Birthing the *Melayu Baru*: Gender, Family and Malay-Muslim Identity

by

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Dahlia Martin

Abstract

Contemporary Malay-Muslim identity politics is informed by the colonial-era representations of Malay ethnicity and character. Colonial depictions established the Malay as a naturally effeminate, superstitious and rural-based character, whose mould was confirmed and re-created within the family site; the 'lazy native' continues to occupy a central position in Malay ethnoreligious thought. Malay modernity is therefore concerned with defining an alternative Malay figure to serve as an antithesis to colonial constructions of Malayness. The *Melayu Baru*, or New Malay, was Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's attempt at cultivating a Malayness that would command respect, and be rational and urbane. Like colonial authorities, Mahathir had in his earlier days as a Malay nationalist identified the Malay family as the site where Malayness was created and could, therefore, be reformed. Indeed, during his premiership, there emerged in Malaysian socio-political discourse very distinct standards for the Malay family and, by extension, Malay women as the supposedly natural occupiers of this realm. The rapid Islamisation of Malaysia that Mahathir oversaw complicated his efforts at reforming Malayness; Mahathir responded by courting Islamist activists and increasingly incorporating Islam into the essence of the *Melayu Baru*. Adhering to a 'true' Islam that encourages innovation and cosmopolitanism has therefore become a key aspect of Malay modernity; and Islamisation has inevitably influenced models of the ideal Malay-Muslim woman and her family. This thesis will examine significant drivers in current Malay-Muslim identity politics by exploring the gendered and familial origins of Malay nationalist thought. Drawing on a feminist postcolonial theoretical framework, it will demonstrate that contemporary constructions of Malayness continue to be defined in gendered and binarist terms. It argues that Islamisation can also be understood as hypermasculinisation of Malay-Muslim identity and therefore a direct response to colonial discourse on a feminised Malayness. This thesis also seeks to offer a more comprehensive

overview of Malay-Muslim identity politics by understanding how Malay mothers in urban settings, as the first socialisers of an emerging *Melayu Baru*, relate to Malay-Muslim reformation. The analyses come together in a final argument to suggest that Islamic identity amongst Malay-Muslims will increase, particularly if the gendered and colonial origins of contemporary Malayness are not acknowledged by Malay leaders.

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Abbreviations

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement)
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
GLC	Government-linked company
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
JAKIM	Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia)
JAWI	Jabatan Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutan (Federal Territories Islamic Affairs Department)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysia Indian Congress
NEP	New Economic Policy
NOC	National Operations Council
OWC	Obedient Wives Club
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party)
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party)
PR	Pakatan Rakyat (People's Pact)
SIS	Sisters in Islam
S.W.T.	*Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala* (Glory to Him; typically invoked after mention of Allah)
UMNO	United Malays Nationalist Organisation

Selected Glossary

adat	custom
akal	reason; typically understood as a masculine trait
bomoh	traditional healer
Bumiputera	'sons of the soil'; typically used to encompass Malays and the indigenous peoples of Sarawak and Sabah
dakwah	Islamic missionary
fatwa	religious edict
Hadith	an account of the Prophet's words or actions
Islam Hadhari	Civilisational Islam
kafir-mengkafir	charges of religious infidelity
kampung (spelt in some literature as *kampong*)	village
khalwat	close proximity; a prosecutable offence under sharia law
Kaum Ibu	mother's group
kursus kahwin	marriage preparation course
masuk Melayu	to become Malay
mat rempit	a term for illegal motor cyclists
Melayu Baru	New Malay
merdeka	independence
nafsu	lust; typically understood as a feminine trait
orang kampung	village people
Reformasi	Reformation
Revolusi Mental	Mental Revolution
Rukun Negara	National Principles
shariah (spelt in some literature as s*yariah*)	Islamic law
takdir	the fate of God
tudung	headscarf
Tun	an honorific title that is typically awarded to retired Malaysian Prime Ministers
Tunku	a royal hereditary title equivalent to prince or princess
ulama	traditional religious leaders
ummah	global Islamic community
ustazah	a female religious instructor

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Particular constructs of gender and family have been central to the development of modern Malay-Muslim identity in Malaysia, and are frequently invoked in sociopolitical contestations over the position of Malay-Muslim identity. In modern Malaysia, a multiethnic country where ethnic Malays make up approximately 54.6 per cent of the population,[1] the Malay political elite have consistently pedalled the notion that the Malay-Muslim community is under siege. Former Prime Minister Najib Razak made use of this premise to cement his position, arguing in 2010 that Malay interests needed protection.[2] His one-time mentor, the recently re-elected seventh Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, had similarly declared a few months before Najib that political divisions among the Malays would see them be taken advantage of by 'other races.'[3] Despite the 2010 census including the ethnic categories of Chinese (24.6 per cent), Indians (7.3 per cent) and 'Others' (0.7 per cent), the main 'threat' to Malay interests is often understood to be the Chinese. Najib, for instance, blamed the poor showing of his ruling coalition at the 2013 general elections on a 'Chinese tsunami,'[4] whilst Mahathir lamented that Malay political parties were 'beggars' to the Chinese.[5] At the next general election five years later, Mahathir as the Leader of the Opposition reassured Malays that their constitutional rights and privileges would be safeguarded by the new ruling

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1. Saw Swee-Hock, *The Population of Malaysia (Second Edition)*, ISEAS Publishing, Singapore, 2015, p. 64
2. Adib Zalkapli, "Only Umno can protect Malay rights, says Najib", *The Malaysian Insider*, 23 October 2010, at: ***http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/only-umno-can-protect-malay-rights-says-najib***, Accessed 31 August 2015
3. The Malaysian Insider, "Dr M claims Malays under siege", *The Malaysian Insider*, 17 June 2010, at: ***http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/dr-m-claims-malays-under-siege***, Accessed 31 August 2015
4. Bridget Welsh, "Malaysia's Elections: A Step Backward", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2013, p. 144
5. Yiswaree Palansamy, "Dr M: Malay parties now beggars to DAP Chinese", *The Malay Mail Online*, 20 December 2014, at: ***http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dr-m-malay-parties-now-beggars-to-dap-chinese***, Accessed 31 August 2015

coalition.[6] Battlelines that were drawn up in the colonial era and later solidified in the

negotiations for Malayan independence continue to be reinforced in Malaysian political life:

at stake, the dignity of the Malay race, which had at its disposal a particularly potent weapon.

Deputy Home Minister Nur Jazlan Mohamad stated in mid-2015 that racial politics in

Malaysia was likely to continue because of the high Malay fertility rate, earning criticism

from a female politician from an opposing party: "Do Malay women have to stop giving birth

just to stop racial policies?"[7] Although none of the Malay political elite have stated publicly

that they want the Malay fertility rate to remain higher than that of other ethnic groups in

Malaysia, there has been enough investment from government in the shaping and well-being

of specifically Malay-Muslim families that there is an unmistakeable subtext on Malay

'strength' vis-a-vis growing numbers for a political opponent to pick up on. The notion of

strength by numbers is one also embraced by some non-Malays, with one Chinese-based

political party calling on Chinese couples to have more children.[8] Yet the state has dedicated

resources for familial wellbeing to one single ethnoreligious group: there exist premarital

courses for Muslim (i.e. largely Malay) couples only; strict rules on registration of Muslim

children; and even, in one predominantly Malay-Muslim state, subsidies for domestic help in

an effort to encourage larger families.[9] There is also a never-ending identification of 'threats'

specific to Muslims in the country, such as 'liberalism,'[10] the concept of LGBT (lesbian, gay,

6. Ida Nadirah Ibrahim, "Pakatan will safeguard all your constitutional rights, Dr M assures Malay community", *The Malay Mail Online*, 10 May 2018, at: *https://www.malaymail.com/s/1629313/pakatan-will-safeguard-all-your-constitutional-rights-dr-m-assures-malay-co*, Accessed 12 May 2018
7. Malaysiakini, "Nur Jazlan wins 'New Sexist On The Block' title", *Malaysiakini*, 27 August 2015, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/310138*, Accessed 31 August 2015
8. Saw Swee-Hock, *The Population of Malaysia (Second Edition)*, p. 65
9. Firdaos Fadzil, "Oh baby! It's all maid for you", *The Star*, 15 June 2015, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/06/15/Oh-baby-Its-all-maid-for-you-Terengganu-wants-young-parents-of-every-race-to-have-more-babies/*, Accessed 6 October 2015
10. Yiswaree Palansamy, "Citing Nur Fitri case, Najib says liberalism a threat to Muslim identity", *The Malay Mail Online*, 14 May 2015, at: *http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/citing-nur-fitri-case-najib-says-liberalism-a-threat-to-muslim-identity*, Accessed 6 October 2015

bisexual and transgender) rights,[11] and even the Jews.[12] To ensure Malay survival against such threats, nationalist political rhetoric focuses heavily on constructing the ideal Malay family unit. Malay women, by virtue of their potential to bear children, have become the main focus of anxieties about the Malay family and character.

What was the ideal that Malay families and women were required to embody, and how did these ideals reflect evolving sociopolitical constructions of Malay identity? Whilst there was much commentary on Malay identity and family during the colonial era,[13] the most significant modern-day account on Malay identity, insomuch as it ties into heredity and Malay societal and global positioning, is Mahathir's *The Malay Dilemma*. It was in this text that Mahathir promulgated a concept of Malay privileges so as to '(bring) all races to approximately the same level.'[14] The Malays were portrayed as a disadvantaged group, with Mahathir explaining in the first few pages a key factor that he felt had 'retard(ed) the development of the Malays':[15]

> …Hereditary influence must play a role in the development of a collection
>
> of individuals which constitutes a race. What is not generally known by the
>
> Malays is the effect of inbreeding. In this book, I have explained how the
>
> laws of genetics, which govern the transmission of hereditary

11. Bernama, "Muslims threatened by liberalism, secularism and LGBT, says Najib", *The Malaysian Insider*, 14 May 2014, at: **http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/muslims-threatened-by-liberalism-secularism-and-lgbt-says-najib-bernama**, Accessed 6 October 2015
12. Anisah Shukry, "Jews, 'orang putih' using media to destroy Malays, says Umno leader", *The Malaysian Insider*, 22 August 2015, at: **http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/jews-orang-putih-using-media-to-destroy-malays-says-umno-leader**, Accessed 6 October 2015
13. See *Chapter Three* for a discussion of colonial constructions of Malay identity and society.
14. Timothy P. Daniels, *Building Cultrual Nationalism in Malaysia: Identity, Representation, and Citizenship*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 96-97
15. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, Times Books International, Singapore, 1970, p. 9

characteristics, are affected adversely by inbreeding and other marriage

practices.[16]

For Mahathir, hereditary factors were key determinants to the success of a race. In *The Malay Dilemma*, a text that helped lay the ideological foundations for Mahathir's two-decade premiership, the prescription for the 'development' of the Malays depended primarily on one thing: a fundamental change in the construction of Malay families and, by a supposedly natural extension, Malay society.[17] Unsurprisingly, the government-sanctioned portrayal of and discourse on Malay families and womanhood underwent a definitive transformation during the Mahathir years,[18] in line with Mahathir's goal to improve the Malay position nationally. The idea that 'Malay stock' needed to be improved has not diminished over time: Mahathir in mid-2014 complained that Malays are 'lazy.' He offered as an example a breakdown by gender of Malays in universities: 'Seventy per cent of the students in our higher learning institutions are female and only thirty per cent are male.'[19] As I set out later in this thesis, the perception of the disempowered position of specifically the Malay male has been a driving factor in Malay-Muslim nationalist aspirations. The employment of 'traditional' and, increasingly, 'purely Islamic' gender roles and stereotypes is therefore a powerful tool for would-be reformers of Malay society and identity, as a means of improving the virility and esteem accorded to Malay men and therefore to Malays as a whole. Maila Stivens, in her study on contemporary Malay mothering, wrote of the 'embeddedness of much discursive production of Malay mothering in the tensions surrounding the relationship

16. ibid., p. 10
17. The relationship between family and nationhood is discussed later in this chapter.
18. See *Chapter Three*.
19. Rahimy Rahim, "Dr M: I failed to change lazy Malays", *The Star*, 11 September 2014, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2014/09/11/mahathir-mohamad-says-he-failed-to-change-lazy-malay-mindset/*, Accessed 19 September 2015

of Malaysian Islam to modernity.'[20] Malay women, on account of their potential to bear children, and their families, thus have complex and overlapping relationships with the concept of 'Malay development,' especially when elements such as modernity and Islamisation come into play. In a broad sense, I am concerned with exploring how gender and family figure in socio-political constructions of Malay-Muslim identity, particularly in the *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) discourse that Mahathir championed during his first premiership. More specifically, I try to understand where Malay-Muslim mothers locate themselves in a new Malaysian modernity. The nuances in these fields provide a new and unique perspective for understanding the dynamics in the increasingly contested space of contemporary Malay-Muslim identity politics. To fully explain the arguments and nuances to which I have alluded, I will begin this chapter by presenting an overview of the history of Malaysia followed by a summary of its current tensions, focusing specifically on the evolution of ethnoreligious politics there and the elite's focus on protecting a Malay hegemonic framework of power. I then move onto discuss the theoretical and methodological frameworks that form the basis of this thesis' inquiry. This includes an overview of the theoretical literature on gender and postcolonial identities and how such theories are significant in the context of this thesis' areas of concern. I will discuss issues pertaining to methodology for this research, including my own positionality in it. The chapter will then end with an outline of the remaining chapters in this thesis.

1.2 Locating Malayness in Contemporary Malaysia

Malay-Muslim womanhood is informed by a variety of factors, not least the recent modern history of Malaysia. Stivens argued in her analysis of Malay mothering that a grounding in

20. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother" in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds.) *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 72

the particularities of Malaysian modernity is also required to examine 'modern' mothering in

Malaysia.[21] Malaysian modernity ties in directly with local ethnoreligious politics,

specifically, with the New Economic Policy (NEP) aimed specifically at improving the

economic position of the ethnic Malays. Even before the country was formed as a federation

of states formerly colonised by the British, there was anxiety on the part of Malay nationalists

over their position in relation to other ethnic groups, such as the Chinese.[22] There is evidence

that this anxiety over the presence of the Chinese and what this might say about the Malays

themselves had its roots in colonial-era discourse on Malayness: British encouragement at the

arrival of 'proletarianised immigrants' from China and India was supposedly due to the

Malays being unable to carry out the work the British required of them,[23] so that the very idea

of the 'lazy native' was used as a justification for bringing in more ostensibly focused and

enterpreneurial collectives. Colonial official Sir Francis Light described the local Chinese

community as 'a valuable acquisition,' and called them 'the only people of the East from

whom a revenue may be raised without expense and extraordinary efforts of Government.'[24]

The idea that the Chinese were more adept at economics than the Malay community soon

took hold; William R. Roff, citing a Malay-language newspaper editorial from 1930, wrote

that the Malays were 'well aware of their economic subservice to the Chinese,'[25] and thus

were very much opposed to granting local citizenship and political rights to non-Malays.

Indeed, when the Malayan Union was proposed as a federation of states and with equal

citizenship for all, opposition from Malay nationalists was so strong that the British

eventually backed down, negotiating with the Malay rulers and the then recently-formed

21. ibid., p. 50
22. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1967, p. 207-210
23. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *Growth and Structural Change in the Malaysian Economy*, Macmillan, London, 1990, p. 4
24. Jean Elizabeth DeBernardi, *Rites of Belonging: Memory, Modernity, and Identity in a Malaysian Chinese Community*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004, p. 54
25. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 209

Malay nationalist group, the United Malays Nationalist Organisation (UMNO), to form a plan for a Federation of Malaya. The Federation plans upheld Malay special privileges, and severely restricted who was eligible to apply for federal citizenship: all Malays qualified as citizens whilst the majority of non-Malays did not.[26] It was a set of circumstances that was reaffirmed when the Federal Constitution was drawn up in 1955. In what was widely considered a 'social contract' between the country's ethnic groups[27] as agreed to by UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), the Malays received special mention in the Constitution under Article 153, whereby the head of state was to safeguard the *Bumiputera* (literally, sons of the soil) position, and protect and promote their interests in four areas: reservation land, quotas in certain federal public service sectors, the issuing of licences and permits for certain businesses, and also matters pertaining to educational assistance.[28] Although the Constitution did have a clause on freedom of worship, Islam was declared the official religion of the Federation and was also firmly linked to Malay identity. In return for acknowledging the special position of the Malays, non-Malays received citizenship. Timothy P. Daniels has described the notion of citizenship as embodied by the Federal Constitution as both highly ethnicised and gendered:

> Legal citizenship (in the Federal Constitution) was constructed combining notions of equality and inequality in such a fashion so as to create realms in which all Malaysians were formal equal citizen-members and realms in which Malays, especially Malay husbands and fathers, were the default or generic Malaysians, the only real citizens or full belongers.[29]

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26. Timothy P. Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia*, p. 35
27. Shamsul A. B., "From orang kaya to *Melayu Baru*: Cultural construction of the Malay 'new rich'" in Michael Pinches (ed.) *Culture and privilege in capitalist Asia*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 95
28. Michael Burgess, *Comparative Federalism: Theory and Practice*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 126
29. Timothy P. Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia*, p. 264

Daniels' argument about the racial-gendered element to federal citizenship is particularly interesting given the role of Malay women in opposing the Malayan Union, as discussed later in Chapter Five. I will argue later in this thesis that in Malaysia, and certainly amongst the Malay political community, aspirations based on gender have always been seen as separate from, and have indeed taken a backseat to, ethnoreligious concerns.

