourteenth century began to permeate the Malay language. The interaction of Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic influences can be seen in Malay *hikayats*, such as *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and *Hikayat Indraputra*. Many of these *hikayats* exhibit extensive usage of fantastic elements from Hindu and Buddhist texts and Sanskrit vocabulary side-by-side with Persian and Arabic words and suffixes from Persian literature.

In the fifteenth century, the arrival of Portuguese, Dutch, British and Japanese colonizers marked another episode in the linguistic development of the Malay language. Among the colonizers, the British were the most prominent as they established a formal education system in Malaya in the early twentieth century. The British education system initiated mass borrowings of English words in the academic domain, especially in translated academic texts. Throughout the twentieth century, English loan words became more common, following the change of the standard orthography of Malay from Arabic-based Jawi to Roman alphabets which made it easier to incorporate new English words. The British colonization period also saw the establishment of Chinese and Indian communities in Malaya, both of which have had significant impacts on the diverse nature of the Malay vocabulary, especially the so-called Bazaar Malay.

Historically, code-switching has long been a major linguistic process affecting the Malay language, albeit without facilitation by a prescribed lexicon and grammar from an official institution such as the DBP, which was only established in 1956. Hence, it is crucial

for us to have an informed diachronic view so as to recognize that the code-switching currently happening is a tiny part of the bigger linguistic picture of Malay language change.

b) Code-switching in the Academic Context

Following Malaysia's independence in 1957, Malay was established as the national language and medium of instruction in national schools, while national-type schools still used other languages like English, Tamil and Mandarin as the media of instruction. Eventually, English schools were incorporated as national schools. Instead of being used as a medium of instruction, English was taught as a second language in all schools. This implementation led to English being the more prominent common language between ethnic communities, and thus more widely used than Malay in communication between speech communities, especially in urban areas.

English was then further elevated as an academic language through the implementation of ETEMS (English in Teaching Mathematics and Science) educational policy. Its proponents argued that reference materials for these subjects in Malay were limited, and therefore English was the more appropriate language to use as a medium of instruction. Hassan (2005) states that there were acute shortages of academic reading materials in Malay at the tertiary level, which justified the use of English to teach science and mathematics at school. English also became the medium of instruction in a majority of private colleges and institutions, and some public universities. Through the implementation of education policies, English has acquired prestige—especially in the academic domain. In contrast, Malay is slowly losing its reputation as an academic language, and only enshrined as a national language with no practical appeal. Hence, the high level of sophistication connected to English as well as the extensive use of borrowed and imported English terms in education may underlie the motivations of code-switching in Malay.

c) Word Borrowing

As pointed out above, word borrowing is one of the main catalysts for the expansion of Malay vocabulary.

This mechanism is often used by scholars in fields such as science, mathematics and engineering, with the borrowed (usually English) words used in the Malay context—regardless of the existence of corresponding Malay words. Consider the example below:

“genre” - *genre* (academic), *jenis* (colloquial)

“discussion” - *diskusi* (academic), *perbincangan* (colloquial)

The English word “genre” already has a Malay word with the same meaning, *jenis*. However, there is also the Malay word *genre*, which is frequently used in academic contexts. The same goes with *diskusi* and *perbincangan*, both of which translate to “discussion” in English. The favoring of borrowed words from English may be caused by the prestige associated with the language discussed earlier, and as a result, Malay speakers import English words outside the prescribed lexicon.

In KL Malay and Manglish, there is a growing compendium of words imported from various sources, namely English, Cantonese, Hokkien, Tamil, Telugu and a few other languages, which have yet to be included in the official dictionary. These words are also used as telltale signs to identify *bahasa rojak*. Amir Muhammad¹¹, in his essay *Unwelcome Words*, lists 100 words used in KL Malay from diverse origins which are not found in *Kamus Dewan* and their meanings. The essay serves as evidence of the linguistic catch-22 in Malaysia, where imported words that are considered pollutants of the language are not included in the official dictionary, which itself contains a huge amount of borrowed words.

d) The Creolization of KL Malay

Asmah Haji Omar (1982) cites examples of the creolization of Bazaar Malay in other variants of Malay, such as Baba Malay and Ambonese Malay, in which the former pidgins were learned as native languages by new generations of speakers. The current state of KL Malay, although strictly neither a pidgin nor a creole, begs the question of what will happen when native speakers of the variant—with all its features (contraction and diphthong simplification, to name a few) and imported words are born, if there are not any such speakers already. Clearly, this requires serious attention from linguists, as the emerging language is

going to be a fortified variant of KL Malay, far from being just a regional dialect, with its own structure and importing/borrowing mechanisms.

Conclusion

Code-switching occurs in Malay, specifically KL Malay, a previously neglected Malay variant distinct from Standard Malay and Bazaar Malay. In the process of code-switching, individual words and strings of words are imported from English, and are assimilated through a range of phonological and morphological processes. The occurrence of code-switching in KL Malay is related to socio-educational conditions such as the implementation of education policies and the superimposition of English in schools. It is necessary for KL Malay to be researched further, as it has serious implications on future policies, second language education, and Malay linguistics.

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End Notes

- ¹ see Teoh (1994), p.5
- ² *rojak* is an adjective that means 'mixed' and/or 'eclectic' according to *Kamus Dewan* (2005)
- ³ "Gag Order on Using Bahasa Rojak" 02 April 2006. *The Star Online*, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2006/4/2/nation/13849132&sec=nation>; "'Bahasa Rojak' Is Out, Says RTM" 03 February 2000. *Utusan Online*, http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=1998&dt=0704&pub=utusan_malaysia&sec=rencana&pg=ot_01.htm&arc=hive&arc=hive; Ku Seman Ku Hussein. "Stesen TV dan Bahasa Melayu," 05 November 1998. *Utusan Online*, http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=1998&dt=1105&pub=utusan_malaysia&sec=rencana&pg=ot_04.htm&arc=hive&arc=hive; Noor Hazani Musa. "Bahasa Rojak Melayu Hamburger" 04 July 1998. *Utusan Online*. http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=1998&dt=0704&pub=utusan_malaysia&sec=rencana&pg=ot_01.htm&arc=hive&arc=hive
- ⁴ see Nik Safiah Karim (1986), p. 126.
- ⁵ 1sg. = first person singular pronoun; 2sg. = second person singular pronoun
- ⁶ rel.= relative pronoun
- ⁷ Comparable to intersentential and intrasentential categorization. I find it more pragmatic to avoid using sentences to define the categories as it is not very clear where the sentential boundaries are in the recorded responses.
- ⁸ All words are transcribed phonetically, except for imported English words which are written with the standard spelling. 'ə' represents the mid-central vowel (schwa).
- ⁹ prep.= preposition
- ¹⁰ 'form' has the same usage as 'grade' in American English. It is used to refer to the levels in secondary schools in Malaysia.
- ¹¹ Amir Muhammad is a writer and independent movie-maker. His previous movies include the banned *Lelaki Komunis Terakhir* (*The Last Communist*) and *Apa Khabar Orang Kampung* (*Village People Radio Show*). He also published the local best-seller *Malaysian Politicians Say the Darndest Things* (2007).

Faun Pii: Northern Thai Trance Dance

Photo Essay

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Introduction

Founded in the thirteenth century as a kingdom, the Lanna region covers parts of northern Thailand, Burma, Laos, and a small portion of southern China. Lanna society retains its own alphabet, dialects, visual culture, as well as Animist-based, spiritual practices. Belief systems and ancestor worship rituals possibly over a millennium old are found in various forms throughout the region. Prominent among these is the Chiang Mai region of northern Thailand, including the cities and surrounding areas of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang. Each year in the late spring and early summer months leading up to the Buddhist Lent, dozens of trance dance possession rituals, called *Faun Pii*, literally “spirit dance,” take place that pay homage to royal, communal, and hero spirits within family, clan, and social lineages.

Faun Pii are believed to descend from ancient, pre-Buddhist, Mon culture rituals but have also syncretized numerous religious practices throughout the centuries. There are three types of possessing spirits in *Faun pii*: *Pii Mod*, *Pii Meng*, and *Pii Jao Nai*. *Pii Mod* are generally spirits of ordinary citizens and tend to hew closely to familial and/or clan lineages. *Pii Meng* spirits are generally members of the royal class. *Pii Jao Nai* are spirits of heroes and social leaders and are a relatively recent phenomenon in the last couple of decades. The photos in this essay were taken during pilot fieldwork in Summer 2008 on the traditional background and contemporary gender identity formation in the current population of mediums participating in Lanna trance dance.



*Medium entering trance with Pii Meng cloth
Lampang, 2008*

Pii Meng mediums enter their possessed trance state by spinning from a hanging ritual cloth ("Paa Jong") in the middle of the ritual pavilion structure ("Paam"). When they see a medium about to spin, the musicians quickly switch to the traditional rhythm and melody that accompanies the entrance into trance.



*Young medium assisted by older medium
Chiang Mai, 2008*

While most of the younger mediums are now male, there are still a few females being "called" by the spirits and initiated into the practice by the elders.



*Medium/spirit dancing
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Prem is a Pii Jao Nai medium from Lampang who maintains connections with numerous male and female spirits.



*Ping Pong in Trance as Jao Noi
Lampang, 2008*

Ping Pong is a medium, artist and village administrator with two spirits associated with him: Jao Noi, a young prince, and Jao Fah Mengrai, a king from the Chiang Mai region. The two spirits represent Pii Meng and Pii Jao Nai lineages, a rare combination in one medium.



*Old Medium/Spirit
Lampang, 2008*

Lanna has been a primarily matriarchal society for centuries, and most of the older mediums in Northern Thailand are female since Faun Pii is traditionally a domestic spiritual practice.

*Medium entering trance with Pii Meng cloth
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Pii Meng mediums enter their possessed trance state by spinning from a hanging ritual cloth ("Paa Jong") in the middle of the ritual pavilion structure ("Paam"). When they see a medium about to spin, the gamelan musicians quickly switch to the traditional rhythm and melody that accompanies the entrance into trance.





*Old medium/spirit watching
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Many of the oldest mediums sit on the sidelines, even after entering trance possession, and observe the ceremony.



*Mediums/spirits dancing
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Mediums/spirits dance under a traditional Paam Piang (flat-roofed Faun Pii tent).



*Mediums/spirits drinking
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Faun Pii mediums typically drink heavy amounts of rice whiskey and brandy while in trance.



*Medium/spirit dancing
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Middle-aged women represent possibly the last generation ever of primarily female mediums.



*Medium being dressed
Chiang Mai, 2008*

Each medium retains a pre-designated helper to dress them in a new outfit upon entering the possessed state.



*Healing ceremony
Lampang, 2008*

Ping Pong and other mediums perform a healing ritual on a local worshipper in the street outside a Faun Pii ceremony in Lampang.



*Medium/spirit smoking
Chiang Mai, 2008*

With the majority of possessing spirits being male, female mediums take on many stereotypical male behaviors (e.g. smoking, drinking, lewd conversation) in their trance states that they may not be allowed to or be comfortable with in their normal identities.

Boxing Day in Cotabato

Notes from the Field

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Shane Joshua Barter is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of British Columbia and a Human Security Fellow of the Canadian Consortium on Human Security. Barter's dissertation explores the roles of village leaders in separatist conflicts in Southeast Asia.

Stuck in a Manila traffic jam and monsoon flood, the taxi driver turned to me. "The biggest problem in the Philippines today is the Muslims. They are dishonest." Two weeks later in a more remote locale, a commander of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front looked over the table at me and explained that Filipinos are taken to drink and prostitution, and are not as moral as Muslims. Both men agreed on one thing: Mindanao's Muslims are distinct from Christian Filipinos.

There are important differences between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines as well as throughout the world. But an exclusive focus on difference serves to naturalize separation. Ignored are commonalities between the religious communities in the Philippines: friendliness, family spats, a love-hate relationship with the United States, singing, basketball ... and boxing.

In June 2008, I spoke with Abdulaziz, a prominent elder, at his home in Cotabato, Mindanao. A former Barangay Chairman who is close to the separatists, Abdulaziz is an expert on traditional peace ceremonies. Over tea and cookies, we were discussing his many experiences. When the topic shifted to human rights abuses, the old man grew restless. "The abuses Moros suffered under Estrada proved that the problem was not just with Marcos, but instead the Philippines.

Muslims still do not have the land stolen by Christian settlers, and we have to fight back!" As the emotion peaked, the conversation stopped. The room was suddenly crowded with young men and women, and the television was turned on.

Manny Pacquiao versus David Diaz, live from Las Vegas for boxing's lightweight title! Pacquiao has won titles across numerous weight classes and is the Philippines' prized athlete. He was born to a Catholic family in Bukidnon, near Cotabato, and now resides in General Santos City. But there was no sense Pacquiao was a hometown boy. There is too much tension between local Muslims and Catholic settlers to allow that. No, Moro enthusiasm for Pacquiao appears to be a national sentiment.