1.2.1 Islam in Malay Nationalism

The two main Malay nationalist parties in Malaysia (ie. the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party and UMNO) were not known, in their early days, for possessing particularly strong Islamic roots; the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS), despite having been formed by a breakaway *ulama* (traditional religious leaders) faction of UMNO, was initially regarded more as a conservative Malay party rather than an Islamic one.[30] Meanwhile, UMNO leader and the first Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had made it clear that Malaysia was not to be an Islamic state.[31] Such were the relatively close links between the two parties that PAS' early members tended to simultaneously be members of UMNO,[32] with the differences between the two due less to religion than to class:[33] UMNO initially regarded PAS as harmless, a mere 'party of peasants and backward *ulama*.'[34] The dismissal of PAS would come back to haunt UMNO for a long time - since 1955, soon after PAS had been formed, PAS has consistently

30. Norani Othman, Zainah Anwar and Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, "Malaysia: Islamization, Muslim politics and state authoritarianism" in Norani Othman (ed.) *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism*, Vinlin Press, Kuala Lumpur, 2005, p. 82

31. Peter G. Riddell, "Islamization, Civil Society, and Religious Minorities in Malaysia", in K. S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (eds.) *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005, p. 163

32. Farish Noor, *The Other Malaysia: Writings on Malaysia's Subaltern History*, Silverfishbooks, Kuala Lumpur, 2002, p. 121

33. Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Piety and Politics: Islamism in Contemporary Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 29

34. Farish Noor, "A Race for Islamization?", *Asiaweek.com*, March 31 2000, at: ***http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/magazine/2000/0331/nat.viewpoint.html***, Accessed 26 July 2014

been able to secure at least 30 per cent of votes in Peninsular Malaysia[35] and seriously challenge UMNO's command of the Malay vote. In 1959, PAS even won control of the state governments of Kelantan and Terengganu - a situation quickly and partly remedied by UMNO when, following defections from PAS to UMNO, UMNO was able to gain control of Terengganu in 1961.[36] During the 1960s, UMNO was able to use the *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia to manoeuvre PAS into adopting a defensive electoral strategy and thus lose significant support.[37] But by 1969, the electoral dynamics and nuances had changed once again: infighting within UMNO helped PAS develop a strong electoral advantage in a successful grassroots campaign, with the PAS leadership arguing that some of UMNO's concessions to non-Malays were threatening Malay identity.[38] Another opposition party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), emphasised racial equality in its messaging, and attempted to project itself as a defender of non-Malay rights and interests.[39] The combination of both UMNO infighting and opposition party tactics meant that the battle lines in 1969 were drawn among starkly pronounced ethnic contours, with the 1969 results translating into a serious loss in support for UMNO and its allies in the ruling coalition: in addition to a huge non-Malay swing to the opposition, there was also a significant swing from UMNO to PAS.[40] It represented the first occasion when the ruling coalition did not succeed in obtaining a crucial parliamentary two-thirds majority; however, the 1969 elections are also remembered for a particularly dark period of Malaysian modern history. Immediately afterwards, racial riots broke out in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur; figures on the total number of people killed vary, but most of the victims are reported to have been ethnic Chinese. These riots were

35. Liew Chin Tong, "PAS politics: Defining an Islamic state" in Edmund Terence Gomez (ed.) *Politics in Malaysia: The Malay Dimension*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 108
36. ibid., p. 108
37. Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Piety and Politics*, p. 30
38. ibid., p. 31
39. Meredith L. Weiss, *Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2006, p. 100
40. Joseph Chinyong Liow, *Piety and Politics*, p. 30

officially said to have occurred spontaneously, although there is evidence that they were 'carefully planned and organised and that they were an excuse for the new regime to declare an emergency to effect the regime change.'[41] The bloodletting that occurred within UMNO following the riots changed UMNO policies and therefore impacted upon Malaysian nation-building; the 'Young Turks' faction, led by Mahathir, blamed the Tunku for the riots, saying he had conceded too much to the non-Malays. Although Mahathir was later expelled from UMNO for his attack, the Tunku's position was nonetheless severely weakened. When an emergency was declared and parliament was suspended in the wake of the riots, the Tunku appointed his deputy, Abdul Razak, to head the administrative body tasked with restoring law and order in the country, effectively making Razak the most powerful man in the country.[42] Razak, whilst observing constitutional niceties and demonstrating respect for the Tunku, worked during the two years that parliament was suspended to remodel the ruling coalition known as the Alliance and also to pave the way for the development of the NEP.[43] When parliament reconvened, the ruling coalition, renamed the Barisan Nasional (BN) or National Front, was in a stronger position after several opposition parties, including PAS, joined its ranks. The 1974 elections saw BN returned with a two-thirds majority; but the brief attempt at Malay unity was not to last, with PAS leaving BN in 1977.

The cause of the 1969 riots was officially due to persisting inequalities between Malaysia's ethnic communities: Mahathir, for instance, believed that the riots happened in part because the Malays were all too aware of an 'imbalance in the wealth and progress of the races,'[44] an

41. Kua Kia Soong, *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969*, Suaram Komunikasi, Petaling Jaya, 2007, p. 85
42. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2002, p. 124
43. Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne, *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 23
44. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 24

imbalance in which the Malays were thought to be on the losing end. This explanation allowed Razak's administration to justify the need for an NEP: upon formally assuming the position of Prime Minister, Razak surrounded himself with some of the Young Turks or 'Malay ultras' (including Mahathir) who believed that the Malays were getting a poor deal despite the social contract. The NEP would thus, through the implementation of several policies, seek to foster national unity and address some of the 'imbalances' by 'reducing poverty and interethnic economic disparities.'[45] Like Article 153, there was also discussion of the NEP having a 'deadline' of sorts, with 1990 being the year by which Malays were to have control of 30 per cent of the national wealth.[46] Yet the NEP continues to persist to the present day, albeit in 'continually reincarnated' forms.[47] There are lingering questions as to whether or not the NEP has been successful in its aim to raise the economic position of the Malays. In 2012, Mohamed Ariff wrote that 'Malay households still account for nearly 75 per cent of the bottom 40 per cent,'[48] whilst a 2014 report from the United Nations Development Programme noted a growing inequality in Malaysian society represented in large part by a comparatively slow consumption growth for the bottom 40 per cent.[49] There has been 'significant numerical growth' in the Malay middle class;[50] and furthermore, the make-up of the Malay middle class has changed, from mostly 'administrators and schoolteachers' to a

45. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, "Whither Malaysia's New Economic Policy?", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 4, 1990, p. 469
46. Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1997, p. 35
47. Mohamed Ariff, "Preface: Development strategy under scrutiny" in Hal Hill. Tham Siew Yean and Ragayah Haji Mat Zin (eds.) *Malaysia's Development Challenges: Graduating from the Middle*, Routledge, New York, 2012, p. xx
48. ibid., p. xix
49. The Malaysian Insider, "Growing inequality a threat to Malaysia's future, says UN report", *The Malaysian Insider*, July 24 2014, at: ***http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/growing-inequality-a-threat-to-malaysias-future-says-un-report***, Accessed 28 July 2014
50. Terence Chong, *Modernization Trends in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005, p. 50

primarily 'managers and professionals working in both the private and state sectors.'[51] Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman have studied this new Malay middle class and argued that its links to 'an enlarged bureaucratic structure' need to be emphasised, since these links have 'vital implications for Malay ethnicity.'[52] Therefore, it is necessary to mention the ideology - the *Rukun Negara* - that was developed to legitimise the NEP and help facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between UMNO and the Malay middle class that it has helped to nurture.

As a national ideology, the *Rukun Negara*, or National Principles, has been a pervasive part of Malaysian everyday life: it is known to have been recited at school assemblies, invoked by politicians, and even, according to Zainah Anwar, have been displayed on billboards throughout the Klang valley.[53] The *Rukun Negara* was meant to provide Malaysians with a platform that transcended ethnicity, religion, culture, class and politics.[54] The first of the five principles that make the *Rukun Negara* is the 'belief in God' principle, described by Kua Kia Soong as 'presumptuous' for its failure to recognise religious diversity.[55] The confluence of events and trends surrounding the formulation of the *Rukun Negara* do certainly point towards the adoption of a deliberate strategy to perpetuate a Malay-Muslim national and political hegemony: its introduction by an emergency council headed by a politician (Razak) close to Malay ultras; its reference to a monotheistic deity, which tied in with the special mention of the monotheistic faith Islam in the constitution and also the constitutional link

51. Abdul Rahman Embong, "The Culture and Practice of Pluralism in Postcolonial Malaysia" in Robert W. Hefner (ed.) *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia*, University of Hawai'i Press, United States of America, 2001, p. 61
52. Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions*, p. 36
53. Zainah Anwar, "I've rediscovered the Rukun Negara - New Straits Times", *Sisters in Islam*, at: *http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.354.6*, Accessed 29 July 2014
54. R. S. Milne, "'National Ideology' and Nation-Building in Malaysia", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 7, 1960, p. 566
55. Kua Kia Soong, "Time to revisit the Rukun Negara", *The Sun Daily*, July 10 2014, at: *http://www.thesundaily.my/node/262015*, Accessed 29 July 2014

between Islam and Malayness, making it yet another national platform to invoke exclusivity; UMNO's brief success, under Razak's leadership, in taming PAS and thus controlling the Malay voting bloc; and finally, a global wave of Islamisation that reached the country around the same time, and which UMNO found increasingly difficult to manage, culminating in a so-called 'Islamisation race.' In tandem with the NEP, the *Rukun Negara* ideology was ultimately about fashioning a godly, entrepreneurial Malay-Muslim citizen, serving as a precursor to the Islamisation of Malay-Muslim identity and also the articulation of the *Melayu Baru* ideal.

1.2.2 The Melayu Baru

After rejoining UMNO in 1972, Mahathir quickly rose through the ranks to become Prime Minister in 1981. Malaysia's economy boomed during his premiership, assisting in the growth of the country's middle class. Yet, the capitalist ethos of the country's rapid development did not gel well with the 'protection' that the government afforded the Malays, Later, Mahathir suggested that many Malays had 'underachieved,' possibly becoming complacent as a result of their privileges.[56] Continuing with an earlier theme, Mahathir began to hint at the need for what Terence Chong has described as a 'qualitative change in the Malay middle class';[57] the concept of the *Melayu Baru* was thus meant to sum up an entrepreneurial figure that both helped to legitimise the NEP and allow UMNO to step back from 'looking after' the Malays.[58] It was a figure, argued Chong, whose vigour and strong rooting in the present meant that it was 'locked in binary with the idealised feminine Southeast Asian woman,' so that the *Melayu Baru* was a 'decidedly masculine' figure.[59]

56. Khoo Boo Teik, *Beyond Mahathir: Malaysian Politics and Its Discontents*, Zed Books Ltd, London, 2003, p. 195
57. Terence Chong, "The Construction of the Malaysian Malay Middle Class: The Histories, Intricacies and Futures of the *Melayu Baru*", *Social Identities*, Vol. 11, No. 6, 2005, p. 577
58. ibid., p. 577
59. ibid., p. 580

Stivens drew parallels between the *Melayu Baru* discourse and muscular Christianity,[60] the 'militarily competent and hyper-masculine Christian gentleman, the heir to the Protestant Ethic.'[61] The *Melayu Baru*, whose masculine traits signalled independence and meant that he was now more than capable of standing unassisted on his own two feet,[62] would thus be able to be a truly cosmopolitan figure. The cultured position that the *Melayu Baru* was meant to embody was perhaps linked to its position as a firmly urbanised figure. As Shamsul Amri Baharuddin explained in his analysis of the intricacies of the Malay middle class, the *Melayu Baru* were 'based mainly in big cities,'[63] having undergone a 'mental revolution and cultural transformation' to leave behind 'feudalistic and fatalistic values' as well as the mostly agrarian-leading lives that Malays had come to be associated with.[64] However, despite the new setting and outlook, the *Melayu Baru* was not to forget where he came from. Mahathir was critical of the 'corrupting influence of "Western values"' and used such criticism as a basis for conceptualising an 'Asian Values' approach.[65] He was particularly critical of Malays in Malaysia who blindly copied the dominant West.[66] The *Melayu Baru,* then, was ultimately part of Mahathir's effort to sculpt a uniquely Malay(sian) modernity, whilst also redefining local politics and society. Khoo Boo Teik has described how Mahathir's many policies and campaigns were attempts to 'reform and reorientate the values, attitudes and outlook of not only Malaysians in general and the Malays in particular, but also the

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60. Maila Stivens, "Sex, gender and the Malay middle class", p. 92
61. Maila Stivens, "The hope of the nation: Moral panics and the construction of teenagerhood in contemporary Malaysia" in Lenore Manderson and Pranee Liamputtong (eds.) *Coming of age in south and southeast Asia: Youth, courtship and sexuality*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 2002, p. 192
62. See *Chapter Two* for further discussion of the hypermasculinisation of Malay-Muslim identity.
63. Shamsul A. B., "From orang kaya to Melayu baru", p. 102
64. ibid., p. 106
65. Michael D. Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values: The Tepid War*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 39
66. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Challenge*, Pelanduk Publications, Subang Jaya, 1986, p. 44

politicians from the ruling coalition, bureaucrats and businessmen.'[67] Mahathir's many endeavours at restructuring the nation may well have stemmed from his belief, so clearly articulated after the 1969 riots, that the Malays were being taken for granted and thus needed to increasingly stand up for themselves; but there was also an element of controlling opposing influences, which in turn looked to threaten the *Melayu Baru* mould, UMNO's position and Mahathir's dreams of Malay prosperity. For instance, Shamsul has contended that the Islamic resurgence, 'imported' from overseas-based groups, was mostly felt among the new Malay middle class.[68] Mahathir, in the wake of the 1969 riots, had mostly addressed the issue of what direction Malaysia would take through an ethnicised lens. Many years later, he was attacking a wholly materialist and capitalist-based society,[69] and emphasising the necessity for a spiritual society vis-à-vis 'a Muslim society.'[70] Islam, then, had a key role to play in the Malay reformation, with Mahathir's efforts to define that role informed by both a desire to lift up the Malays and a need to control the gradual Islamisation of Malay-Muslim identity. The *Melayu Baru* concept thus forms the foundation of various efforts in reforming Malayness, in that it acknowledges that Malays today need to possess new traits in order to not only survive, but to thrive in the modern world. At the same time, its construct provided UMNO with a narrative of success and indispensability to the Malay electorate: without UMNO at the centre of government, there would be no political will to champion Malay interests. The results of the recent general elections have not only demonstrated the fallibility of such narratives, but have also raised questions about the centrality of UMNO in perpetuating Malayness.

67. Khoo Boo Teik, "Nationalism, Capitalism and 'Asian Values'" in Khoo Boo Teik and Francis Loh Koh Wah (eds.) *Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and Practices*, Curzon Press, New York, 2002, p. 55
68. Shamsul A. B., "From orang kaya to Melayu baru", p. 103
69. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Challenge*, pp. 56-57
70. ibid., pp. 64-65

1.3 Islamisation, Gender and Malayness

An important legacy of Mahathir's premiership is the Islamisation of the country, overseen by his administration 'to curb Islamic extremism and militancy among some sections of Muslim intellectuals';[71] Mahathir himself made various efforts to inculcate in the nation a more Islamic character, and co-opt prominent *dakwah* (Islamic missionary) personalities such as future Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim into the UMNO fold. One of the Mahathir administration's focal points in the Islamisation of the country was the Islamic legal system: the *shariah* legal systen, in tandem with a centralised establishment of local Islamic bodies, was further developed and its powers expanded to 'act as a showcase of successful state promotion of Islam in society.'[72] Still, there were clear tensions in Mahathir's move towards an Islamic modernity, with Mahathir himself lamenting how Islam 'is being invoked to promote retrogression which will bring in its wake weakness and eventual collapse.'[73] Such tensions are clearly evident in the Islamisation he oversaw, in the negotiation of powers to Islamic bodies, and especially so in the development of Islamic laws, such as the Islamic Family Law Act. The Act, introduced a few years after Mahathir became Prime Minister, was 'considered internationally to be among the most progressive codified Muslim family laws in terms of rights and protection for women.'[74] Mahathir believed women had an important role to play in his ambitious modernisation agenda; indeed his wife, Siti Hasmah, embodied this in her position as a professional Malay woman who supported Muslim women's rights, at one time even speaking out against a proposed law to loosen the restrictions on polygamy.[75]

71. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia*, p. 213
72. Maznah Mohamad, "Making majority, undoing family: law, religion and the Islamization of the state in Malaysia", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2010, pp. 365-366
73. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Challenge*, p. vii
74. Zainah Anwar and Jana S. Rumminger, "Justice and Equality in Muslim Family Laws: Challenges, Possibilities, and Strategies for Reform", *Washington and Lee Law Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 2007, p. 1533
75. Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne, *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir*, p. 117

Various amendments since the introduction of the Act have since reversed its position as an example of a progressive Muslim law. For instance, in 2006, Mahathir's daughter Marina Mahathir made clear her opposition to the then recent amendments to the Act. The amendments caused controversy for allegedly being discriminatory against women, with one section making it easier for Muslim men to practice polygamy, and easier for them to divorce their wives. Gender neutral language in the amendments also allowed a man to seek property from his wife in a divorce case. Marina used the term 'apartheid' to describe the lot of Muslim women in Malaysia: 'Non-Muslim Malaysian women have benefited from more progressive laws over the years while the opposite has happened for Muslim women.'[76] However, not all Muslim women were upset with the amendments; two women from the Muslim Professionals Forum (MPF), a local Muslim organisation set up by individuals of a 'professional and scientific training and background' to 'articulate the views of authentic mainstream Islam,'[77] issued a statement saying that the amendments were 'deserving of support of Muslims' and that Marina's apartheid remarks showed she was 'completely ignorant of the reality on the ground.'[78] The *dakwah* group Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIH), a group affiliated with the opposition party Keadilan (Justice Party), was similarly critical of Marina's remarks. 'Women in Malaysia are given unlimited opportunities to obtain high educational level, we are free to choose our profession and career besides enjoying high standard of living with our families,' said its women's chief Dr Harlina Halizah Siraj.[79] Stivens wrote how the Islamic revivalism appealed to both middle class and working class

76. Marina Mahathir, "No cheer for Muslim women", *Musing with Marina Mahathir*, March 17 2006, at: ***http://musingwithmarinamahathir.blogspot.com.au/2006/03/no-cheer-for-muslim-women.html***, Accessed 6 August 2012

77. Muslim Professional Forum, "About: Muslim Professionals Forum", *Muslim Professionals Forum*, at ***http://mpf.org.my/wp/?page_id=2***, Accessed 13 August 2012

78. Farah Pang Abdullah and Siti Jamilah Sheikh Abdullah, "Response to Marina Mahathir (IFLA Issue)", *Muslim Professionals Forum*, March 12 2006, at: ***http://mpf.org.my/wp/?p=321***, 12 March 2006, Accessed 13 August 2012

79. Jonathan Kent, "Malaysia 'apartheid' row deepends", *BBC News*, March 11 2006, at: ***http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4795808.stm***, Accessed 13 August 2012

Malay women in Malaysia;[80] the history of the Islamic Family Law Act then serves not only as an interesting mirror to the tensions and aspirations of Mahathir's premiership, but also charts the progress of negotiations that Muslim women have had with Islamisation in the country.