The Muslim audience was not just watching the fight—they were participating in it, screaming at the television with every blow landed by Pacquiao. One Muslim woman yelped in delight when Diaz started to bleed. A bearded cleric proclaimed Pacquiao the 'Mexi-cutioner'. The room was packed, the crowd praising Pacquiao's training, skill, and humility. All this time, Abdulaziz' stare did not leave the television. "Pacquiao," he said of the Christian boxer, "is one of us."

For just one hour, these Moros were Filipinos. This is not to say that under each Moro headscarf or beard lays a 'real Pinoy'. But the match showed that the conflict between Moro and Filipino is neither primordial nor fundamentalist. Mindanao's Muslims have similar passions as Catholic Filipinos—but also legitimate concerns with their place in the Philippine state. There is great anger towards human rights abuses, state religious symbols, land ownership, and corruption. Many of Mindanao's Muslims want to build a more Islamic society, especially in the realms of education and law. These people are not radicals and are not cultural opposites of Catholic Filipinos.

When Pacquiao knocked Diaz out in the ninth round, my friends viewed it as a triumph for all Filipinos. We celebrated with a feast of fish and rice. I hoped to continue talking about the conflict, but it was not to be. As lunch ended, the first of many replays of the fight began, the audience duplicating their previous excitement. I submitted to the inevitable and decided to simply enjoy this boxing day in Cotabato.

Four Days in Papua

Notes from the Field

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J. Eli Margolis earned a M.A. in Security Studies from Georgetown University in 2008. Margolis worked at the Embassy of Indonesia to the United States from February to November 2007.

The trip described here occurred in December 2007 and January 2008.

"Your name?"

The detective spoke with a broken ease. His accent cut his words sharply, suddenly, but his voice carried no energy and his shoulders hung passively on his frame. His hands sleep-walked over the typewriter, searching for the right place to begin.

"Spell please?"

He didn't look up. A smoke trail rose from the cigarette burning between his lips. As I answered, I surveyed the room.

The public section of Jayapura's police intelligence unit was small—just three offices, none bigger than a dorm room. We sat in the third, separated from sunlight and company by a low plaster wall. Everything looked aged. Wide, dark stains bloomed on the walls. The metal filing cabinet in the far corner bowed, its corners chipped. I shifted my weight; the chair squeaked.

I found it fitting. The station felt like the rest of the city: hot, slow, and vaguely supervised—every bit a remote provincial capital. I refocused my attention as the typing stopped. The detective looked at me.

"And you are here for why?"

I had set off for Jayapura the day before out of simple curiosity. I wanted to escape from the Jakarta-Yogyakarta-Bali beaten path of tourism in Indonesia, wanted to see what else such a large and diverse country might hold. Like all travelers, I sought authentic experience.

Here, history encouraged me. Papua—the province governed from the city of Jayapura—looked to be anything but a beaten path.

Originally colonized by the Netherlands along with the rest of Indonesia, Papua has long been regarded as different. Its people are ethnic Melanesian, not ethnic Javanese as in Java, the country's most populous island. Over time, many Papuans embraced Christianity, not Islam. And while the main islands developed the economic and bureaucratic infrastructure of a modern state, Papua has remained relatively isolated.

When the Dutch left Indonesia in 1949, they stayed in Papua. To them, such differences merited a separate country. But Indonesia's staunchly nationalist early presidents protested. What was Dutch, they argued, should be Indonesian—all of it. And, after long years of UN-brokered negotiations and a very controversial vote, Papua joined Indonesia in 1969.

But as the province joined Indonesia, many of its people rejected the idea. Even before the official handover, dissidents formed the Free Papua Movement. Some in its armed wing, the National Liberation Army, have been waging a low-level insurgency ever since. Over time, several issues inflamed resistance: large-scale migration from Java and Sulawesi, resource extraction by international corporations, local government corruption, a heavy security presence, a Jakarta-centered dictatorship, and human rights abuses.

Even after Indonesia's remarkable democratic transition earlier this decade, the province remains a flashpoint. In Indonesia, protests continue periodically; in 2006, a demonstration near Jayapura turned into a riot, killing four Indonesian officials. Abroad, a network of non-governmental organizations draw attention to the province; several advocate for Papuan independence outright.

But by the time I stepped into police headquarters, the province had calmed. The new democratic government in Jakarta promised cultural respect, regional autonomy, local representation, and development. The police were no longer controlled by the military. And the insurgency hovered near extinction.

Still, Papua remained closed to international journalists, and even tourists needed to check-in with police for special passes.

* * *

The detective's keystrokes echoed around the otherwise silent office one at a time. Clack. Clack. Clack. While he typed my *surat jalan*—the required travel permit—I tried to make conversation.

"Why do I need a permit again?" I asked in a fake casual sing-song.

"Oh." The typing stuttered and then resumed. The detective smiled weakly. "It is the paperwork. For everybody. Just in case. For your safety."

"Safety?" I asked, with a forced note of concern. And after a pause: "Why? Is it dangerous?"

"No, no," he answered quickly, pausing for another smile. "It is not dangerous. Just for everybody. You are safe. Everybody has a permit." So I am safe, I thought,

but the permit is for my safety. I did not bother to point out the contradiction.

Still, he was likely right. Despite the province's small insurgency and recent riot, I faced little danger. The government maintained a heavy security presence around Jayapura. District and provincial police stations watched over the city's main avenues—a detached outpost, its night market. On the roads outside the city, a handful of military bases stood guard, their armored cars parked in a row, watching traffic.

If anything, I worried more about the military than the would-be rebels. Papuan dissidents often embrace outside observers. To them, foreigners—commonly NGO workers—are a source of international support. The government is less welcoming. The military in particular sees international observers as interlopers, meddlers.

I recalled with unease the night before, when a walk had turned into a lesson on local military culture.

That night, I had stepped outside of my hotel to find two young Javanese men selling fireworks. At first, the conversation flowed as it always had in Indonesia: name, age, nationality, their fireworks, my limited Indonesian. One of a hundred conversations of curiosity. Open and easy. Smiling.

But, when I parted, they caught up to me. And the questions got more intrusive. What are you doing here? Where are you going? When the pair started warning me away from certain areas, I stopped. We stood still, awkwardly lit by the headlights of passing traffic.

"Why are you so curious?" I asked over the buzz, turning their questions around. "Why are you following me?"