There has been much literature published that has viewed the relationship between Malay-Muslim women and Islamisation as a site of ongoing negotiations rather than a merely passive, one-way (that is, top to bottom) one; there are, however, different ideas as to how pervasive Islamisation might be in the lives of women and differing suggestions as to what the motivations of the women themselves might be. Wazir Jahan Karim, for instance, argued that Islamisation in Malaysia was not necessarily displacing Malay identity and practices, and specifically, *adat*.[81] Karim challenged the notion that *adat* was being subsumed by Islamic fundamentalism, arguing that a process of mediation determined the compatibility between Islam and *adat* so that the end result was Islamic practices instead becoming subsumed *under adat*.[82] In this context, *adat* was then empowering for women, and promoted women's progress. Aihwa Ong argued that Islamisation had more of an insidious presence in women's lives, stating that tensions between state nationalism and Islamic revivalism are mostly located in efforts to regulate women, in an effort to, ultimately, regulate *all* bodies.[83] Ong also wrote that all 'Great Religions,' including Islam, are 'heavily patriarchal,' and suggested that middle class support for an Islamic resurgence was both part of an effort 'to conserve their economic, political and cultural resources' and also due to an awareness that there was

80. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother", p. 52
81. *Adat* can be understood as an elaborate set of local customs, traditions and behaviour.
82. Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, pp. 208-212
83. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam: Malay Families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia" in Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (eds.) *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p. 186

'in religion an important source of competing nationalist ideologies in modernising societies.'[84] Norani Othman, meanwhile, argued that there was more to the relationship between Islamisation and gender than competing postcolonial ideologies: for her, the patriarchal dynamics present in Malaysian political discourse were in part the result of an anti-Western zeal.[85] According to Norani, the efforts of state nationalists and Islamic revivalists needed to be located within 'the context of a global phenomenon within the Muslim world',[86] that is, concurrently occurring developments pointing to an Islamic resurgence in other Muslim-majority countries. The result was a similar formulation of Islamisation, a 'retraditionalising' Islam that sought to:

> …impose an anachronistically understood Islam onto modern times, one devoid of a modern and Islamically appropriate conception of social relations, established on a basis of equality, between men and women.[87]

Norani was critical of Islamisation-infused state actions that have reinforced gender inequalities; for instance, she discussed the introduction of compulsory pre-marriage courses for Muslims, where the wife's position as subordinate to a husband was emphasised in reading materials.[88] Noting that contemporary Islamisation represented a new kind of 'intrusion' into local Muslims' lives,[89] Norani did not view *adat* to currently be as progressive a force for women as Karim had. Yet Norani, as a founding member of Malaysian women's rights organisation Sisters In Islam (SIS), nonetheless argued that women's groups in Muslim countries are able to achieve more by 'working within their

84. ibid., p. 187
85. Norani Othman, "Islamization and modernization in Malaysia: competing cultural reassertions and women's identity in a changing society" in Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller (eds.) *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 156
86. ibid., p. 161
87. ibid., p. 161
88. ibid., p. 159
89. ibid., p. 190

respective religious and cultural paradigm,'[90] signalling the need for a discourse on rights that had an Islamic grounding. Indeed, there is evidence that Malay-Muslim women are choosing for Islam to have an increasingly important place in their lives. Ayse Nilufer Narli discussed, in a paper published a few years into Mahathir's premiership, how some of the final-year female Malay-Muslim university students she interviewed preferred to be identified as Muslim, rather than Malay, women.[91] Sylva Frisk conducted fieldwork in the late 1990s where she examined, from the perspective of the women she interviewed, the centrality of Islam in urban Malay-Muslim women's lives, or what she termed 'women's Islamisation.'[92] By sharing details gleaned from observations of religious education activities and interviews with women, Frisk demonstrated how many women viewed their submission to their faith as an active process that was a source of comfort to them during times of personal struggle and one that also helped to add meaning to their lives. Frisk ultimately concluded that her interviewees were 'not fighting the same battle as Western, or even Muslims feminists are.'[93] It is a perspective shared by Stivens, who suggested that women's support for an Islamic resurgence may be viewed as an attempt to face Malaysian modernity on their own terms.[94] Understanding how Malay-Muslim women position themselves in Malay-Muslim identity politics then becomes key to fully understanding the intricacies of Malaysian modernity. In this thesis, I will argue that UMNO deployed its largely successful strategy of drawing on a *Melayu Baru* figure to command electoral success.

90. Norani Othman, *Shari'a and the citizenship rights of women in a modern nation-state: Grounding human rights arguments in non-western cultural terms*, IKMAS Working Papers, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1997, p. 52
91. Ayse Nilufer Narli, "Development, Malay women and Islam in Malaysia: Emerging contradictions", *Kajian Malaysia*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1984
92. Sylva Frisk, *Submitting To God: Women and Islam in Urban Malaysia*, NIAS Press, Copenhagen, 2009, p. 15
93. ibid., p. 190
94. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother", p. 72

1.4 A Theoretical & Methodological Framework for Researching Gender and Ethnicity in Malaysia

This thesis utilises postcolonial feminist analysis and methodologies to examine the links between gender and Malay(sian) modernity and the relationships between Malay-Muslim mothering, Malay-Muslim womanhood, nation, religion and modernity. As demonstrated earlier, the literature on women's relationship with Islamisation in Malaysia points to a unique and complex confluence of informing factors, not least being the emergence of a Malaysian modernity. It is therefore imperative that when researching gender and ethnicity in Malaysia, a theoretical and methodological framework is developed to reflect the distinctive circumstances of Malaysian modernity. These frameworks need to encapsulate not only concerns about gender and ethnicity, but also the sociohistorical conditions of the country. In my own research, I found developments within the inquiry of postcolonial theory to be most suited to this endeavour, specifically the contributions that feminist theorists have made in this field. A postcolonial feminist analytical and methodological approach allows identity formations and practices to be located in appropriate sociohistorical conditions and for exploration of the relationships between politics and the personal.

1.4.1 Feminist postcolonial theory

The development of postcolonial theory has been a relatively recent undertaking of a thoroughly bustling nature. Many scholars have made significant contributions to this growing field, but in considering a postcolonial perspective on modernity in Malaysia and for the sake of brevity, only the contributions of a few scholars will be discussed here. The term 'postcolonial' was and sometimes is often thought to refer solely to a point in time, that is, a period following the end of colonial rule, rather than a political positioning. Homi Bhabha's

1993 text *The Location of Culture* was particularly influential in defining parameters for postcolonial critique:

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples....[95]

Bhabha drew upon the work of Jacques Derrida in his attempts at this intervention, particularly the latter's work in what was termed 'deconstruction' in semiotics and western philosophy. For Derrida, deconstruction was not an approach that needed to be applied, but rather one that was already evident in every text[96] on account of the limitations of language. Derrida argued in his 1967 essay *Différance* that meaning of signs depended on how they differed from other signs, that creating a final meaning was therefore an unstable process, and that all signs needed to be 'supplemented' by other signs.[97] Bhabha used *différance* to explain a binarism in colonial discourse of the coloniser/colonised, and also the lingering effects of colonialism in the positioning of the postcolonial world, arguing that in Britain the 'postcolonial, migrant presence does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but

95. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* Routledge, New York, 1994, p. 245
96. Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese friend" in P. Kamuf (ed.) *A Derrida Reader*, Harvester, New York, p. 274
97. Jacques Derrida, "Différance" in Alan Bass (trans.) *Margins of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982

articulates the narratives of cultural difference…. The postcolonial space is now "supplementary"…it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn't aggrandise the *presence* of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up….'[98]

The concept of gender is conspicuously absent from much early postcolonial theory. Edward Said, for instance, whilst arguing that 'the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem,'[99] never fully explored the links between power, gender, and race in postcolonial theory.[100] For many feminist scholars, the deliberate omission of gender in examination of identity is a demonstration of power politics, with Julia Kristeva arguing that collective identities are masculinised in their rejection or attempts at controlling the Other.[101] Feminist theorist Anne McClintock was one of the first scholars to point out the lack of gender considerations specifically in postcolonial theory, arguing against the tendency of postcolonial theorists to organise their work around 'a binary axis of time rather than power.'[102] A concept of historical time, according to McClintock, was a key element in the engendered 'family of man' discourse,[103] which in turn largely informed an imperial worldview. The use of familial terms here meant that colonisers were able to construct a hierarchy with themselves placed at the top of it, thereby creating 'a

98. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 241
99. Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered" in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley (eds.) *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-84*, Metheun, London, 1986, p. 225
100. Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1991
101. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991
102. Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'", *Social Text*, Vol. 31/32, 1992, p. 88
103. Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," *Feminist Review*, Vol. 44, 1993, p. 63

cult of domesticity'[104] with an agenda of producing 'a social sphere that is considered to be *natural and universal*'[105] (italics mine). The social sphere, and 'family of man,' was assumed to be natural because it inculcated an equally presumed natural gendered division of labour. Women's responsibility as 'biological "producers" of women and children'[106] was so assumed as *natural* that their position in the nation was always seen in relation to men and never vice versa: Nira Yuval-Davis mentioned one definition of the nation as 'two males plus defending a territory with the women and children.'[107] This construction, however, was not without contradiction. Although these hierarchies, and by extension nationalist discourses which inculcate such hierarchies, 'render women invisible as historical agent,'[108] such emphasis is placed on the domestic work of women that their capabilities in this area continuously need to be played down. McClintock explained:

> What could not be admitted into male rationalist discourse (the economic
> value of women's domestic labor) is disavowed and projected onto the
> realm of the 'primitive' and the zone of empire. At the same time, the
> economic value of colonised cultures is domesticated and projected onto
> the realm of the 'prehistoric.'[109]

European attempts at creating a 'family of man' which featured the Malays began as early as the 18th century. It was then that German naturalist Johann Sebastian Blumenbach had borrowed on the thoughts of his mentor, Carolus Linnaeus, in viewing human diversity under four major classifications – Caucasian, Ethiopian, Mongolian and American. Blumenbach, it

104. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 36
105. ibid., p.35
106. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, p. 26
107. ibid., p. 15
108. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 39
109. ibid., p. 42

should be noted, was actually among the least racist of the thinkers of his day, despite his being remembered for advancing a racially-based viewed of human diversity and development: he was, for instance, relatively sympathetic to Africans, insofar as they possessed the capacity to be 'civilised' and only lacked positive African role models.[110] Blumenbach believed that all humans were capable of reaching the ideal forms of humanity, as well as being similarly capable of transitioning to its more 'degenerate' forms. However, there appeared to be too big of a jump between Ethiopian and Caucasian humanity, so Blumenbach eventually reorganised Linnaeus' system of racial classification to include the Malays. The Malays in Blumenthal's model were meant to encompass all of the Pacific peoples and act as a transitional form between Caucasians and Ethiopians in his model of ideal and degenerate forms of humanity.[111] Following British colonisation in the Malay peninsula, the 'family of man' idea began to take form there, particularly with the advent of the British residency system that the British implemented to take control of the peninsula: British residents were installed to offer 'advice' to a state's sultan to ensure 'stable government.'[112] The Malay rulers would often continue in their titular roles, but have no real administrative powers as the Resident took over running of the state. Banished to the periphery, much like women were in relation to the nation, the gendered administrative systems of colonial Malaya sent a very clear signal as to who could be trusted to be in charge: in this case, the colonisers as the civilised and ideal form of humanity in the colonial 'family tree of man.' For the Malays to then aspire to a form of civility suitable to governing a nation, they would have to adopt an approach that would allow them to stand as equals to their

110. Teshale Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism in World History*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 2011, p. 115
111. Stephen Jay Gould, "The Geometer of Race" in E. Nathaniel Gates (ed.) *The Concept of Race in Natural and Social Science*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 5
112. Charles Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1986, p. 336

colonial masters, one that suitably civilised them so that they too could be the head of a 'family of man.'

The legitimacy of the 'family of man' construct depended heavily on notions of disciplined and embodied masculinity in colonial nationalist thought. Cynthia Enloe has written on how a binary approach to gender, for both colonisers and colonised peoples, allowed for justification of colonial rule as well as a sexual political framework that privileged the coloniser male.[113] European women set a standard for 'ladylike behaviour,' a pinnacle of a civilizing mission that were thought to enable and therefore continue protecting. Colonised women could not meet this standard of 'ladylike behaviour' because the ideology of masculinity in the colonised society did not allow them to: 'if men's sense of manliness was such that it did not include reverence toward women, then they could not expect to be allowed to govern their own societies.'[114] Enloe cited the example of British officials in India passing laws on the rights of Indian women to 'advance civilization,' whilst enabling a system that continued to enshrine the position of the European male at the pinnacle of the civilization – with the European woman in a distinct second place. A European woman's 'ladylike behaviour' included not fraternising with local men, whereas the European male was allowed – and, as this thesis will later discuss, sometimes actively encouraged – to have liaisons with local women. Transgressions of the boundary between European women and local men were often a cause of consternation for colonial officials. Farish Noor has detailed instances of British colonial authorities decrying marriages between European women and (male) rulers from colonised territories, and even how the fear of such a transgression being the basis for refusing a local ruler permission to travel to Britain in the late 19th century.[115]

113. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2014, p. 127-130
114. ibid., p. 130
115. Farish Noor, *The Other Malaysia*, p. 60

Such was the concern around European and colonised masculinities and their importance to the imperial project that discussion around the embodiments of European males versus their colonised counterparts soon ensued. To demonstrate this point, Enloe cited the work of Scouts founder Robert Baden-Powell on 'a white man' versus 'a man': in his 1922 instructional booklet for Rover Scouts, Baden-Powell included an illustration of 'a white man' as 'tall, muscular, eyes straight ahead, body at attention' whilst 'a man' was 'short and black, wearing a top hat and a rumpled coat.'[116] To be a white man then meant to embody traits that no non-white man could ever replicate, even if the latter were to aspirationally dress in the clothes of a civilized white man. The clear distinction of what ideal imperial masculinity was not, together with an articulation of what it looked like, was therefore for Enloe the basis of colonial nationalisms. In this framework, for a colonised people to stand as equals to their colonial masters and therefore possess the right to self-determination meant devising a local nationalism that met the criticisms of 'native' masculinities – a task which arguably, many postcolonial nationalists did indeed pursue.

Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* has offered a framework for examining postcolonial nationalist responses to colonial portrayals of the 'native,' in his coining of the term 'hypermasculinity.' In Nandy's view, colonialism 'produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolised the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity.'[117] In examining the history of British rule in India, he theorised that sometime after the 1830s, 'exposed sections of Indians'[118] began to internalise the sexualised cultural consensus that was a hallmark of colonialism, so that colonial rule began

116. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p. 130
117. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. 4
118. ibid., p. 6

to be perceived locally as 'manly or husbandly or lordly.'[119] Nandy also alluded to a 'cult of domesticity' when he discussed the 'subsidiary homology between childhood and the state of being colonised.'[120] The culminative effects of the infantilsing and feminisation of the Indian populace were, according to Nandy's account, attempts by pre-Gandhian protest movements 'to redeem the Indians' masculinity by defeating the British, often fighting against hopeless odds.'[121] A hypermasculine approach was thus deemed necessary 'to beat the colonisers at their own game and to regain self-esteem as Indians.'[122] Although conducting his study in the sociohistorical context of India, Nandy cited the work of postcolonial scholars writing in other sociohistorical contexts, including Said and Frantz Fanon. Nandy also made references to the effects of Western colonialism in other parts of the world; as such, his framework of hypermasculinity has been used to explain the rise of nationalistic movements in other postcolonial societies. For instance, Frances Gouda utilised Nandy's work to discuss how Indonesian nationalists 'seemed to have few options but to "over-stress" their virile selves when confronting the swaggering Dutch enemy.'[123] Amongst Malay nationalists, there was a similar need to demonstrate a 'virility' that would help to empower them. In *Chapter Two*, I use Nandy's work on hypermasculinity to discuss how developments in Malay nationalism mean that reforms to Malayness can alternatively be viewed as a hypermasculinisation of Malay identity. Despite noting the tendency of many postcolonial societies to adopt hypermasculine tendencies, Nandy did note one significant exception: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi led an activist movement in India that was, according to Nandy, 'liberated from aggressiveness and recognised as perfectly compatible with womanhood,

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119. ibid., p. 5
120. ibid., p. 11
121. ibid., p. 9
122. ibid., p. 52
123. Frances Gouda, "Militant Masculinity and Female Agency in Indonesian Nationalism, 1945-1949" in Gregory Blue, Martin Bunton and Ralph Croizier (eds.) *Colonialism and the Modern World: Selected Studies*, M. E. Sharpe, London, 2002, p. 213

particularly maternity.'[124] Gandhi's practice of nonviolence directly challenged the colonial discourse on masculinity; as for the homology on childhood, Gandhi's response was less direct, so that Westerners frequently referred to Gandhi's 'childlike' demeanour.[125] For Nandy, Gandhi's challenge to the adult-child colonial construct lay in Gandhi's approach to the concept of time, in the way Gandhi emphasised continuity and self-realisation, as opposed to causes and progress and evolution.[126] Nandy's approach thus offered those concerned with improving the postcolonial condition a theoretical model for reclaiming their position that was not framed in the language of the coloniser: that is, by challenging both the gendered positions of colonialism and the Western approach to the concept of time.

Nandy's model, however, has not been without criticism, particularly on account of his generalised notions of gender. In her important work *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Mrinalini Sinha makes the important point that gender as an experience is varied, so that as a category itself it is 'never distinct from national, class/caste, and racial categories.'[127] Sinha's discussion of 'the logic of colonial masculinity' is careful to take into account the shifting nature of such categories, so that ultimately the figures of the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' were constructed in relation to developments in both colonial Indian society and late nineteenth century British society.[128] As an example of her arguments, Sinha cited opposition in colonial India to a bill extending the criminal jurisdiction of Indian civil servants over European British people living in country towns, an episode referred to as the Ilbert Bill controversy. Sinha demonstrated that there were many factors, sometimes even contradictory

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124. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 54
125. ibid., p. 56
126. ibid., pp. 60-61
127. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, p. 11
128. ibid., pp. 1-2

ones, that drove opposition to the Bill: the advent of an era-specific 'Victorian feminism';[129] a contemporary view of the equal 'unnaturalness' in both elevating the position of 'effeminate *babus*' and in meeting the demands of British feminists;[130] and colonial Indian society's citation of the 'subordinate' position of Indian women to further justify the effeminacy of Indian men.[131] Evolving sociohistorical and cultural conditions have thus significantly influenced the articulation of gender, so that, as Sinha noted from the outset of her study, the figures borne of a time and location specific to colonial discourse need to be examined in the context of their own specificities as opposed to 'products of a universalised or generalised colonial condition.'[132] In both colonial Malaya and postcolonial Malaysia, then, the content of local discourse on ethnicity, gender and nationhood need to be considered in relation to the racialised figures of the times. Farish has written on how, in colonial Malaya:

> …the colonial project there was developed and perpetuated according to a heterosexist agenda which had effectively made colonialism a masculine, imperial prerogative (for both the Western men and women who participated in it on many levels) and reduced its subjects (male and female alike) to the level of a subordinate, exotic, feminised state.[133]

This colonial gender dualism has endured to the present day: the lazy native figure was such a powerfully effeminate, impotent figure that its remnants continue to appear in

129. ibid., p. 60
130. ibid., p. 35
131. ibid., p. 44
132. ibid., p. 2
133. Farish Noor, "Innocents Abroad? The Erasure of the Question of Race and Power in Contemporary Feminist and 'Nostalgic' Travelogues", *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1997, p. 61

contemporary discourses such as the *Melayu Baru* and in Malay nationalist admonishments to Malays. The masculinity and virility attributed to other races, such as the Chinese, also needs to be considered; where Sinha argued that concepts of British masculinity and Bengali effeminacy needed to be understood 'in relation to one another, and as constitutive of one another,'134 the position of gender in Malayness needs to be understood in relation to another polar opposite figure. The construction of 'colonial masculinity,' which acknowledged the multiple and overlapping axes of power, was thus an important development in postcolonial theory: there was an embeddedness to each and every construction that needed to be carefully examined. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak made a similar point when explaining the purpose of postcolonial critique: '(It insists) in disclosing complicities the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique; (it has) emphasis upon "history" and upon the ethico-political as the trace of that complicity.'135

Spivak's use of the female pronoun is no accident; she was acutely aware of the politics ascribed to the voices of western versus 'third world' women. Spivak's championing of third world women has helped redefine postcolonial theory, as Spivak asserted that 'there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak'136 – if a colonised people were being systemically marginalised, than the women in that group were in a double bind. Spivak was, like Bhabha, influenced by Derrida's work on deconstruction, writing that deconstruction involved '(locating) the promising marginal text…to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to

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134. ibid., p. 7
135. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 246-247
136. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan, London, 1988, p. 307

reconstitute.'[137] Spivak's deconstructionist examination of western feminist thought led her to conclude that what western feminists sought was entry to a 'masculist truth-claim to universality or academic objectivity':[138] 'Varieties of feminist criticism and practice must reckon with the possibility that, like any other discursive practice, they are marked and constituted by, even as they constitute, the field of their production.'[139] The actions of many western feminists in speaking for third world women and assuming a global sisterhood based on a platform of identical concerns and experiences was thus, in many ways, playing into dominant western imperialist thought. A new way of referring to the marginalised, whilst at the same time allowing for the peculiarities of a situation, result   ed in Spivak further developing Marxist writer Antonio Gramsci's usage of the term 'subaltern' to do as much. In the Indian context, placing the subaltern subject would be the starting point in critically examining the construct of Indian society – a society in which, despite independence, remnants of a gendered, colonial discourse are still evident even after its independence in 1947.[140] Spivak further argued that we must be aware of our own positioning in the production of knowledge, and also, rather than 'speaking for,' we should learn from.

1.4.2 Postcolonial feminist theory in methodology

In her influential essay *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty demonstrated that tendencies to 'speak for' and universalise the experiences of women in the third world were common features of Western hegemonic discourse, with various analytical presuppositions being utilised in methodology to help

137. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's preface" in J. Derrida (ed.) *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. lxxvii
138. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference", *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 7, No.1-2, 1986, p. 226
139. ibid., p. 225
140. Ketu Katrak, "Indian Nationalism, Gandhian '*Satyagraha*', and Representations of Female Sexuality", in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger (eds.) *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 395

sustain such practices. Mohanty critiqued three such examples: the use of a wholly positivist social science approach; a tendency to assume a universal conceptualisation of 'woman'; and finally, a limited definition of power. These presuppositions, Mohanty pointed out, usually ignored sociohistorical contexts which could thus give different meanings to otherwise similar realities: Mohanty gave the increase in female-headed households in middle-class American and Latin America as an example. Where the former might be interpreted as a sign of feminist progress, the latter, whilst at first glance also indicating improvement in the status of women, actually takes place amongst poorer families, therefore ultimately pointing to a feminisation of poverty there.[141] Mohanty later argued for a feminist methodology and analytic strategy that drew on historic materialism and centralised 'racialised gender.'[142] For Mohanty, these approaches were key in affecting social justice:

> …If we begin our analysis from, and limit it to, the space of privileged communities, our visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges. Beginning from the lives and interests of marginalised communities of women, I am able to access and make the workings of power visible - to read up the ladder of privileged… This particular marginalised location makes the politics of knowledge and the power investments that go along with it visible so that we can then engage in work to transform the use and abuse of power.[143]

141. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds.) *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003, p. 64
142. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003, p. 231
143. ibid., p. 231

Mohanty's intervention for a new feminist methodological paradigm is useful to researchers who are trying to avoid an analysis based on what Spivak cynically described as 'superior theory and enlightened compassion.'[144] It offers a nuanced way of exploring the networks of power and privilege from the perspectives of those located in and directly affected by the those networks. The application of Mohanty's paradigm to the case of researching gender and ethnicity in Malaysia allows a number of important points about gender and ethnicity in Malaysia to be made from the outset. The first is that a generalised understanding of Malaysian womanhood cannot be formulated. As Cynthia Joseph noted, in multi-ethnic Malaysia, 'highly ethnicized discourses' are linked with notions of femininities.[145] In Joseph's longitudinal study of young women in Malaysia, she demonstrated the different ways of being a woman in Malaysia: for example, there are Malay-Muslim women, Chinese women, and Indian women, to name a few. Furthermore, these femininities 'compete with other identity discourses for cultural spaces in an increasingly consumer-oriented and globalised space.'[146] When researching a particular aspect of Malaysian womanhood, an awareness of how various identity discourses mesh with an ethnicised femininity is thus critical in understanding where power on ways of being is situated and how that power relates to evolving contexts. Finally, an awareness of the qualified positioning of power in experiences of womanhood in Malaysia necessitates an analysis that is predicated on historical and sociocultural nuances rather than an entirely quantitative analysis.

144. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, p. 135
145. Cynthia Joseph, *Growing up Female in Multi-Ethnic Malaysia*, Routledge, New York, 2014, p. 66
146. ibid., p. 71

1.4.3 Methodology

Like Spivak, I have come to believe that a researcher cannot speak for their subjects; rather, a researcher must be prepared to learn from them. Although I found the work of several theorists, already discussed here, to be useful for developing a postcolonial and gendered reading of the goals and desires of Malay-Muslim nationalists, that would not in itself allow for an understanding of how Malay-Muslim women engaged with the forces that informed Malaysian modernity. For this, the arguments of theorists such as Spivak and Mohanty need to be put into action in order to find answers. The methodology used for this research project was thus twofold: sources for aspects of this thesis that attend to a gendered reading of the development of Malay-Muslim nationalist identity include news reports, film and television media products, and also discussions with local activists, researchers, and policymakers. For the aspect of this thesis that deals with the question of Malay-Muslim women's relationship with and position in Malaysian sociopolitical discourse, this thesis draws on interviews conducted with some fifty Malay-Muslim women during 2011. All of these research participants had children, are English-speaking and were based in either Kuala Lumpur or one of its surrounding townships. I deliberately sought to interview women who had children as I was interested in whether there were any tensions or negotiations between Malay-Muslim maternities and modernity. The interviewees also varied in ages, with the youngest being in her twenties and the eldest aged over 60; I was interested in whether the identity politics of an older interviewee might differ from those who grew up in Malaysia during Mahathir's first stint in power. I had not deliberately sought out interviewees based on political affiliation; when I did raise political beliefs, I was in fact half-jokingly admonished on one occasion for raising a 'personal' issue. Nonetheless, there was a diversity of political beliefs amongst the individuals I interviewed, with one older woman disclosing her involvement in a widespread anti-corruption protest movement (see p. 129). The choice of interviewing individuals based

mostly in Kuala Lumpur was also intentional: Kuala Lumpur, the centre of much economic activity and development, was likely to be home to many *Melayu Baru*-type individuals – that is, Malay, middle-class individuals who resided in the 'big cities.. I demonstrated earlier in this chapter how the *Melayu Baru* discourse has tended to be overwhelmingly masculine and in decidedly stark contrast with a feminine lazy native figure. When interviewing Malay-Muslim women, I sought to hear the thoughts of a group largely marginalised in contemporary Malay-Muslim identity politics. In Frisk's account of fieldwork involving the religious practices of urban Malay-Muslim women, she discussed how many women viewed her as a potential convert, with some wanting her to convert to Islam because they cared about her well-being in the hereafter.[147] My religious status was not so much an issue amongst interviewees the way it was for Frisk; when I introduced myself to potential interviewees, many of them were clearly able to ascertain by my name that I was of a mixed background with a Malay (or at least Muslim) parent. I was out of practice at speaking Malay because when I lived in Malaysia, it had been around Kuala Lumpur where I spoke mostly English; however, this did not stop interviewees from assuming my familiarity with Malay words and cultural practices, some of which I did indeed readily recognise. In fact, most of the interviewees were happy to be interviewed in English, a language that is widely spoken throughout Malaysia; on the few occasions where my out of practice Malay was revealed, little was made of it since I was then living in Australia. With the exception of sources who agreed to be identified in this thesis - typically well-known interviewees who were able to comment on the position of Malay-Muslim women in Malaysia - most of the interviewees are identified in this thesis by pseudonyms. Many interviewees were remarkably open and gracious with the personal information that they shared; in some instances, I have felt it

147. Sylva Frisk, *Submitting to God*, pp. 18-19

necessary to alter background details to further protect their identities, although none that impact an analysis of locating their lived experiences in a sociohistorical context.

1.5 Thesis Outline

As this chapter has demonstrated, earlier literature on the relationship between identity, gender, family, ethnicity, religion and modernity in Malaysia points to a unique and complex confluence of informing factors. This thesis is structured to allow for ample exploration of these relationships, and in doing so it presents an argument for the continued necessity of studying Malayness from a gendered perspective. Throughout the thesis, I weave textual analyses and materials from interviews to investigate and explain developments. Chapter Two offers an in-depth examination of the gendered foundation of Malayness, highlighting how Mahathir in particular used that foundation to argue for a new modern Malay-Muslim identity. This assessment is then used to inform Chapter Three which examines how gender continues to underpin contemporary efforts to reform Malayness. It argues that Islamisation often equates to a more masculine understanding of Malay identity, setting up the question of why women's voices on this issue are integral to understanding the bearing that Malay-Muslim identity has on Malaysian politics. Chapter Four then looks at how urban Malay womanhood is performed and evolving in modern Malaysia, and the implications of these evolving performances on the elite's ability to continue propagating an ideal Malay-Muslim identity. I argue that urban Malay-Muslim women's agency can best be understood in religious terms, in that for them, Islam provides a transcendent way of addressing tensions in contemporary Malay identity politics. Chapter Five addresses some of the issues raised earlier by examining the position that gender occupies in political discourse. Chapter Six explores how Malay-Muslim womanhood is used to advance the Malay elite's ambitions towards leading a global Islamic community (referred to as *ummah*), and argues that the

hypermasculinisation of Malay-Muslim identity which is used to ensure an esteemed place in the *ummah* necessitates a subjugation of Malaysian womanhood. The concluding chapter, Chapter Seven, assesses the outlook for Malay-Muslim identity with its basis in gender, and does so with reference to the 2018 general election results. It argues that, amongst urban Malays, ethnicity will increasingly be seen as less of an identity-marker, and that the prospect of liberating Malayness from the lazy native mythos remains grim.

Chapter Two – Malayness, Modernity and Mahathirism

Mahathir was, and continues to be, one of the more defining contributors to discussions over Malay identity. His outspoken views on the essence of the Malay character have not only attracted attention and controversy for decades, but they were also a formative part of many policies drawn up and implemented during his tenure as Prime Minister. The effects of such policies continue to reverberate in the Malaysian socio-political landscape today: the Islamisation 'race,' which Mahathir oversaw whilst in office, continues to gather momentum, shaping, redefining and consolidating what it is to be a Malay-Muslim in modern Malaysia. It is hard to overstate Mahathir's influence on contemporary Malaysia, particularly when it comes to local conceptualisations of Malay-Muslim identity. This does not mean, though, that Mahathir's thoughts on Malayness were entirely unprecedented or unconnected to other ideological developments. For instance, Syed Hussein Alatas described *The Malay Dilemma* as 'an extension of the colonial ideology,'[1] whilst Michael Barr highlighted how Mahathir's positions on ethnicities demonstrated his "utilitarian" approach in his advocacy of 'Asian Values.'[2] This chapter will explore colonial ideologies on Malayness, Mahathir's refashioning of Asian values and some of his work, statements and approaches to Malayness over the years. This is done to enable a better understanding of the context to Mahathirist policies on modernising Malayness, why those policies continue to remain relevant today, and how gender and family were key to those policies.