"To help," one answered, looking at the other. "To be friends."

The second pulled out a camera. "Let's take a picture! Friends!"

I motioned the camera down and made a sour face, more upset at myself than them. Open and easy and smiling, sure. I should have noticed earlier, I thought. Their haircuts and bearing. My light skin. I looked like an NGO researcher, and they were more than naturally curious. My hands shifted nervously. Faking a smile, I asked for confirmation: "Where do you work?"

“For the army,” the cameraman answered. “We are soldiers. We work for the army.”

Calming a dizzying rush of uncertainty, I made my goodbyes and walked on, away, around a dark corner, toward the places they had asked me not to go. The damp night fed my nervous sweat. A small event, but no small displacement. I fumbled for a reaction, not knowing what to think, rudely pushed into reality—a researcher suddenly lost as his ink became experience.

My heart danced, I recalled, but I moved slowly, deliberately, like a drunk trying to pass as sober.

Stumbling upon a *wartel*, I tapped a quick email to the American Embassy in Jakarta, less for them than for me. “Nothing illegal,” I wrote in closing, sure the pair had not acted under orders. “But certainly nothing reassuring.”

The bang and rattle of the typewriter slide brought me back to the present, to the police office and the slow ceiling fan. I pushed myself upright and the chair again complained. The detective continued to type. Clack. Clack. Clack.

The next day, I gathered my permit and bag to set out from Jayapura for Sentani, a smaller town several miles away. As soon as it began, the journey took an unexpected turn.

While bargaining with a *supir ojek* over the cost of a motorcycle ride, I heard a call for my attention. Nonchalantly, two Papuan men walked over, interrupting my awkward negotiations. The driver and I both paused.

The two were almost comically mismatched. One stood tall and spare, with a bare and serious face. The other was short and accessorized, wearing a bright aluminum watch, a dark safari cap, and a thick mustache that ruled proudly over the lower half of his face.

Ignoring the *ojek* driver, they pointed me toward the public taxi, a dented but sturdy white van. We boarded together. And, after a short ride, they motioned me off. Out past the city, out off the highway. They set to walking and I followed.

At a bend in the dirt road, the tall man turned around. “This,” he said, motioning to the right, “is my house.”

A neighborhood of cinder-block structures fanned out before us, draped in thick coats of bright paint. His house, from its narrow front porch to its tall rear wall, radiated lime green.

“Please, sit,” said the short man, nodding to a couch on the porch.

The tall man disappeared inside and a woman emerged with lemonade and cookies. Across the street, boys played in worn shorts, with shoes discarded and shirts optional. I slung off my pack and sat down, disoriented, but with enough presence of mind to thank the woman generously. His wife, I thought.

“Next time, take the taxi,” advised the shorter man. “It is cheap. Look for the white vans and then ask the driver where you are going.”

I agreed, and discussion continued. At the speed of lemonade-sips, the conversation moved predictably — another conversation of curiosity. Smiling. I answered more questions than I asked. Eventually, I told them about my earlier trips across Java and Bali.

The tall man wanted to know more. “Why are you here, in Papua?”

“Vacation,” I said. “I am a student in Washington, D.C., in America. I came here for vacation, to learn about Indonesia.”

“Student,” he repeated, “not working for research, not NGO?”

“No.”

“Oh,” he said, looking past me into the street. He sounded disappointed.

At times, activists and academics seem to be the only foreigners watching Papua. Usually, the activist voice is louder, more certain. But sometimes the line between the two groups blurs. Before setting off for Indonesia, I had read reports by both. Briefly, I had even conducted interviews.

Several months earlier and half a world away, I sat down with two human rights activists as they lobbied the United States Congress. To them, the situation is

binary. In Papua, there is good; it is native, just, and innocent, if imperfect. And there is bad; it is imposed, illegitimate, and destructive. Pushing the province into Star Wars, one called it “the dark side.” At the time, I just shrugged.

But Papua complicated things. Moving from chat to chat, I caught glimpses of a second Jayapura, a mirror city birthed by this tension. The government kept calm the surface. But invited visitors swam deeper. Hints came and then disappeared sporadically: an activist telling me how an old woman guided him quietly to a scene of government abuse; those two Papuan men, too eager to shepherd and speak with a researcher; an *ojek* driver, offering me a cot in his house so that I could avoid the government register at a hotel.

“It is fine,” he had assured me. “A young man, too, came one week ago. For an NGO.”

But even as I breathed the dust and road-smog of Papua, even as I walked, I could never shake my skepticism. I understood the international open hearts that pressed for education, free speech, or healthcare. It was those pushing for independence that confused me. From my small perch near Jayapura, the province looked vast, underdeveloped, diverse, destitute, and inaccessible—poor soil in which to plant the seeds of a new state.

Still, I felt unsure. With each step, my walk brought me no nearer to certainty. Like the city, my mind felt divided. If cold policy stretched over the surface, hot doubt flowed beneath it. Conclusions froze and boiled, crashed and melted away. If not independence, then the province deserved reform, I decided—the government’s promises of respect, representation, and development. Promises. But implemented by whom?

My feet continued to move in a quiet cadence. I thought of the detective. I thought of the soldiers. I thought of the researcher that came before me, imagined him white with youth.

I thought finally of the Papuan boys playing, of the man with the lime-green home. And what does this mean to them? No answers came to me.

A day later, I sat outside my guesthouse, watching an indifferent orange sky close out the year, unsure of

what to do with the last hours of 2007. New Year’s Eve in Papua. I decided to take a walk.

In Sentani as it was in Jayapura, the ethnic differences were almost geographic. The Javanese claimed sites of uniform and commerce: the military bases and police posts, the driver’s seats, the storefronts. Papuans took the highways, the board-and-tin villages, the betel stands. Migrants from Sulawesi moved between the two.

And all held claim to God. But, as the mosques watched over scattered corners, the churches claimed the main. They lined the highway: great, reaching structures, many without walls, open to God and the wind, open to salvation from the heat of bodies clustered close together. Along the roads, they outnumbered police outposts.

But the one I stumbled upon was different, no more than a house on a side-street. In the dark, I saw people gathering outside its double doors, and studied the shadows they cast across the light streaming out from inside.

On impulse, I walked over. The group quieted as I approached, a ghost from the darkness.

“*Selamat tahun baru!*” I almost shouted, smiling, nervous. “Happy New Year! Is this a church?”

“Happy New Year!” they responded. And, almost without hesitation: “Please, please come in.”

“Are you a Christian?”