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1. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Frank Cass and Co Ltd, London, 1977, p. 180
2. Michael D. Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values*, p. 42

2.1 Conceptualising the Malay Problem

The real Malay is a short, thick-set, well-built man, with straight
black hair, a dark brown complexion, thick nose and lips, and bright
intelligent eyes. His disposition is generally kindly, his manners are polite
and easy. Never cringing, he is reserved with strangers and suspicious,
though he does not show it. He is courageous and trustworthy in the
discharge of an undertaking; but he is extravagant, fond of borrowing
money, and very slow in repaying it. He is a good talker... He takes an
interest in the affairs of his neighbours and is consequently a gossip. He is a
Muhammadan and a fatalist, but he is also very superstitious. He never
drinks intoxicants, he is rarely an opium-smoker. But he is fond of
gambling, cock-fighting, and kindred sports... He is, however, lazy to a
degree, is without method or order of any kind, knows no regularity even in
the hours of his meals, and considers time as of no importance...[3]

Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, 1895

Sir Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* is a classic Orientalist text, through which the

former colonial administrator, in his own words, 'attempt(s) to awake an interest in an almost

undescribed but deeply interesting people.'[4] It was first published in 1895, just before

Swettenham was appointed the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States[5] and

3. Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd, Singapore, 1895, pp. 2-3
4. ibid., p. vii
5. The Federated Malay States consisted of the present-day states of Selangor, Perak, Negeri
Sembilan and Pahang, and would last until 1946 when, together with the Straits Settlements and
Unfederated Malay States, it was replaced by the Malayan Union.

includes an account of a failed assassination attempt on his life by Perak nobleman Dato Maharaja Lela Pandak Lam. Swettenham was travelling down the Perak River by boat in the hopes of meeting the British Resident of Perak state, James Wheeler Woodford Birch, at a place named Pasir Salak, when he was informed by a Haji Ali during one stop that Birch had been assassinated at Pasir Salak by Maharaja Lela whilst the former was bathing in the river. He was also told that Maharaja Lela was anticipating his arriving there shortly and had set up a barrier across the river in the hopes of killing Swettenham too. Rather than risk staying put in unfriendly territory, Swettenham and some of his crew opted to continue travelling down the river, through the night, with the intention of attempting to break through the barrier when they reached Pasir Salak. The fast-flowing stream, the cover of the night sky, and the settling of a strong mist over the river helped hide the group from Maharaja Lela's men as they passed through Pasir Salak. But the barrier Swettenham and his men were expecting to encounter, which would halt their journey through Pasir Salak and lead to their being attacked and killed, never materialised.

In a tone containing both disbelief and smugness, Swettenham recounts the moment when he realised there was no barrier:

> We could hardly realise the truth when we found ourselves at the lower end
> of the village without having encountered any obstruction. The barrier
> never existed in fact – only in the imagination of Haji Ali, or, more
> probably, the Maharaja Lela had intended to make it, *but the Malay habits
> of laziness and procrastination defeated his plan*.[6] (Italics mine).

6. Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, p. 266

Swettenham was not the first colonial official to write of 'the Malay,' as he addresses his subject, as the lazy native. One earlier mention of the lazy native came from 17th century Portuguese official Emanuel Godhino de Eredia, who claimed they were 'very *wanton*' (italics mine).[7] Similar claims from other foreign observers were to follow: 'the Malay' was additionally described as thieving and unreliable,[8] 'listless and apathetic'[9] according to the founder of Singapore Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, and as having 'a feebleness of intellect'[10] by British Resident in Java John Crawfurd. Swettenham was actually regarded by Syed Hussein Alatas as in fact having a 'conception of Malay character (which) was considerably modified compared to some earlier writers.'[11] For instance, on the subject of Malays being 'treacherous,' Swettenham wondered 'whether he deserves the reproach more than other men.'[12] Despite this comparatively sympathetic outlook, he was nonetheless relentless in his portrayal of the Malay as the lazy native, stating in another work that 'the leading characteristic of the Malay of every class is a disinclination to work.'[13] He theorised this might be owing to 'the fact that interest in manual and intellectual labour was not situationally cultivated,'[14] the climate 'which inclines the body to ease and rest,'[15] or even:

> …the fact that, in the course of many generations, many hundreds of years, he
>
> has learned that when he did set his mind and his body moving, and so
>
> acquired money or valuables, these possessions immediately attracted the

7. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 37
8. ibid., p. 37
9. Thomas Stamford Raffles, *Memoir*, Sophia Raffles (ed), James Duncan, London, 1835, Vol. 1, p. 244
10. John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, Archibald Constable, Edinburgh, 1820, Vol. 2, p. 287
11. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 44
12. Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, p. 4
13. Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1955, p. 136
14. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 44
15. Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p. 137

attention of those who felt that they could make a better use of them than the owner.[16]

A later British Resident, Hugh Clifford, demonstrated a similar level of sympathy for the predicament of the Malay in light of some of their less promising traits:

> One cannot but sympathise with the Malays, who are suddenly and violently translated from the point to which they had attained in the natural development of their race, and are now required to live up to the standards of a people who are six centuries ahead of them.[17]

Western colonialism has been named as one of the forces behind the debate over Malay-Muslim identity,[18] and the place of the lazy native in colonialist discourse certainly helped to drive this force. When colonisers sought to document their observations of the Malay world, they did so 'within their own ethnocentric and eurocentric world view which necessarily placed the native as well as his culture, beliefs and symbols on an inferior, subjugated register.'[19] Malayness became associated with backwardness; the new colonial order with progressiveness. In Swettenham's colonial narrative, Maharaja Lela was the quintessential Malay who had ultimately missed the opportunity to eradicate an opponent through his own ethnically inherent stupidity; Maharaja Lela's success with Birch was only because he'd fortuitously caught the latter off-guard. Maharaja Lela was eventually tried and hanged in

16. ibid., p. 137
17. Hugh Clifford, *In Court and Kampong*, Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd, Singapore, 1896, p. 74
18. Farish Noor, "The One-Dimensional Malay: The Homogenization of Malay Identity in the Revisionist Writing of History in Malaysia", paper presented at the Third Annual Malaysian Studies Conference, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, 7-8 August 2001
19. ibid.

Singapore by the colonial authorities for Birch's assassination: the Malay resistance was crushed, on account of their well-documented alleged inferiority.

The story of Maharaja Lela is useful in exploring when and how Malayness came to be regarded as having a 'problem,' as well as the legacy of the problem as it plays into Malay-Muslim nationalism today. The story makes evident that laziness and a simple nature were traits the colonial authorities regarded as playing into 'the Malay problem' and also establishes that they viewed the problem to be a result of this natural state of the Malays' being, as per the imperialist 'family tree of man' discourse. It also illustrates how violent an effect the implementation of this discourse had on the Malay psyche in the form of Maharaja Lela's attempt at resistance; the Sultan of Perak once summed up colonialism's legacy on Malay esteem when he reflected, in the early 20th century, of his ancestors as being like 'frogs beneath an inverted cocoa-nut shell who dreamed not that there was any world beyond the narrow limits in which they were pent.'[20] The colonial desire to *know* the Malay was not one which the Sultan of Perak's ancestors were familiar with as it largely appears to have been an issue they were not preoccupied with. Indeed, there is much scholarly debate over the origins of the Malay identity: while Leonard Andaya asserts that a 'Melayu' ethnic identity can be traced as far back as the seventh century (that is, the early history of the Malay archipelago),[21] there are others who are not so sure. Anthony Milner suggests that among the people who would later come to be regarded as Malay, there was a loyalty to a particular ruler ''or some other local attachment' rather than a Malay ethnic identity.[22] As evidence, Milner cites both the case of colonial figure William Marsden, who noted that in all official

20. Hugh Clifford, *Bushwacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories*, Henemann, London, 1929, p. 218
21. Leonard Andaya, "Malay Ethnic Identity: Unravelling the Historical from the Discursive", paper presented at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore, 15 November 2007
22. Anthony Milner, *The Malays*, Wiley, Chichester, 2008, p. 12

correspondence with Malay states, the writers rarely referred to themselves as Malay,[23] and 'Malay studies' scholar Ismail Hussein noting that 'the term "Malay" was seldom used' in the pre-colonial period.[24] Alatas, making room for both Andaya's supposition and Milner's concerns wrote, wrote: 'The Malays themselves had also an opinion on what they were, but this was not directly expressed. The Malay historical sources do not concern themselves with the problem.'[25] As the Sultan of Perak's remarks clearly demonstrate, the pre-colonial inhabitants of the Malay archipelago hadn't conceptualised that there was a problem in their existence, mostly because they hadn't conceptualised a construct of Malayness. This construction was rather an activity undertaken by the European colonisers; the colonial presence in India had sought to control their new subjects 'by defining and classifying space, making separations between public and private spheres, by recording transactions such as sale of property, by counting and classifying populations, replacing religious institutions as the registrar of births, marriages, and deaths, and by standardising languages and scripts,'[26] and in Malaya they were no different. As evidenced by texts such as Swettenham's, there were efforts to study the local population in Malaya, to have their 'minds and actions...framed in an epistemological and practical grid.'[27] The whole process was taken a step further with the passage of the Malay Reservation Enactment 1913. In an act that was to pave the way for how Malayness is understood today, the Enactment, introduced to safeguard Malay land ownership,[28] began by defining who was a Malay; not only that, but because this Enactment was added separately to the different constitutions of the eleven states of the

23. ibid., p. 12
24. Ismail Hussein, "Between Malay and National Culture", *Malay Literature*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 1990, p. 58
25. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 37
26. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British Rule in India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 1
27. Shamsul A. B. "A History of an Identity, an Identity of a History: The Idea and Practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia Reconsidered", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, Issue 3, 2001, p. 360
28. Anthony Milner, *The Malays*, p. 124

Malay peninsula, this definition varied depending on the state: 'a person of Arab descent was a Malay in Kedah but not in Johor; a person of Siamese descent was a Malay in Kelantan but not in Negeri Sembilan.'[29] Not only was this Enactment a site where Malay and Malayness was 'created and confirmed,' it was also where they became 'contested categories.'[30] Modern Malaysia continues to be similarly preoccupied with delineating Malayness: the constitution defines a Malay as a 'person who professed the Muslim religion, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to the Malay custom.'[31] Like the Malay Reservation Enactment before it, this definition also allows for some fluidity in assuming a Malay identity: the phrase *masuk Melayu*, or becoming Malay, has often been used to demonstrate the achievability of this criteria, with one politician controversially quipping, in 2007, that it was 'easy' to become Malay.[32]

2.2 Contemporary Malayness

Conceptualising a Malay problem was made possible only by combined activities at manufacturing a Malay identity. By the time the Malay Reservation Enactment was passed, the entire Malay peninsula was under British control, completing a process of colonisation that had first begun with the Portuguese takeover of the port of Malacca in 1511. The British began looking at how to exploit the natural resources of Malaya. But the 'lazy' Malay stood in the way of these ambitions, so that immigrants from China and India, who were presumably more hardworking than the Malays, were brought in to address this gap. Syed

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29. ibid., p. 361
30. ibid., p. 361
31. Saw Swee-Hock, "Population Trends and Patterns in Multiracial Malaysia", in Swee-Hock Saw and K. Kesavapany (eds.) *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2006, p. 13
32. Lim Kit Siang, "It is easy to become a Malay", Lim Kit Siang for Malaysia, at: *http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2007/06/11/it-is-easy-to-become-a-malay/*, Accessed 28 March 2012

Husin Ali explained how the British viewed the problem with the Malays with regard to supporting the local economy, and how Chinese and Indian workers might provide a solution:

> They (the British)…believed that the Malays were neither hardworking nor stable labourers since their family links to their villages were strong, allowing them to quit or return home when they wished. It was difficult for the Chinese and Indians to do so because their homes were far across the sea.[33]

It is difficult to miss in the above extract the influence of previous 'studies' of the Malays in their natural environment. The various efforts of colonial officials to catalogue Malayness were instrumental in legitimising an apparent necessity for immigration. Syed Hussein has argued that colonial portraits of Malays were following the agenda of colonial capitalism, so that 'the (colonial) accusation of indolence (on the part of the Malays) was merely a veiled resentment against Malay unwillingness to become a tool for enriching colonial planters.'[34] In contrast, the arrival of Chinese and Indian immigrants helped to further a colonial capitalist agenda, as the bulk of them worked as coolies.[35] Although the Chinese and Indian immigrants were initially regarded as transient workers,[36] many Malays objected to colonial immigration policies, particularly after a 1931 census revealed that the non-Malay population outnumbered the Malay population.[37] Seeds of resentment amongst the Malays grew, which Syed Husin contends were directed not towards the British, but rather the immigrants, mostly

33. Syed Husin Ali, *The Malays: Their Problems and Future*, The Other Press Sdn Bhd, Petaling Jaya, 2008, p. 104
34. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp. 80-81
35. ibid., p. 80
36. Julian C. H. Lee, *Islamization and Activism in Malaysia*, ISEAS Publications, Singapore, 2010, p. 37
37. In-Won Hwang, *Personalized politics: the Malaysian state under Mahathir*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003, p. 24

because 'the simple-minded Malays would see them (the immigrants) leading an affluent life…the wealth and power of the British was too remote for them to perceive clearly.'[38] That the immigration and particularly the Chinese immigrant population, rather than the British, were the focus of Malay discontentment helps provide a clue as to why the gendered family tree of man, imposed by imperialism, later became the foundation for Malay nationalism; however, it also serves to demonstrate that this family tree of man, and the less favourable traits that had come to be associated with the colonial construct of Malayness, had become internalised by the Malay psyche. Urban Malays soon began forming group associations,[39] sensing they had comparatively little control of the economy.[40] 'Who says this land belongs to the Malays?' asked Penang Consultative Council Member Lim Cheng Ean in 1931. The Malay reaction was one which 'could hardly stomach' the remarks,[41] as, according to Mahathir, the Malays 'had realised that the Chinese could be a menace.'[42] Former UMNO politician Mustapha Hussain also recalled the incident in his memoirs as one which led to the establishment of groups in rural areas too. The Malays, he wrote, were realising a need to look after themselves.[43] Both Swettenham and Clifford had felt that change on the part of the Malays was a 'necessary progress, at least in so far as the government system and certain practices were concerned.'[44] The low self-esteem of the Malay collective subscribed to this belief, and quickly began exploring how to construct a new and empowered Malay identity, with traits that would never again allow the Malays to be dominated by another group: the 'problem' with the Malays was that they were said to possess traits that allowed this to happen.

38. Syed Husin Ali, *The Malays*, p. 17
39. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 178
40. Syed Husin Ali, *The Malays*, p. 17
41. Mustapha Hussain, *Malay Nationalism before UMNO: The memoirs of Mustapha Hussain*, Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, 2005, p. 122
42. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 41
43. Mustapha Hussain, *Malay Nationalism before UMNO*, p. 136
44. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 43

2.2.1 The Orang Kampung

The idea that there was something wrong with the Malays was explored in more detail and more publicly by Malay politicians in the wake of the 1969 racial riots. In *The Malay Dilemma*, Mahathir discussed the idea that there were 'intrinsic factors' that 'retarded' the development of the Malays.[45] *The Malay Dilemma* primarily made the case that a 'gulf' between the government and the people had been a leading cause of the 1969 racial riots.[46] The book was in many ways more an exploration of the Malay psyche, describing Chinese (one of the two 'major races of Malaysia')[47] shrewdness as, amongst other things, destroying the 'self-reliance' of the Malays.[48] In a chapter titled *The Malay Problem*, Mahathir argued that part of the problem among the mostly rural Malays was that they were simply too courteous towards their 'guests.' Colonial officials, he continued, had further compounded the issue by misunderstanding what this courtesy meant:

> But, unfortunately, what is merely good manners to the Malay is wrongly interpreted by non-Malays. The British consider the deference and the constant giving way on the part of the Malays as evidence of weakness and inferiority. …If this arrogance has never been openly resented or if the mistake has never been corrected, it was because the Malays considered it bad manners to correct mistakes in etiquette committed by foreigners.[49]

45. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 9
46. ibid., p. 26
47. ibid., p. 13
48. ibid., p. 41
49. ibid., p. 150

In the above extract, Mahathir did not take issue with the colonial portrayal of Malays as 'kindly.' Rather, he explained the seeming inferiority as the result of being seen through the lens of colonial prejudice. One observation he did not argue vigorously with, however, was that of being lazy: he acknowledged that the Malays had been 'previously docile'[50] and that he had hoped *merdeka* (independence) would help them 'really break away from their lethargic, self-effacing past.'[51] Several contributors to postcolonial thought, from Franz Fanon to Bhabha, have posited the potential of a colonised group to internalise colonial discourse and beliefs about their position in the world. Syed Hussein explained: 'An ideology is never confined to its originating group. It is also shared by those who are dominated by the system of which the ideology is the rationalisation.'[52] What Mahathir did then, in *The Malay Dilemma*, was to recast the standard colonial observation of the Malays as an indictment of Malayness that UMNO (and presumably himself too, in due course) could refer to in ensuring that Malay reform remained firmly in front on the political agenda. The prosperity of Malaysia would depend not so much on the position of all Malaysians, but rather, on the position of Malays. *The Malay Dilemma* even provided a clue as to what an improved Malay position would look like: Mahathir also made reference to a difference between rural and 'town Malays,' describing the latter as 'better educated,' 'more sophisticated' and 'more diverse.'[53] He made the case that being rural-based had, for a number of reasons, not been beneficial to the Malays; the 'town Malays,' he wrote, 'found no difficulty in changing with the times.'[54] Eric C. Thompson makes the point that an *orang kampung* (translated as village people) figure in texts such as *The Malay Dilemma* were treated as being 'in need of reform

50. ibid., p. 46
51. ibid., p. 46
52. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 132
53. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 43
54. ibid., p. 43

and urbanisation.'[55] '*Orang kampung*,' he continued, 'is a site of subjective embarrassment, which can be alleviated through movements, and as such produces migration.'[56] Ultimately, therefore, *The Malay Dilemma* paved the way for an urban-based prescription model that would heal the wounded Malay psyche. It was in such a fast-changing scene, with no room for complacency, that the Malays, previously defined by a pitiful *orang kampung* subjectivity, could best keep up with modernity.

2.2.2 Revolusi Mental

Razak's ascension to Prime Minister in 1970 further solidified the notion of a 'Malay political primacy'[57] in the Malaysian sociopolitical landscape. There had been clear hints over the years of the direction a Razak administration would take. As the country's first Minister of Education, Razak's name would become associated with the 1956 Razak Education Report, recommending that Malay language instruction become compulsory in Malaysian schools[58] with the end goal of having Malay as 'the sole National Language for all citizens.'[59] In contrast, the Tunku had failed to embrace the concept with any zeal, ultimately choosing to delay the implementation of Malay as the national language. It was a move that helped to seal the fate of Malay political primacy; some of his UMNO colleagues as a result became increasingly suspicious of the Tunku's agenda.[60] In the aftermath of the 1969 riots, Razak became Director of the National Operations Council (NOC), a 'de facto extraparliamentary government,'[61] to borrow Jomo Kwame Sundaram's description. There

55. Eric C. Thompson, *Unsettling Absences: Urbanism in Rural Malaysia*, NUS Press, Singapore 2007, p. 204
56. ibid., p. 205
57. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia*, pp. 132-133
58. Antonio L. Rappa and Lionel Wee, *Language Policy and Modernity in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand*, Springer, New York, 2006, p. 38
59. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia*, p. 129
60. ibid., p. 81
61. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, "A Specific Idiom of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia: Sino-Malaysian Capital Accumulation in the Face of State Hostility," in Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid

could be no denying the power of the NOC; even the Tunku was said to have acknowledged a 'secondary role' for the Cabinet in relation to the NOC.[62] The NOC determined that inequalities between Malays and non-Malays had been a key factor in the eruption of the 1969 riots, and that to prevent such violence from recurring again, there needed to be an economic and ideological restructuring of Malaysian society. Consequently, it was determined that the position of the Malays needed to be further developed and further protected within the country: the NEP was introduced in 1971. The Malay-dominated NOC also moved quickly to prohibit discussion of 'sensitive' issues: subjects such as Malay privileges, the position of Malay rulers and the position of Malay as a national language were to be avoided, ostensibly for the sake of preserving inter-communal harmony. When parliament reconvened in 1971, a raft of measures, the so-called 'Sensitive Matters Amendment,' were passed, officially restricting discussion of 'sensitive' issues under any circumstances, and increasing the power accorded to the Conference of Rulers. According to Andrew Harding, 'the amendments provided the basis for the construction of a developmental state that denied basic civil liberties and entrenched the Alliance, expanded and renamed BN, in power.'[63] Razak further signalled a break from the Tunku's approach towards ethnic politics by allowing Mahathir to re-join UMNO. Soon after, Mahathir was installed as Minister of Education, a post Razak had held in the Tunku's cabinet. The 'ultras' that the Tunku had so strongly disliked were now holding the reigns of power, and UMNO was never quite the same again.

(eds.) *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1997, p. 243
62. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia*, p.132
63. Andrew Harding, *The Constitution of Malaysia: A Contextual Analysis*, Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2012, p. 58

Indeed, the controversial ideas that Mahathir had championed in *The Malay Dilemma* soon found a home in official UMNO discourse. In 1973, UMNO released a compilation of essays titled *Revolusi Mental* (translated as Mental Revolution), adopting a term first used by Sukarno in Indonesia. The book was edited by the then UMNO secretary-general Senu Abdul Rahman, but featured an array of contributors from within the party. Like Mahathir before them, the 14 authors of *Revolusi Mental* wanted a few home truths about the Malays to be acknowledged, believing this was the first step towards helping the Malays to progress, or more specifically, to help 'fulfil the aims of the new government in this new era.'[64] The uncomfortable truths were undoubtedly similar to the lazy native character from both colonial discourse and *The Malay Dilemma*, although *Revolusi Mental*'s listing of Malay flaws was distinctively comprehensive. Syed Hussein, writing a few years after the publication of *Revolusi Mental*, was unflinching in his criticism: 'No colonial British book had ever recorded so many negative qualities relating to the Malays.'[65] Anthony Milner and Helen Ting have paired *Revolusi Mental* with *The Malay Dilemma* by noting how they 'sought to privilege and also to challenge Malay society - and in doing so presented essentialised formulations of "the Malay" and other races.'[66] These essentialised formulations were crucial in helping UMNO to define its purpose in the wake of the 1969 elections and riots as the party that was ultimately needed by the Malays. Farish described how *Revolusi Mental* used 'the neo-feudal ideology of patronage (to help) create and reinforce the impression that the Malays were somehow unable to cope with change and development without the help of the State and the UMNO party in particular.'[67] So intrinsic has the idea of the underperforming

64. Virginia Matheson Hooker, *Writing a New Society: Social change through the novel in Malay*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, p. 309
65. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, p. 150
66. Anthony Milner and Helen Ting, "Race and Its Competing Paradigms: A Historical Review" in Anthony Milner, Abdul Rahman Embong and Tham Siew Yean (eds.) *Transforming Malaysia: dominant and Competing Paradigms*, ISEAS, Singapore, 2014, pp. 41-42
67. Farish Noor, *The Other Malaysia*, p. 120

Malay been to UMNO's argument for relevance that the *Revolusi Mental* call has never completely disappeared from UMNO discourse. For instance, at the UMNO general assembly in 2014, deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin invoked the essence of *Revolusi Mental* when calling for new ideas in tackling various issues: 'Maybe we can call it the Mental Revolution 2.0, as mentioned by the late Tun Abdul Razak in the foreword of the book *Revolusi Mental*, among the reasons for the decline of the Malay race is the backward thinking caused by lack of knowledge and old way of life.'[68] *Revolusi Mental*'s continued invocation emphasised the need for something *new* to replace the old as a central tenet in efforts to reform Malayness. For UMNO, the parameters of any Malay revolution were defined by the 1969 riots: only the 'old Malay' would let themselves get into the position they were in in 1969. The 'new Malay,' whose success would almost certainly emulate the Chinese Malaysian, would not.

2.3 Mahathir's Continuing Legacy

Maharaja Lela's story and its parallels with Mahathirst concerns about Malay development and positioning continue to have ramifications in Malaysian politics today. Such was the significance of Mahathir's legacy to Malay reform that subsequent administrations from between 2003 to 2018 have struggled to meet Mahathir's standards on Malay development. In his last speech at an UMNO General Assembly, Mahathir warned his audience that the Malays' 'struggle' was still not over, advising that 'there is no influence greater than Islam in building the strength and resistance of the Malays.'[69] Mahathir's successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi appeared to take up this mantle when, in the run-up to the 2004 general elections,

68. Bernama, "Muhyiddin Outlines Seven Measures To Demonstrate Aspiration Of Youths", *UMNO General Assembly 2014*, 25 November 2014, at: *http://web10.bernama.com/umno2014/newsEn.php?id=1088365*, Accessed 18 December 2015
69. Mahathir Mohamad, "Full text of Dr Mahathir's speech", *The Star*, 20 June 2003, at: *https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2003/06/20/full-text-of-dr-mahathirs-speech/*, Accessed 9 June 2018

Badawi formally introduced the idea of a 'progressive Islam' into UMNO's political rhetoric with the concept of *Islam Hadhari* or Civilisational Islam. *Islam Hadhari* was, as Badawi would later explain, UMNO's Islamised 'understanding of the concept of development.'[70] Despite stating that he was Prime Minister of all Malaysians[71] and that *Islam Hadhari* would not threaten non-Muslims' rights, *Islam Hadhari* was often placed in the context of Malay development.[72] When Badawi promoted the Ninth Malaysia Plan policy framework, he singled out *Islam Hadhari* as being key to achieving the Plan.[73] But Mahathir could barely contain his cynicism about *Islam Hadhari*, attacking Abdullah's approach[74] which resulted in reports that the opposition screened footage of Mahathir questioning the concept.[75] Badawi met with Mahathir in an effort to quell his rising number of criticisms about the government; but Mahathir made it clear that he would continue to speak out if he felt government policy was not good for the country 'and Malays in particular.'[76] Ultimately, *Islam Hadhari* had mixed success for the Badawi administration; whilst BN won the 2004 general elections by a landslide, the 2008 general elections saw BN lose its two-thirds majority in parliament. Mahathir soon quit the party in protest at Badawi's leadership, rejoining the next year after Badawi had left the premiership. Badawi would later claim that Mahathir's criticisms had

70. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, *Islam Hadhari: A Model Approach for Development and Progress*, MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, 2006, p. 1
71. ibid., p. 62
72. ibid., pp .175-176
73. The Star, "Adhere to values of islam Hadhari, Muslims urged", *The Star*, 2 June 2006, at: *https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2006/06/02/adhere-to-values-of-islam-hadhari-muslims-urged/*, Accessed 10 June 2018
74. Sara Chinnasamy, *A Study of the Impact of the Internet, Malaysiakini.com and Democratising Forces on the Malaysian General Election 2008*, PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, 2014, p. 108
75. The Star, "Criticisms will hurt Govt in polls, Dr M told", *The Star*, 21 August 2006, at: *https://www.thestar.com.my/news/community/2006/08/21/criticisms-will-hurt-govt-in-polls-dr-m-told*/, Accessed 10 June 2018
76. The Star, "Transcript of Tun Mahathir's press conference," *The Star*, 24 October 2006, at: *https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2006/10/24/transcript-of-tun-mahathirs-press-conference/*, Accessed 10 June 2018

contributed to the 2008 election results.[77] A little over a year later, Najib succeeded Badawi as Prime Minister, the latter having been forced out for the 2008 poor showing. Najib initially attempted to approach Malay reform differently from both Mahathir and Badawi: he quickly did away with *Islam Hadhari* and in its place promulgated *1Malaysia*, a brand he described as 'the key thrust of my administration.'[78] *1Malaysia*, with its emphasis on diversity and unity, was a departure from UMNO's typical Malay-centric discourse. But it quickly demonstrated its malleable capacity: for non-Malays, it signalled recognition of them as full citizens; for Malays, a continuation of affirmative action policies favouring them.[79] Najib did little to help the ambiguity. Although he toned down Malay nationalist rhetoric,[80] he also stated that the Malays were 'still left behind,'[81] and ultimately retained ethnic-based economic policies. When the 2013 general elections showed further erosion in electoral support for BN, Najib and UMNO reverted to the racial politics of old: '*Apa lagi Cina mahu*?' (What more do the Chinese want?) was the next day's headline in an UMNO-owned Malay-language newspaper. The Najib administration's brief venture into a more inclusive discourse on Malaysian modernity had not yielded any tangible results for BN, nor had its policies appeased Mahathir. If Najib continued to stay in power, warned Mahathir in 2015, then the Malays in Malaysia would end up marginalised like the Malays in Singapore.[82] The following year, Mahathir again quit UMNO, this time forming his own political party. Such

77. The Jakarta Post, "Malaysia's ex-PM Badawi hits out at predecessor Mahathir in latest book," *The Jakarta Post*, 9 August 2013, at: ***http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/08/09/malaysias-ex-pm-badawi-hits-out-predecessor-mahathir-latest-book.html***, Accessed 10 June 2018
78. Najib Razak, "The 1Malaysia Concept Part 1", *NajibRazak.com*, 15 June 2009, at: ***https://www.najibrazak.com/en/blog/the-1malaysia-concept-part-1/***, Accessed 9 June 2018
79. James Chin, "Malaysian Politics: Anwar and Najib's Moment of Truth", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 2012, Vo. 101, No. 3, p. 271
80. James Chin, "Malaysia: The Rise of Najib and 1Malaysia", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2010, p. 166
81. Bernama, "Najib: Aid for Malays will continue", *The Sun Daily*, 15 October 2009, at: ***http://www.thesundaily.my/node/150264***, Accessed 9 June 2018
82. The Straits Times, "Mahathir's claim that S'porean Malays are marginalised falls flat", *The Straits Times*, 26 June 2015, at: ***https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/mahathirs-claim-that-sporean-malays-are-marginalised-falls-flat,*** Accessed 10 June 2015

was his opposition to Najib that Mahathir aligned his new party with the opposition bloc, a grouping that had, until recently, been led by his one-time protégé, Anwar, whom he'd previously had jailed in controversial circumstances. In time, the opposition bloc named Mahathir as its Prime Minister-designate in the event that it won an election; Anwar's wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail was to become Deputy Prime Minister. Mahathir's criticism towards Najib was over a variety of subjects, not least being accusations of corruption involving the state-owned 1Malaysia Development Berhad company. But the position of the Malays remained a recurrent theme in Malaysian political contests, complete with hypermasculine affirmations of Malayness. In September 2015, shortly after Mahathir threw his support behind a growing protest movement calling for free and fair elections in Malaysia, a gathering of individuals wearing red shirts marched through Kuala Lumpur. The participants, styling themselves as the Malay Dignity Uprising,[83] sought to 'defend Malay supremacy through UMNO rule.'[84] Ahead of the rally, its organisers made much of the bravado of the rally participants; videos circulated the internet of participants breaking bricks, and the rally leader warned that his 'boys' could take care of clashes with any 'DAP Chinese' opposition they might encounter.[85] UMNO was reported at the time to have assisted with funding and logistics,[86] and Najib later defended the rally by stating it had occurred because Malay pride had been 'scarred.'[87] Mahathir, however, dismissed the notion that the rally was about

83. David Martin Jones, "Rule by Law in Malaysia and Singapore", in Greg Lopez and Bridget Welsh (eds.) *Regime Resilience in Malaysia and Singapore*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2018, p. 282
84. Abdul R. Embong, "The Noisy Right and the Not-So-Silent Moderates: Democracy and All That in Malaysia" in Chantana Banpasirichote Wungaeo et al (eds.) Globalization and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Challenges, Responses and Alternative Futures, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016, p. 58
85. Sophie Lemiere, "Malaysia: gangster boogie, bosses and politics" in Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour (eds.) *Handbook of Organised Crime and Politics*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2019, p. 405
86. Joceline Tan, "Disquiet over Malay rally," *The Star*, 13 September 2015, at: *https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/columnists/analysis/2015/09/13/disquiet-over-malay-rally-the-controversial-himpunan-maruah-melayu-being-planned-in-the-heart-of-kua*, Accessed 10 October 2019
87. Bernama, "Najib: Pro-Malay rally peaceful, no seditious or racist banners," *The Malay Mail Online*, 19 September 2015, at: *https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2015/09/19/pm-*

protecting Malay rights,[88] and continued to attack any notion that UMNO was now the only protector of the Malays. Ahead of the 2018 general elections, Najib warned that Malay privileges and position in the country would be at stake if the opposition were to form government;[89] Mahathir argued that the Malays were 'worse off'[90] under Najib. Amrita Malhi argued that there was one major change in the approach to ethnic politics: rather than attacking the 'Chinese' DAP, the opposition under Mahathir externalised the Chinese threat so that all of the People's Republic of China investments in Malaysia, which the Najib administration had overseen, were singled out as threats to Malaysian sovereignty.[91] As Malhi noted, this was a narrative that 'connected with Malaysians' collective memory of colonisation.'[92] For Mahathir, it also rang true to his earlier anti-colonial position and was not a significant ideological leap for him to make. The surprising results of the 2018 elections, in which BN lost power for the first time since its independence, has resulted in some Malaysians feeling that these elections could mark the end of race-based politics in Malaysia. While the outcome remains significant and can accurately be seen to capture Malaysians' growing discontent and unwillingness to tolerate the status quo, the return of Mahathir coupled with his important and consistent contributions to Malay reform raises questions about the feasibility of 2018 ending race-based politics in Malaysia. As I have demonstrated

himpunan-rakyat-bersatu-rally-a-manifestation-of-malays-to-defend-dignit/972615, Accessed 10 October 2019

88. Zuhrin Ahzam Ahmad, "Dr Mahathir: 'Red shirt' rally not about fighting for the Malays", The Star, 15 September 2015, at: *https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/09/15/mahathir-cancel-red-shirt-rally*, Accessed 10 December 2019

89. Amar Shah Mohsen, Haikal Jalil and Aiezat Fadzell, "Najib: Malays will be homeless, degraded if Pakatan wins," *The Sun Daily*, 7 December 2017, at: *http://www.thesundaily.my/news/2017/12/07/najib-malays-will-be-homeless-degraded-if-pakatan-wins*, Accessed 10 June 2018

90. Hasmizar Hassan, "Najib has made the Malays worse off, says Dr Mahathir," *The Malaysian Insight*, 4 August 2017, at: *https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/v/10019/,* Accessed 10 June 2018

91. Amrita Malhi, "Flipping the Chinese Threat: How the Malaysian Opposition Won," *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 29 May 2018, at: *http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/flipping-the-chinese-threat-how-the-malaysian-opposition-won-historic-election/m* Accessed 10 June 2018

92. ibid.

in this chapter, Mahathir was, and remains, the key figure in contemporary efforts to reform Malayness. To get a sense of where ethnoreligious socio-political developments will unfold in the wake of the historic election results, it is necessary to fully analyse the approaches that Mahathir has taken to reforming Malayness: the basis for those approaches, which I have begun to do in this chapter with the description of the *Orang Kampung*; its desired effects, that is, a new Malay figure no longer relegated to the realm of the *kampung*; and its products, the Malay middle-class. Both the desired effects and its products will be demonstrated in more detail in the following chapters.