“We are having a service tonight. Come in, come in.”

Pushed along, I followed their hands, riding on a wave of greetings. To the pastor, to an old woman, to and past a family, to the corner. I searched for an out-of-the-way spot and sat down. The room filled quickly, crowded with maybe fifty people.

The service moved, but moved blurry. The convocation, the sermon came too quickly for me to understand, wrapped in accents too thick to decipher. Language fell into the background, mingled with the sweating heat in a haze. They called to God and I stepped back.

I felt like a phony, like a leech. Unable to find my own meaning in the new year, I had sneaked in to steal theirs. Eager for authentic experience, I found something deeper than I could understand, more

sincere than I knew how to process. Overwhelmed, I just watched.

The congregation moved together, sang together, and called again to God. Their off-beat claps punctuated discordant hymns. Together, they reached and felt and grabbed to recover a meaning unique to them. Around me, the church body felt at once both disjointed and united.

I did not understand it. But I knew why I felt so out of place. I had discovered a refuge, a pure expression of community and in-group experience, a space with no burdensome supervision or ethnic expectation. I had found a place that the spirit of my presence inherently violated, an in-group I contaminated with the simple act of watching.

I stood with them, but hunched. And I fell deep into my chair upon sitting, ashamed and waiting for it to end.

* * *

“What is your name?”

This again. The army officer stood stiffly, but looked at me with boredom from under the brim of his hat. I handed him my *surat jalan* and leaned over to sign the register. The Papuan *ojek* driver guiding me grinned and chatted with the other guards.

“And your passport?”

We stood at the entrance to *Ifar Gunung*, a squat mountain overlooking Sentani. During the Second World War, the United States had turned it into a military base. General MacArthur retreated here after losing the Philippines. Now, the Indonesian military used it.

But, before he left, MacArthur erected a monument at the peak. I told the guard that I was an American, that I wanted to visit the monument. The officer took my passport and waved my driver and me through.

The short ride to the top was surreal. Crawling up the side of the mountain, the military base looked like a displaced image of an older America. Factory-line brick houses, old officer’s quarters, clustered in small villages. Barrel-shaped barracks still survived—some abandoned, others restored—set aside in clearings.

At the top, the view was no less arresting. Wind poured over the peak, swaying trees and tearing branches away. It seemed to wash us clean, to make us ready. We stared out to the horizon. From the foot of the mountain out across the valley, Sentani lay exposed. I could see the dot-like houses bunched by the edge of the lake, the single strand of highway running through town, and the American-made airstrip off to the right.

I sat to look and the driver joined me. After a few days together, he had become more of a friend than an occasional hire. But his mind was on the guards, not the view.

“Soldiers and police,” he said, “they are no good. I do not like them. When you are nice, they just act like nothing, like you are nothing.”

“Legally,” I agreed, speaking louder than I felt to fight the wind, “I don’t think he should have taken my passport, only my *surat jalan*.”

He did not seem to pay attention.

“I want to show you something,” he said. Reaching into his pocket, he took out his cell phone and showed it to me. The display background was the morning star flag, the symbol of the Free Papua Movement. I nodded, letting him know I understood. But I stayed silent.

After a time, he spoke again.

“*Saya orang Indonesia*,” he said over the charging wind, “*tapi saya tidak suka orang Indonesia*.”

I am Indonesian, but I do not like Indonesians.

Being a “*Santri*”

Notes from the Field

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nihayatul Wafiroh is a M.A. student in the Asian Studies Department at the University of Hawai‘i. She is from Indonesia and grew up in an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) community in Banyuwangi in East Java, Indonesia. She spent four years in a *pesantren* in Tambakberas, Jombang in East Java.

Being a *santri* was one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

A student who studies in a *pesantren* is called a *santri*, and a *pesantren* is an Islamic boarding school—one of the most important educational institutions in Indonesia. Any Muslim student with a strong motivation to study in a *pesantren* can enroll as a *santri*. Although *pesantren* education ranges from elementary to university level, many *santri* study only for their junior and senior high school years. In the beginning, *pesantren* only focused on Islamic education, but after the colonial era, *pesantren* developed a more comprehensive educational curriculum. Nowadays, *pesantren* combine secular and religious education.

I grew up in a *pesantren* and came to know the culture well. My grandparents were the founders of the largest *pesantren* in Banyuwangi city, East Java province, Indonesia. Now, my parents have replaced my grandparents as the leaders of the *pesantren*. As a result, I was already familiar with the rules and the daily life of a *santri*. When I was in junior high school, I studied with *santri* in my parent’s *pesantren*. I also engaged in the school’s activities. Nevertheless, since I am from a founding *pesantren* family, I broke many rules and was free from punishment. Being the

granddaughter of the founder of the *pesantren* gave me a power that put me in a status above that of my peers. Therefore, when I left my parents to attend senior high school, I finally felt that I could be a “true *santri*.” I felt that in the new *pesantren* I would have to follow the rules and I would no longer have any power over my peers.

Studying in a *pesantren* is one of the traditions of my family. Everyone in my family, before marriage, has to go to a *pesantren*. A *pesantren* is mainly established by the community for the community, and in many cases the selected *Kyai* (a headmaster of a *pesantren*) will use his own funds to establish the school’s facilities. For these reasons, the living cost and tuition in a *pesantren* is cheaper than at formal schools in Indonesia, and many of the students that attend *pesantren* are from the middle and lower classes. The name of the *pesantren* that I studied at for my senior high school years was Al-Fathimiyyah Bahrul Ulum located in Tambakberas, Jombang. This city was in the same province as my hometown, East Java. I studied there for four years from July 1994 to July 1998.

In July 1994, I was taken to *Kyai* and *Nyai* by my parents. Generally, when students apply to a *pesantren*, parents will give their rights as parents to the *Kyai* and *Nyai*. Having grown up in a

pesantren and having been a *santri*, I found that the *Nyai* and *Kyai* were representative of parent figures, yet this relationship caused *santri* to act out, and the resulting punishments were ineffective. The *Kyai* has an authority similar to that of the absolute power of a king. A person becomes a *Kyai* when the community recognizes that he has a strong knowledge of the Muslim religion, so it is the community that gives a person the title of a *Kyai*. The *Nyai*, the *Kyai*'s wife, supports the *Kyai* in maintaining the *pesantren*, particularly the female students. In many cases, the wife of the *Kyai* is chosen only for image purposes, not for her capability, but that is not to say that all *Nyai* fall into that category.

In the *pesantren*, the *Kyai* and *Nyai* have the same rights as parents. They not only teach but also sometimes play matchmaker. The *Nyai* holds an important role for female *santri* because she is like a mother to the female *santri*. The *Nyai* and *Kyai* are also assisted by student boards. These boards are selected by the *Nyai* and *Kyai* from among the distinguished senior students. There is a board of male students who serve the *Kyai* and a board of female students who serve the *Nyai*. They are the right hands of the *Nyai* and *Kyai*. Basically, all rules are arranged by the *Kyai* and *Nyai*, and the boards help to maintain these rules. Senior students chosen to be on these boards have to deal with issues in the *pesantren* such as education, security and student activities. The boards are divided into many departments and are run very formally. Each member has their specific positions to serve based on his or her responsibilities.

In Al-Fathimiyyah, the *pesantren* I attended, there were many residential buildings, each with various rooms. About 15-20 *santri* lived together in one room. My room, Al-Masyitoh B 1 or GBONE was the largest room in the *pesantren*, so there were about 45-50 residents. The residents of this room were from many different provinces and islands in Indonesia. Additionally, half of the residents were studying in the junior high school, and the rest were in the high school. We did our activities such as sleeping, eating, studying and chatting in that room. Every single resident had three cabinets for clothes, books and shoes. In the *pesantren*, we believed that a modest life would be the key to gaining sufficient knowledge. Because of this, *santri* tried to live humbly. For instance, we slept without beds and used only blankets, and

we shared everything with each other, even the bathrooms and our pillows.

A *pesantren* has many strict rules regarding *santri* activities. Even studying and doing personal activities is arranged by the *pesantren* student boards. In the early morning at 4 a.m., the bell rings in the *pesantren* office, and *santri* wake to prepare for morning prayer in the mosque. After praying, the second bell signals time to read the *Qur'an*. These activities were always done from early morning until 10:30 p.m.

Santri also could not go outside the *pesantren* areas without receiving permission from the student's respective *pesantren* boards and the *Kyai* or the *Nyai*. Receiving permission to leave the *pesantren* was a long process. First, a *santri* had to take their security book from the *pesantren* office. Every *santri* has their own security book. This book is the record of when the student leaves the *pesantren*. With their security book, a *santri* will approach the *Kyai* or the *Nyai* and ask for permission. If the *Kyai* or *Nyai* allows the *santri* to leave, she will sign their book and write when they are to return. If the *Kyai* or *Nyai* does not give permission, the process is stopped there. Because of these rules, *santri* can only leave the *pesantren* once every two months. Special consideration is given to students when making family visits. But when students are only leaving the grounds to go to the market place or to town, they will be limited in the length and frequency of trips.

Additionally, the controlling of relationships among female and male *santri* was very strict. Because in the Islamic doctrine women and men who do not have any blood connections are prohibited from contacting each other, almost all female *santri* never spoke with male *santri*, even though sometimes we knew the names of some boys. Breaking any of these many rules meant punishment from the leader of the *pesantren* or from the board members.

My room, GBONE, was famous for our creativity and for being troublemakers. There was even an informal gang. Those who wanted to be "popular" in the *pesantren* became members of this gang. Mostly members of this gang were senior *santri*. Because of their seniority, they served as role models for the junior *santri*, like me at the time. The leader of the gang's name was Karim. She had been in the *pesantren* since junior high school and knew the school well. Her strongest trait was that she was friendly. For sure,

everyone enjoyed chatting with her and she easily attracted people as her followers. In addition, she was a smart and dynamic person, which made her very persuasive. The gang had responsibilities like everyone else, but they did not do them. Everyone in my room knew this, but no one was brave enough to go against them, and everyone tried to be as friendly as possible to the gang. For example, after morning prayer, all *santri* must clean their sleeping space and return items to their rightful places or no one would be allowed to sleep that night. However, the gang would continue sleeping, avoid prayer and avoid reading the Qur'an. No one bothered them, not even the boards of my room. In fact, many of the members of the gang were senior students and were even members of the student board of the building and room.

The first time I arrived in the room, I thought that everyone was equal. In my view, the senior *santri* should follow the rules as older sisters would. In fact, I remember the first time I spoke with Karim. She asked me about my family, my boyfriend, and my hobbies. She was so friendly that I felt as if I had already known her for long time; hence, I could talk about anything with her. After I became close to her, she often asked me to do activities with her. For a short time, I was one of about ten of her followers, and of them, the only underclassman.

Becoming one of Karim's followers changed my status in the room from a junior *santri* to a powerful *santri*. It was prestigious among the students for a junior *santri* to have such a chance to be friends with Karim. I never really knew why she chose me. In my analysis, perhaps, compared with other junior *santri* in my room, I was more confident because I was already familiar with *pesantren* life. Another thing was that the *Nyai* and *Kyai* knew me and my family well, since we were all a part of the same *pesantren* network. I think that she had expected that she would receive more attention from the *Kyai* and *Nyai* if she became my friend.

I learned many things from her, especially how to take advantage of my time in the *pesantren*. She introduced me to new friends and she taught me how to break the *pesantren* rules without getting caught. Because of her influence, I became braver at breaking the *pesantren* rules. Running away from my duties (praying, studying, and doing *pesantren* activities) was a daily routine. In the

first year, I was only breaking my room rules. By the second year, I took it one step further. I began to contravene the larger *pesantren* rules. For instance, Karim and I went to her brother's house outside the *pesantren* without permission from the *Nyai*. Another time, Karim asked me to go to a place where she had already made an appointment with her boyfriend. As the lookout, I kept watch outside while she met her boyfriend. I would inform her if there were *pesantren* board securities near by. Furthermore, she often asked for money from other members of the gang, and sometimes when she saw good things, such as clothes or veils, she strongly recommended that her followers buy them. Then, after we brought them home, she wore them like they were hers.

We broke the rules many times, but the *pesantren*'s security boards did not detect us. However, one day when Karim, Anis (another of Karim's followers), and I left the *pesantren* for town, one security board member saw us on the bus. After we returned to the *pesantren*, *Nyai* asked me if I had broken other rules and I confessed to everything we had done in the time I had been in the gang. As a result we were heavily punished: cleaning toilets, reading the whole *Qur'an* in a day, giving statements that I would not repeat these activities again in front of the whole mosque, and praying five times a day behind the prayer leader (*imam*) for forty days. This was really hard and very embarrassing for us.