Chapter Three – (En)gendering Malayness

3.1 Defeminising Malayness

The *orang kampung* imagery is not just subscribed to in political rhetoric; echoes of this construct are also recalled in the 'private realm' of the self and interpersonal relationships. In order to understand the dynamics of Malay identity politics, there must also be an awareness of the subtle, but nonetheless pivotal, gender politics at play. Whilst attempting to recruit participants during fieldwork, one of the oft-heard phrases from potential interviewees was that they did not represent a 'typical Malay.' Upon further enquiring, some interviewees explained that they didn't carry out a lot of Malay practices, citing a conflict in the requirements for those practices and their own rational or religious beliefs.

> Malays can be so close-minded. Not all, but a lot. They don't question the things they do. Like the *bersanding*[1] at wedding ceremonies – a lot of them don't realise it's actually Hindu. You might be born Malay, but you're not Hindu, you're Muslim.
>
> Izzah, 24 years old

David Kloos, in his work on how Acehnese Muslims negotiated religious norms, explained how religious agency was 'contingent on a range of shifting identities,' though never dependent on categories of class and gender alone.[2] Kloos argued that their agency, as flexible as it was, remained 'explicitly religious in nature,'[3] and certainly amongst the

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1. The *bersanding* is a ceremony where the bride and groom, dressed in regal attire, are 'enthroned' on a bridal dais and put on 'display' for the first time as a married couple.
2. David Kloos, *Becoming Better Muslims: Religious Authority & Ethical Improvement in Aceh, Indonesia*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2018, p.158
3. ibid, p. 158

interviewees, their faith remained a cornerstone of their lives, even though their negotiations of intersections between faith and Malayness could yield different results. Kuala Lumpur born-and-bred Izzah explained that she did not identify as a Malay, despite coming from a mostly ethnic Malay background. She considered herself a Muslim first, and had trouble reconciling herself with some 'typical' Malay traditions - for instance, at her own wedding, she chose not to have a *bersanding* on the basis of its Hindu origins. There certainly are some indications of an anti-*bersanding* trend in Malaysia at present; for instance, one *dakwah* website featured a column on the appropriateness of the *bersanding* practice, with *Ustazah*[4] Shahidah Sheikh Ahmad making clear it was *not* from the culture of Islam, before going on to detail how the practice might be at odds with certain *hadiths*[5] and verses of the Quran.[6] Raymond L.M. Lee has also noted that the *bersanding* ceremony is 'rejected by many Malays as un-Islamic because of its Hindu accretion.'[7] Frisk, discussing Malay weddings that took place specifically in Kuala Lumpur, wrote how the 'ideal Islamic wedding'[8] was a simple affair that did not have a *bersanding*. According to Frisk, 'Malay weddings in Kuala Lumpur can be more or less traditional, modern or Islamic depending on the composition of traditional, modern and Islamic elements.'[9] Frisk discussed an instance of a Malay wedding in Kuala Lumpur that she attended where there was no *bersanding*, and where even the favours were carefully chosen in an effort to avoid Hindu associations.[10] For Izzah, the *bersanding* was an aspect of a Malay-Hindu culture that directly contradicted her Muslim

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4. A female religious teacher.
5. Typically understood to refer to accounts of the Prophet's words or actions.
6. Shahidah Sheikh Ahmad, "Apakah hukum bersanding?", *Wanita Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia Negeri Johor*, at: **http://johor.wanita.ikram.org.my/index.php/soal-jawab/soal-fiqh/77-apakah-hukum-bersanding**, Accessed 7 August 2014
7. Raymond L. M. Lee has noted that this ceremony has been "rejected by many Malays as un-Islamic because of its Hindu accretions." Raymond L. M. Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, Issue 4, 1988, p. 402
8. Sylva Frisk, *Submitting to God*, p. 145
9. ibid., p. 146
10. ibid., p. 146

faith, and her desire to not have such an event set her apart from typical Malays. Izzah's suggestion that some Malays don't question things does have echoes of the naive Malay figure the Sultan of Perak reflected on a century ago. Izzah was not the only interviewee to offer critiques of what it is to be a Malay, how Malayness fits in with Islam and how this has affected her own lived experiences. One interviewee discussed the difficult relationship she had had with her mother, including the estrangement that followed after finding out her mother consulted a *bomoh* (traditional healer) about her marriage.

> I think she would probably be shocked to see me covered (in a headscarf and loose clothes). But she grew up in the *kampung*, and didn't get to finish school… I feel regret (about the estrangement). She was my mother. Sometimes, I think, could we have met halfway? But neither of us was willing. I did what I thought was right (ignoring the *bomoh*'s advice).
>
> Cleo, 45 years old

Like Izzah, Cleo had grown up mostly in Kuala Lumpur and also thought of herself as a Muslim first. She and her husband had initially considered most of her mother's advice harmless, but drew a line when she asked them to drink a concoction from a *bomoh* which he would help the couple conceive. Patricia Sloane-White has presented an account of an urban middle-class Malay family's interaction with a *bomoh*, including the quiet opposition of a religiously observant relative to his family's consultation with one. She noted how 'even within a single family little agreement exists in Malay life among the faithful.'[11] In Sloane-White's account, the individuals consulting with the *bomoh* eventually came to share the

11. Patricia Sloane-White, "The Ethnography of Failure: Middle-class Malays producing capitalism in an 'Asian miracle' economy", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2008, p. 479

view of their religiously observant relative, that what had happened was *takdir* or the fate of God, so that when they later recalled the episode it was a story told 'in an Islamic idiom with moral implications.'[12] For Cleo, though, the estrangement with her mother was not an episode from which she was able to take any comfort from. Despite being sure that she had made the right decision, Cleo acknowledged feeling some sorrow over how the relationship had decayed, particularly since they were unable to reconcile before her mother died. But Cleo's reflections on the relationship led her to conclude that it was bound to be difficult because the two had had very different upbringings resulting in them having different values. In many ways, Cleo's experiences with her mother runs parallel to some of the arguments Mahathir had made about more sophisticated town Malays and the less worldly rural Malays. Cleo specifically mentions how her mother grew up in a village as well as her mother's lack of education. She discusses how she demonstrates her piety in her choice of clothing, a decision she says would have stunned her mother. Perhaps the biggest difference, then, between Cleo and her mother was that the latter was rooted in a typical Malay world that Cleo could not synthesise with her own religiosity. A dark and primal Malay past has continued to be a benchmark in measuring progress in the enduring preoccupation with dissecting Malayness.

The central aspect in both the conceptualisation of typical Malayness and the establishment of a dark Malay world, which was through its own ineptitude responsible for its colonisation, is the femininity that was ascribed to not just being Malay, but to *being a Malay man*. The works of Nandy on hypermasculinity and McClintock in theorising a cult of domesticity and family tree of man help us further understand the relationship between gender, Malayness and Malay-Muslim identity today. The figure of the lazy native was a figure that had been

12. ibid., p. 478

feminised in accordance with the colonial 'homology between sexual and political dominance'[13] and the cult of domesticity. The superiority of the colonisers to the Malays was enabled by the docile and feminine nature of the Malays, whereas the colonisers were domineering and in possession of more masculine traits. The end result, therefore, was meant to be as natural as the dominance of women by men. If the European colonisers had been able to succeed in their conquest of the Malay world on account of their (the Europeans') masculine traits, then the Malays, or rather Malay men, needed a corresponding formula that would improve their own sexual currency and masculinise them so that they too could occupy a high status in the family tree of man. After all, when Swettenham and other colonial-era figures spoke of the Malay, it was mostly done by referring to a biologically male subject, so that as per the cult of domesticity and family tree of man, masculinity had a direct correlation with racial esteem. One episode in particular neatly encapsulates some of the tensions that arise with the intersecting of racial, religious, gendered and sexual insecurities and hierarchies: in 2010, the Malaysian news site *The Nut Graph* carried an interview with a young Malay-Muslim woman, Nabila Nasir, who was 'caught' committing *khalwat*[14] in a car with her Chinese boyfriend by three Malay-Muslim police officers. When they were brought to a police station, the officers asked, 'Is Chinese penis really that good?'[15] Nabila defiantly answered, 'Yes, (Chinese penis) is delicious, and I love it!' Silence quickly ensued in the room, and it mostly stayed that way until the end of the encounter when Nabila and her boyfriend paid a RM500 bribe. Nabila's response had succeeded in emasculating the

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13. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 4

14. *Khalwat* is said to have been committed when two unmarried or unrelated individuals of the opposite sex are found in "close proximity"; Julian C.H. Lee has written about religious enforcers searching houses on the basis of an anonymously reported allegation of *khalwat*. Julian C. H. Lee, "Oversanctification, Autonomy and Islam", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2010, p. 33

15. Shanon Shah, "Is Chinese penis really that good?", *The Nut Graph*, 14 June 2010, at: *http://www.thenutgraph.com/%E2%80%9Cis-chinese-penis-really-that-good%E2%80%9D/*, Accessed 20 January 2014

police officers by appearing to confirm their worst fears: the sexual virility of Malay men was not enough to keep the Malay woman Nabila happy and away from Chinese men. Nabila's experience highlights a necessary aspect of the gendered conceptualisation of Malayness: Malay nationalism and esteem depended on the ability of Malay women's 'bodies and sexuality play(ing) pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives.'[16] One of the police officers also remarked to Nabila that, 'There's no shame in this world when Malay girls can stoop to dating Chinese men.' The remark demonstrated the view that Nabila had transgressed an ethnoreligious-sexual boundary, with the racialisation of sexual imagery earlier making it clear that the police officers thought Nabila should not be dating outside those boundaries: for the male Malay-Muslim police officers, being Chinese meant occupying a lower position in a racial hierarchy. During fieldwork, I heard stories similar to Nabila's from a few interviewees: interracial and inter-religious heterosexual relationships were not unheard of to an overwhelming majority of the interviewees, with many reporting either being or having been in one, or having a relative or close friend who was. Despite the frequency of such relationships, there were some frank acknowledgments that the couples had faced some initial opposition from their families and communities, particularly if the female member of the couple was a Malay-Muslim: one interviewee discussed how she was harassed by Malay male classmates in university for going out with a Chinese man. For Nandy, hypermasculinity allowed for the development, in both the coloniser and the colonised, of an 'undeveloped heart' of '"banal" violence,'[17] that is, racism, sexism and cultural domination. The machismo, political dominance and self-esteem of Malay men depended very much on their racial, sexual and cultural superiority; elements which were

16. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 39
17. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 33

clearly present throughout Nabila and her boyfriend's encounter with the Malay male police officers and in some of the opposition to interracial romances experienced by interviewees.

The other telling feature of Nabila's experience are the questions that the Malay male police officers asked her boyfriend: 'Are you serious about going out with her?', 'Getting married soon?', 'You're not scared of getting circumcised?' and 'Don't you want to convert to Islam?' This series of questions illustrated that, in their view, despite their unhappiness at Nabila's choice of partner, there was still a way that the relationship could become a positive: by having Nabila's boyfriend *masuk Melayu*. I discussed the topic of *masuk Melayu* with Ibrahim Ali, the founder and president of the Malay ethno-nationalist non-governmental organisation Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia (Perkasa). Interestingly, it also arose during a discussion of relationships between Malay women and 'foreign' men:

> If they married for the purpose of building the family situation, I mean
> that's alright because I'm not against it, once they are Muslim, the Muslim
> can marry another Muslim regardless of where they are from. They can be
> from Antarctica, but the only thing that I'm concerned (about) is that they
> must be (marrying for) the family situation, not…because they are looking
> to settle in Malaysia, making use of the local women - I'm really against
> (that). … According to the Malaysian constitution, the definition of the
> Malays are those who are Muslim. If they are Muslim, they (can) be
> construed as a Malay. Muslim is a Malay, the definition of Malay is a
> Muslim. So once they get married to the local people who are Malays they
> also become Malay.[18]

18. Ibrahim Ali, interview, September 2011

Ibrahim states here that he is concerned with Malaysian women being used by non-Malaysian men to get visas. Despite his stated concern for all Malaysian women, he speaks mostly of the challenges that faced by specifically Muslim (Malay) women. For him, the marriage of Malay women to non-Malaysian men hinges on two key points: first, that they are genuinely committed to building a family with the woman; and secondly, that they are Muslim. The latter point is particularly significant to Ibrahim's understanding, and also modern conceptualisations, of contemporary Malayness, given its place in the constitutional definition of a Malay. Malay identity has become synonymous with Islam:[19] according to Ibrahim an individual that practices Islam and marries a Malay becomes Malay as per *masuk Melayu*. The concept of *masuk Melayu* has increasingly become a contentious issue in modern Malaysia; for instance, in 2007, the then Chief Minister of the state of Malacca attracted criticism when he said that it was 'easy to become Malay'[20] at the opening of an Islamic-themed seminar in the East Malaysian state of Sabah. Six years later, in 2013, Sabah was again the site of controversy over the *masuk Melayu* concept when the state's mufti told a 'Malay Leadership Crisis' symposium that there needed to be a program to '*meMelayukan*' (make Malay) indigenous Muslims in the state who did not call themselves Malay.[21] The synonymity between Islam and Malayness that has enabled the contemporary Malaysian understanding of *masuk Melayu* appears to have, like much that has been associated with Malayness, been invented fairly recently. Anthony Reid noted how in some parts of

19. Gerhard Hoffstaedter, "Religious pluralism in Malaysia: can there be dialogue?" in Joseph Camilleri and Sven Schottman (ed.) *Culture, religion and conflict in Muslim Southeast Asia: negotiating tense pluralisms*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, p. 43
20. New Sabah Times, "DAP: Melaka CM's remark 'a gross insult to non-Malays'", *New Sabah Times*, 11 June 2007, at: ***http://www.newsabahtimes.com.my/nstweb/fullstory/8559***, Accessed 21 January 2014
21. Zurairi AR, "Citing unity, mufti wants Sabah's Bumiputera Muslims made Malay", *The Malay Mail Online,* 28 September 2013, at: ***http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/citing-unity-mufti-wants-sabahs-bumiputera-muslims-made-malay***, Accessed 21 January 2014

Indonesia it actually means to become Christian.[22] Alice M. Nah described the process of *masuk Melayu* as having gone on 'long before (it) became a salient postcolonial issue.'[23] Indeed, Ariffin Omar has been one of the few scholars to discuss the concept of *keluar Melayu*, noting that, in the instance of the links between the Malays and Batak clan of East Sumatra, a process of '"Malayization" and "Batakization" had been going on backwards and forwards for at least centuries.'[24] Despite this, in the present day there is no such provision for *keluar Melayu* in the Malaysian constitution; in Malaysia, it is once a Muslim (Malay), always a Muslim (Malay). This distinct pro-*masuk Melayu* bias serves two purposes: firstly, to ease any anxiety that may arise over the prospect of *keluar Melayu*, anxieties that relate to the issue of femininity and as such the undesirable position of being Malay; and secondly, to perpetuate a Malay-Muslim hegemony that will attest to a Malay virility.

The conflation of Malayness with Islam does inevitably raise the question of the role that Islam plays in the defeminisation of Malay-Muslim identity. As this thesis has previously discussed, Malayness was first conceptualised with the advent of colonialism. It was out of this conceptualisation that the first discussion of the Malay-Muslim experience arose, 'sparked off by the encounter between three apparently irreconcilable forces: Malay traditionalism, Islamic reformism and Western colonialism.'[25] For at the same time that colonial rule had come into effect and begun to change the way the Malay world saw itself, so too was change taking place in the Islamic world. Conservative and modernist elements

22. Anthony Reid, "Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities" in Timothy P. Barnard (ed.) *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 2006, p. 14
23. Alice M. Nah, "Negotiating indigenous identity in postcolonial Malaysia: beyond being 'not quite/not Malay'", *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2003, p. 521
24. Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community 1945-1950*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 82
25. Farish Noor, "The One-Dimensional Malay"

were beginning to take hold there, and the Malay world, by now in closer contact with the Islamic world than they had previously been, was duly influenced. One of the central ideas there was that Islamic modernity was very much dependant on the removal of pre-Islamic elements that were regarded as idolatrous. Contemporary Islamic thinkers in Malaysia reflected such views: they not only attacked the 'secular' colonial authorities, but they also joined the colonial establishment in attacking the 'darker' and 'superstitious' Malay world which had eventually been beaten by a foreign power.[26] The link between Malay and Muslim has, therefore, remained tenuous to the present day, with Farish explaining the continuing unease as thus:

> …The weakness of the Islamist project lies in the fact that its 'salvatic mission' and universalist claims requires the obliteration of the Other while at the same time conjuring it up time and again as its own counterpoint. …It denies the Other while calling him back, just to have him dismissed again.[27]

According to Farish, the relevance of Islamic reformism depended on the figure of the Other being continuously recalled in order to serve as a reminder of what it was the Malays needed to 'escape' from. Reading Farish's explanation from the perspectives of both Nandy and McClintock, an unresolved anxiety over the feminised Malay man, the Other, meant that the journey towards hypermasculinity and an esteemed position in the family tree of man remained firmly on the Malay-Muslim nationalist agenda. The solution to the predicament of the feminine Malay was, as Farish pointed out, the gradual adoption of an increasingly

26. ibid.
27. ibid.