The hardest punishment was when *Nyai* said she was disappointed in me. To be honest, I was worried that *Nyai* would report this case to my parents. Fortunately, *Nyai* only advised me, and she promised that she would not inform my parents. Perhaps *Nyai* did not inform my parents because she wanted to preserve her relationship with them. Since I am the daughter of a family that has a *pesantren*, it is very prestigious when a *pesantren* receives a student who is from another *pesantren* family. Another thing was that *Nyai* knew that I was just Karim's follower, so my behavior would change when outside of Karim's influence. In many cases, *Nyai* informed parents when students repeatedly broke the rules, but that did not happen to me. After this case, I promised myself that I would not make trouble again. Then, in the following year, I became a member of the *pesantren*'s board, serving as one of the higher officers. After these realizations and changes, I was more reluctant to break the rules.

Although Karim was a secretary on the *pesantren* board, she continued to break the rules. Six months before graduation, *Kyai* decided to send her back to her family without an honorable graduation. According to *pesantren* practice, there was nothing that they could do for her any longer. The last punishment from the *pesantren* boards had not had any influence on her. I recall, one day after we had punishment together, she said, "*Nyai* is not fair. Why did she not ask me about my reasons for breaking the rules before she punished me? These punishments are really embarrassing. All *santri* know about our case now." Karim thought that when one did something, they had their own reasons for their behavior, but *Nyai* never wanted to know about reasons. I never got to know Karim's reasons either, and now I wonder about them. Problem solving should be more important than punishment. Karim had said that every single person has their own reasons for bad behavior. If someone made trouble, they might have their own problems. Finding the right solution for the problem should be the best way. In the *pesantren*, if a *santri* breaks the rules, it is better for the leaders and their staff to talk with that student about their problems before punishing them. I believe that others cannot stop problem students from doing wrong. They can only stop themselves. Thus, it is not a guarantee that after the punishment is received, the *santri* will behave well.

The privacy of an individual *santri* should be respected. Punishing them in front of the public breaks a *santri*'s rights as a human being. For me, being embarrassed in front of my friends was harder than doing the punishment. The wrong punishment can cause spite against the leaders and board members, and this is what is happening in the *pesantren* when "embarrassment" is used as punishment.

During the time that I was breaking rules in the *pesantren*, I was aware that I was making a mistake. As a junior student, I had been looking for a senior student as a role model and I found that in Karim. Essentially, the *Kyai* and *Nyai* replaced my parents, but in the *pesantren* there were about seven hundred *santri*, and the *Kyai* and *Nyai* could not give equal attention to us all.

The figure of a parent is important in children's lives. This figure can also become the person who will guide and accompany a child as they mature. Children follow and do anything for their idols. The effect of these figures on children can be good or bad. It is up to the parents and teachers to regulate these relationships. In my case, Karim was my adult figure. She was like a big sister to me. The *Nyai* and *Kyai* ought to be like parents, so that *santri* will share their problems with them. But, the *Nyai* and *Kyai* put their positions much too high above the *santri*. As a result, *santri* are not able to act as children with them.

Looking back now, I see that my experiences are lessons to be learned. After I finish my studies, I plan to return to my family's *pesantren* and help my family maintain the *pesantren*. I hope to be able to act as a parent to the students, and also to give them fair punishments.

Benny Widyono's *Dancing in Shadows*

Book Review

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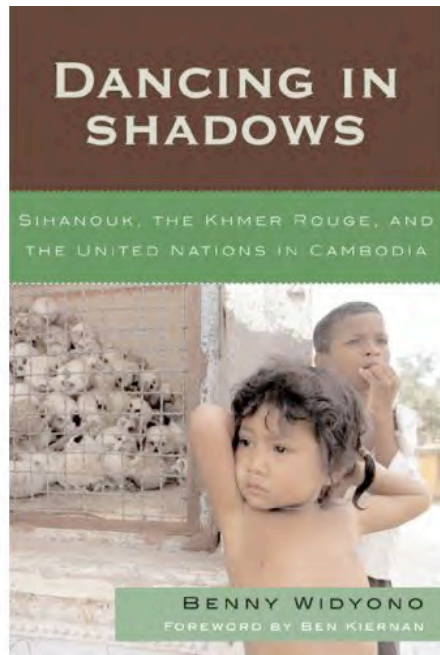
Benny Widyono's gripping *Dancing in Shadows* is a memoir of his peacekeeping and diplomatic work in Cambodia: in 1992-93 he served as the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia's (UNTAC) Provincial Director of Siem Reap; subsequently in 1994-97 he served as the UN Secretary-General's Political Representative to the Royal Government of Cambodia (2008, p. xxvii).

Dancing in Shadows begins on an unexpected note with Ben Kiernan's foreword that focuses on the role of Indonesians in resolving the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, paving the way for UNTAC. Kiernan notes a July 1980 meeting at Phnom Penh's Noor Al-Ihsan mosque between Cham genocide survivors and Indonesian journalists. Their pioneering reportage triggered a change in Indonesian policy towards Cambodia which eventually led Indonesia to guide the warring Cambodian factions to reach a peace settlement (ibid., pp. xvii-xxiv).

This largely unknown thread of Cambodia's tortured recent history nicely introduces the role of Widyono, himself an Indonesian citizen; for the key Indonesian role in the Cambodian peace process is also reflected

in Widyono's subsequent participation in UNTAC. The Indonesian-Cambodian connection does not end there: Kiernan (ibid., p. xix) and Widyono (ibid., pp. 23-24) both note Indonesia's and Cambodia's mirrored experiences with politicide and genocide. This tragic mirroring is not just an academic observation for Widyono, as his ethnic Chinese heritage subjected him and his family to General Suharto's anti-Chinese policies (ibid., p. xxix).

The key contribution of *Dancing in Shadows* is found in Widyono's critique of the Cambodian peace process. Unlike other academics, he was actually part of UNTAC's top administration, and enjoyed a privileged perspective of the mission's ultimate failure in Cambodia. In Widyono's view, UNTAC's ultimate failure stemmed from two significant flaws in the 1991 Paris Agreements. First, the Agreements legitimized Pol Pot's genocidal Khmer Rouge faction; second, the Agreements downgraded the status of Hun Sen's State of Cambodia (SOC) regime, disregarding its extensive administrative and military control over most of Cambodian territory (ibid., p. 35). These problems would adversely affect UNTAC's subsequent performance. Not only did the Khmer Rouge pose a significant military challenge to UNTAC; UNTAC also found itself incapable of asserting its nominal authority over the SOC's apparatuses of power (ibid., p. 42).



Widyono is highly critical of UNTAC's performance, accusing it of "shaping and perpetuating the Cambodian tragedy" (ibid., p. xxvii). Problems brought by UNTAC onto itself include its slow deployment; a crippling lack of Khmer-language speakers in most of its components (ibid., p. 18); and the shameless flaunting of wealth and lack of discipline among UNTAC's peacekeepers. This last problem generated xenophobic anti-UNTAC sentiment among Cambodians, triggering violence and other security problems (ibid., pp. 100-101). Structurally, UNTAC's Civil Administration component failed to exert control over the SOC government. Widyono notes that this failure was inevitable given the fact that UNTAC's Civil Administration was only allocated 200 officers to control the SOC government's 200,000 (ibid., p. 59).

More seriously, Widyono observes that UNTAC coddled the Khmer Rouge, and this leniency emboldened the Khmer Rouge's resistance. Having identified UNTAC's weakness of will, the Khmer Rouge refused to lay down its arms, leading to the collapse of the demobilization of Cambodia's factional armies (ibid., pp. 77-78). One important consequence of this, Widyono notes, emerged 5 years later on 5 July 1997, when a bloody battle erupted between the (undemobilized) armed militias of Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and Prince Norodom Ranariddh's Front Uni National Pour un Cambodge

Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif (FUNCINPEC) (ibid., pp. 253-254).

As the 1993 elections neared, the Khmer Rouge tried to disrupt the electoral process with military attacks on UNTAC. Its military resistance caused UNTAC great difficulty. Under the Paris Agreements, the SOC army was supposed to be demobilized, and hence was not legally obliged to protect UNTAC (ibid., p. 106) from the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge also continued with its program of ethnic cleansing, massacring 124 Vietnamese civilians in Siem Reap's Chong Kneas floating village on March 10, 1993. This massacre succeeded in forcing 21,000 Vietnamese, including second and third generation residents of Cambodia, to flee to Vietnam. Widyono notes Sihanouk's and UNTAC's shameful indifference to the plight of Cambodia's Vietnamese residents (ibid., pp. 96-98).

Despite the massive international involvement, the 1993 elections would prove meaningless. Even though FUNCINPEC won, CPP pressure led Sihanouk to declare a power-sharing government, with Hun Sen and Ranariddh as co-premiers, and the CPP having more seats in the cabinet (ibid., pp. 129-131). During this post-UNTAC period, Widyono returned to Cambodia as the UN Secretary-General's Political Representative to the Royal Government. From this vantage point, Widyono observed the strengthening of the CPP's hegemony and the corresponding failure of FUNCINPEC to subvert the CPP's extensive patronage networks. Hun Sen later confided in Widyono that the CPP had been successfully modeled after the hegemonic organization of Indonesia's GOLKAR and Malaysia's UMNO political parties (ibid., pp. 146-147).

Also of interest in *Dancing in Shadows* are Widyono's personal observations of Hun Sen, Sihanouk and Ranariddh. Hun Sen emerges as a remarkably determined individual who used his leadership skills and abilities to build a loyal and effective patronage network unparalleled in Cambodia. Ranariddh's corresponding lack of effective leadership skills, coupled with his delusions of grandeur, would exacerbate the fury of the FUNCINPEC rank-and-file when he failed to adequately reward them for their support (ibid., p.

216). His failure to reward past loyalty would trigger a crippling tide of FUNCINPEC defections to the CPP.

In addition, even though Ranariddh was nominally the First Prime Minister, he was happy to let Second Prime Minister Hun Sen handle the drudgery of actual government leadership (ibid., p. 154). Ranariddh's inaction directly strengthened Hun Sen's grip on power, and eventually led him to be eclipsed by opposition leader Sam Rainsy. Overseeing all this was the increasingly impotent King Sihanouk, filled on one hand with resentment against Hun Sen and Ranariddh, and on the other with grudging admiration at Hun Sen's skillfulness in outmaneuvering himself and his son (ibid., pp. 160-161).

As noted earlier, in 1997 the tensions between the CPP and FUNCINPEC exploded in a military confrontation between their militias. Widyono, who had since retired from the UN, interprets the battle as having been planned by both sides. Given the documentary evidence, FUNCINPEC was probably planning a coup d'état as alleged by the CPP; but the CPP itself had clearly planned its attack on FUNCINPEC, and hadn't been taken by surprise as claimed (ibid., pp. 256-258).

Interestingly, Ranariddh's subsequent pardon and return from exile illustrates the curious circulation of personalities on Cambodia's political stage. Widyono cites the assassinated FUNCINPEC MP Om Rasdy's analogy: "Cambodia resembled a play that lacked enough actors. Consequently, each of the main players had to assume many roles." (ibid., p. 147) Over the next decade, Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy would periodically find themselves exiled and pardoned; Hun Sen would remain at the apex of power, and Sihanouk would slowly but noisily fade from the stage, eventually abdicating in favor of the apolitical Prince Sihamoni (ibid., p. 279).

Upon his return to Cambodia for a visit in January 2005, Widyono observed the fruits of the country's welcome economic growth. After the final defeat of the Khmer Rouge, Siem Reap experienced a massive tourism boom, leading to wealth for local entrepreneurs. However this economic boom also directly led to an expansion of the patronage system: for example, almost all the new hotels were owned by CPP cadres. Phnom Penh experienced a similar economic boom: new commercial activity can

be seen in the establishment of private universities, luxury hotels and restaurants, shops selling pirated CDs and DVDs, and drivers offering rides on *tuk-tuks* and motos. However, the economic boom in urban Cambodia has to be contrasted with the continued poverty of rural Cambodia. The plight of the Cambodian underclass has been exacerbated by the property boom, for rising property values have led to predatory land grabbing across Cambodia. Hun Sen's angry denunciations against the CPP cadres responsible for land grabbing have yet to stop the problem (ibid., pp. 284-286).

Dancing in Shadows would indeed have been improved with an analysis of these other personalities in Cambodia's constellation of political players. Widyono offers occasional tantalizing hints of his encounters with these personages, and in his administrative and diplomatic capacity he would certainly have an insider's knowledge of their roles in Cambodia's networks of power relations. An understanding of this constellation of personalities is particularly urgent given the alleged involvement of high-powered individuals in problems ranging from corruption to land grabbing.

Being a political memoir written in engaging prose, *Dancing in Shadows* offers an insider's view into a critical moment in Cambodia's recent tumultuous history. As such, it is an invaluable resource for all interested observers and students of Cambodia, undergraduate and graduate alike.