Islamic identity. Nandy wrote of the Indian men, denigrated by colonial discourse, as seeing their 'salvation in becoming more like the British, in friendship or in enmity.'[28] The UMNO elite, 'overly enamoured' with the West,[29] were seeking salvation on friendly terms, in a fashion directly in sync with the action of mimicry that Bhabha theorised. As Bhabha also discussed though, mimicry is often regarded as something shameful in that it reminds the colonised performer of their 'not quite' status, the 'lack of' that prevents them from assuming the patriarch's rank in the family tree of man. For many contemporary Islamic thinkers, an aspiration to be like the British, was, to draw on Enloe's work, impossible for the UMNO elite to embody; Islamic thinkers rejected this 'slavish intellectual dependency on the West,'[30] with 'radical nationalist'[31] and one-time PAS president Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy regarding Western imitation as the reason that Muslims lost their selfhood.[32] Burhanuddin recognised the lazy native as a colonialist construction, and one that helped to sustain colonialism too;[33] but he also argued that colonialism had been firstly enabled by the failings and complacency of the colonised society,[34] with one such failure being the backward ways of the religious classes.[35] For Burhanuddin and others, an Islamic outlook, inspired by studies in other parts of the Islamic world, was the key to the salvation of the Malays. It would return them to a practice of an enquiring Islam that was naturally opposed to tyranny: that which was part and parcel of *the proper practice* of Islam. Such a belief, in many ways, represented the 'enmity' that Nandy discussed; for, as Maznah noted, such anti-colonial works were not

28. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 7
29. Farish Noor, "The One-Dimensional Malay"
30. ibid.
31. Farish Noor, "The Localization of Islamist Discourse in the *Tafsir* of Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, *Murshid'ul Am* of PAS" in Virginia Hooker and Norani Othman (eds.) *Malaysia: Islam, Society and Politics*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003, p. 222
32. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "A theory of colonialism in the Malay world", *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2011, p. 10
33. ibid., p. 17
34. ibid., p. 16
35. ibid., p. 15

necessarily free of Eurocentric epistemological frameworks,[36] frameworks that had been used to create, justify and sustain colonial narratives in the first place. Reformist Islam in Malaysia was, for Malay reformers, seen as capable of equalling a neocolonial hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, reformist Islam provided a framework for a Malay-Muslim advancement towards a hypermasculinity that would forever stamp out any questions about the machismo of Malay men.

Ultimately, though, this predilection for a masculine-based Malay-Muslim identity has helped to sustain a lingering belief in Malay inferiority and allowed for the absence of a complete decolonisation process; instead, a cultural Islam has been presented as intrinsic to Malay masculinisation and well-being. Mahathir, early on in his political career, wrote in *The Malay Dilemma* of how the arrival of Islam had had a 'tremendous' effect on the Malays:

> The Arabic language and culture which are part and parcel of Islam were absorbed by the Malays… Unfortunately, all the cultural and educational changes brought about by Islam remained for the most part in the town areas. …The influence of custom or *adat* and the strong animist beliefs of the rural areas limited Islamic teachings, and caused the practice of Islam to merge with Malay *adat* and its animist basis.[37]

That Mahathir decries a merging of Islam with *adat* in rural areas speaks volumes about which he places more value on: clearly it is Islam, practiced in a purer form in the more advanced town centres compared with the rural areas. Islam here becomes an enlightening

36. Maznah Mohamad, "Malay/Malaysian/Islamic: Four Genres of Political Writing and the Postcoloniality of Autochthonous Texts", *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2008, p. 311
37. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 36

and masculinising force, contrasted with the superstitious and effeminate *adat* for emphasis.

Still, despite the brief mention of the practice of Islam amongst the Malays, *The Malay Dilemma* nonetheless emphasised the historical and genetic traits that constituted the 'problem' more than any religious element.[38] Indeed, before Mahathir became Prime Minister there was within UMNO occasional signals of cynicism when it came to dealing with Islamic causes.[39] The 1970s, however, saw an Islamic revivalism begin take place in Malaysia, which other Muslim-majority countries were also experiencing. The '*dakwah* decade,' as the period is often referred to, was aided by the return of students not just from the Middle East,[40] but also those from the West who had been exposed to the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the *Jamaati Islami* in Pakistan.[41] The move by *dakwah* actors in promoting an Islamic revivalism does indicate that it was not just the UMNO elite who desired a Malay reformation: the lowly position which the family tree of man had ascribed to Malayness was felt through each strata of Malay society.

3.2 Islamisation As Hypermasculinisation

In 1986, Mahathir published a sequel of sorts to *The Malay Dilemma*: titled *The Challenge*, the book represented Mahathir's concerns about the 'survival' of the Malays.[42] Whereas *The Malay Dilemma* sought to examine the past and properly identify the roots of the Malay problem, the *The Challenge* 'strove to provide the bearings for the future.'[43] It had been written during the *dakwah* decade, a period which coincided with Mahathir being welcomed

38. Karminder Singh Dillon, *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era, 1981-2003: Dilemmas of Development*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2009, p. 32
39. Anthony Milner*, The Malays*, p. 219
40. Greg Fealy, "Islamisation and politics in Southeast Asia: The contrasting cases of Malaysia and Indonesia" in Nelly Lahoud and Anthony H. Johns (eds.) *Islam in World Politics*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 160
41. Norani Othman et al "Malaysia", p. 80
42. Mahathir Mohamad, "Introduction" in *The Challenge*
43. Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*, Oxford, New York, 1995, p. 36

into the UMNO fold and beginning his meteoric rise through the political realm; by the time

the book was eventually published, he had been Prime Minister of Malaysia for five years.

Khoo Boo Teik has suggested that *The Challenge* represents 'a transitional point in the

evolution of Mahathir's nationalism';[44] for, although the focus was again on the Malays, the

book served to recast the Malay dilemma as a 'Muslim dilemma.'[45] The solution to the Malay

problem, as Mahathir explained, lay with Islam; as he had done in *The Malay Dilemma*,

Mahathir again wrote unfavourably of the animistic beliefs of the pre-Islamic Malays.

> Hinduism and animism … had shaped and controlled the Malay psyche
>
> before the coming of Islam. These beliefs, which were ingrained in the
>
> Malays, were utterly incompatible with Islam. If the Malays were to
>
> become Muslims, these old beliefs must be erased and replaced with a
>
> strong and clear Islamic faith. Hence the teaching of *aqidah* (faith and
>
> belief) and *ibadah* (principles and rituals of worship) was not only vital for
>
> the Malays at the beginning of their Islamization but remains so always.
>
> There is evidence that if these areas in the teaching of Islam were
>
> neglected, the old animistic beliefs would again take control of the Malay
>
> mind.[46]

Mahathir had earlier spoken glowingly, albeit fleetingly, of the arrival of Islam in the Malay

peninsula; in *The Challenge*, he argued that the Malays needed to continuously revisit Islam

in an introductory context. Interestingly, Mahathir's reasoning for this lay in what he saw as

being an ineffaceable trait of the Malay character: the potential, as predetermined by pre-

44. ibid., p. 11
45. ibid., p. 42
46. ibid., p. 19

Islamic influences on the Malay psyche, for their minds to be taken over by 'old beliefs.'

Mahathir's description of the Malay psyche runs parallel to Aihwa Ong's description of a

young scholar speaking at a village celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday in

1979. The problem with Islamic societies, the scholar said, was not Islam, but the weakness

of Muslims in succumbing to *nafsu*;[47] *nafsu* is a concept of basic human desires or

'animalistic lust' that is typically identified as a female trait,[48] and the opposite of *nafsu* is

akal, or rationality, which is in turn associated with men and masculinity.[49] Michael Peletz

argues that the *nafsu*/*akal* dichotomy is more central to Islamic discourse than *adat*,[50] with

Khoo pointing out that *nafsu* and *akal* was present in both men and women in *adat*,[51] For

Malay reformers, then, this dichotomy presented a useful framework in assessing the status of

the Malays: to Mahathir, the animistic, pre-Islamic, backward and ultimately *feminine* Malay

was so fearful a character that a commitment to Islam, that is rationalism and masculinity,

had to be repeatedly re-stated. Consequently, this 'old' Malay character resembled not only

the superstitious figure of colonial texts, but also the Other that was, according to Farish,

recalled again and again by Islamic reformists. Viewed in the context of the periods during

which *The Challenge* was written and published, this depiction of the Malay as prone to

being seduced by the old, dark ways helped to establish a case for UMNO's relevance in the

midst of an Islamic resurgence. It firstly served to demonstrate that UMNO was aware of the

formula that Islamic reformism had for Malay-Muslim identity, and the range of possibilities

it could bring to the development of a Malay-*Muslim* hypermasculinity; the notion that

Malayness needed to be defeminised and that Islam could be a masculinising force helped

47. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam", p. 176
48. ibid., p. 165
49. ibid., p. 177
50. Michael Peletz, "Neither reasonable nor responsible: Contrasting representations of masculinity in a Malay society" in Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (eds.) *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p. 94
51. Khoo Gaik Cheng, *Reclaiming Adat: Contemporary Malaysian Film and Literature*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2006, p. 137

drive this awareness. Secondly, it also made the point that, like Mahathir had earlier

discussed in *The Malay Dilemma*, the intrinsically effeminate Malays still needed to be

protected, since their character was such that they were prone to domination and thus

susceptible to a dangerous power that was not necessarily in the best interest of the Malays.

Furthermore, in emphasising the centrality of Islam to the positive development of the

Malays, he was also helping to establish a new target for Malay-Muslim nationalist anxieties:

'the West,' rather than 'the Chinese' as per *The Malay Dilemma*, was the new target of these

anxieties.[52] This meant that Mahathir's nationalism moved closer to the insistence of Islamic

reformists that the only way the Malays could obtain equal footing with the former colonisers

in the family tree of man was to develop a framework of Malay-Muslim hypermasculinity

and establish the Malays in direct opposition to the one-time colonial powers. The new target,

then, meant that the Malays would need protection from the 'many undesirable Western

values'[53] that might affect their understanding and continual revisiting of Islam.

Paradoxically, Mahathir cautioned against insularity:

> The Prophet's saying that knowledge should be pursued even to China
>
> shows the high value Islam places on knowledge in general. This
>
> exhortation was made before Islam reached China, and surely the
>
> knowledge referred to cannot be *aqidah* and *ibadah*.[54]

These seemingly inconsistent approaches to the knowledge and value systems of non-Islamic

societies were repeated throughout *The Challenge*: on the one hand, Mahathir was clear that

Malays should not be limited to learning only *aqidah* and *ibadah*, while on the other hand, he

52. Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*, p. 48
53. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Challenge*, p. 103
54. ibid.,. 29

believed that there were specifically Western influences that the Malays should avoid. It was

a paradox that emphasised the continuing importance of UMNO: the Islamic resurgence of

the 1970s 'compelled' a reading of Islam that might counter some of the more conservative

currents in the movement.[55] *The Challenge*, therefore, marked a clear instance of such an

attempt from the perspective of a Malay-Muslim nationalist,[56] and also a reorientation of

Malay-Muslim nationalist interests under Mahathir, with Islamisation becoming 'a tool in the

service of (a Malay) ethnic agenda.'[57]

Mahathir's attempts to keep 'in check' the Islamic reformist trends soon appeared to be doing

anything but - the bar was continuously raised as the affirmation of Malay-Muslim

hypermasculinity required further and further demonstrations of violence. The program of

Islamisation that took place, with Mahathir at the helm, was largely driven by what is often

referred to as the Islamisation race, that is, the contest between UMNO and 'arch rival'[58]

PAS. This thesis earlier mentioned how PAS was not initially regarded as an Islamic party;

rather, PAS in its early days served as a vehicle of sorts for 'anti-UMNO'[59] parties in general.

In fact, Burhanuddin's election as party president in 1956 meant that PAS was able to widen

its appeal to include 'those formerly associated with the secular wing' of an early 'anti-

UMNO' Malay nationalist party that Burhanuddin had once led.[60] This changed, though,

with the PAS party polls of 1982, an event where the influence of the *dakwah decade* was

clearly at play: 'old-guard nationalists' were ousted and replaced in the party leadership by

55. Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*, p. 41
56. ibid., p. 41
57. Michael D. Barr & Anantha Raman Govindasamy, "The Islamisation of Malaysia: religious nationalism in the service of ethnonationalism", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 2010, p. 294
58. Azmi Aziz and Shamsul A. B., "The religious, the plural, the secular and the modern: a brief critical survey on Islam in Malaysia", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2004, p. 351
59. John Funston, "The Origins of Parti Islam Se Malaysia", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1976, p. 73
60. ibid., p. 72

ulama.[61] The 'new guard'[62] included Fadzil Noor and Abdul Hadi Awang, both of whom had studied in the Middle East during the *dakwah decade*, and also Nakhaie Ahmad; the three of them had all been involved with the influential *dakwah* group the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) in the 1970s. Bolstered by their collective *dakwah* credentials, the new PAS leadership attacked what they saw as UMNO's 'questionable religious credentials and secular approach to politics'[63] in an attempt to garner more support among Malay-Muslim voters. UMNO responded to PAS' challenge by attempting to establish its own level of friendliness with particular *dakwah* elements: ABIM leader (and future Deputy Prime Minister and later opposition leader) Anwar joined UMNO in a 'sensational political coup'[64] ahead of UMNO's own party polls in 1982. This move marked the beginning of UMNO's attempts to reposition itself as not only the party that could be relied upon to protect the Malays, but also the party with the necessary Islamic credentials to defeminize Malayness and perhaps even lead to the creation of an Islamic state - an Islamic state being the end goal of PAS. Reference to an Islamic state by UMNO was not made at the outset of this Islamisation race, though; Islamisation took off 'slowly at first,' with the government gradually putting in place Islamicist-tinged programs and policies.[65] But such was the ability of PAS in questioning the Islamic-ness of UMNO that the latter 'invariably (rose) to the bait.' After two decades of 'one-upmanship,' Mahathir declared in 2001 that Malaysia was an Islamic state.[66] PAS responded that Malaysia was nowhere near an ideal Islamic state. Perhaps rather than being an Islamisation race, this battle for command of the Malay-Muslim electorate was in fact a race towards Malay-Muslim hypermasculinsation.

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61. Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Political Islam in Malaysia: problematising discourse and practice in the UMNO-PAS 'Islamisation race'", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 42, No 2, 2004, p. 186
62. ibid., p. 186
63. ibid., p. 187
64. Norani Othman et al, "Malaysia", p. 81
65. Michael D. Barr & Anantha Raman Govindasamy, "The Islamisation of Malaysia", p. 297
66. Norani Othman et al, "Malaysia", p. 82

The Islamisation/hypermasculinisation race in Malaysia is certainly a political contest, but it also has had a very real impact on the lives of all Malaysians. For non-Muslims, it has further marginalised them and thus reduced their 'comfort levels,'[67] whilst for Muslims, the developments have corresponded with an increasing religiosity meant for them to participate in. The Malaysian-American musician Ani Zonneveld wrote in 2013 of how the Islamisation race had impacted on her own family:

> (PAS) has been able to back (UMNO) into a religious corner … .UMNO has taken the bait … PAS campaign messaging includes 'May we pray for the destruction of UMNO', claims 'voters who vote for PAS go to heaven', and demands that 'UMNO must completely accept Islam' … I have watched my own family members become more extreme in their understanding of Islam. … My once music-loving brother has shifted his position to one of proclaiming music to be *haram* (forbidden) and worshipping all things Saudi Arabia. My sister will only shake my husband's hand through her very long hijab and even my mom now believes the status of women is below that of men.[68]

Zonneveld discusses here some of the extreme practices her family adopted: her brother avoiding *haram* music, her sister not directly touching another male, and even her mother believing her position to be below that of men. They are developments she compares to the extremism in PAS' own rhetoric; rhetoric that, she notes sadly, UMNO has decided to match.

67. Michael D. Barr & Anantha Raman Govindasamy, "The Islamisation of Malaysia", p. 295
68. Ani Zonneveld, "Expatriate Blues" in Ziauddin Sardar and Robin Yassin-Kasab (eds.) *Critical Muslim 7, July-September 2013*, C. Hurst & Co., London, 2013, p. 154

Zonneveld also wrote that she had observed many family and friends being affected by 'these changes' and that some of her relationships with relatives had become strained on account of her being influenced by the 'white man's Quran.'[69] That Zonneveld had chosen not to interpret Islam the same way as her relatives made her, to them, an outsider, and specifically, a *white* one. In the same way that the earlier UMNO elite had been singled out by their critics for being too receptive to the ways of their former European colonial masters, Zonneveld was similarly being criticised for allegedly subscribing to a religious interpretation parallel to the values of the former colonising nations, thereby allegedly engaging in a yet another pathetic form of mimicry. The sides had been drawn in the Islamisation race so that *kafir-mengkafir*[70] became a key tool: Zainah has written of how as a journalist during the 1980s in the 'Malay heartland' states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah, she was told by villagers of 'separate mosques, separate suraus, and separate burial grounds' and even 'marriages that needed to be solemnised twice' on account of political allegiance determining the veracity of one's faith. *Kafir-mengkafir* remains a potentially lethal political weapon today, with one former state religious leader calling for an end to its practice in January 2013.[71] With Islamisation increasingly dominating the Malay(sian) political agenda, a casual observer could be forgiven for assuming that Islamisation was the manifestation of the political elites' will being imposed onto the rest of the nation.

Yet be that as it may, there were plenty of indications from 'the ground' indicating that Malaysia's social-political hierarchy was not quite operating in a directly linear top-to-bottom fashion. Joel Kahn has written of the 'close parallels' between nationalist views of the

69. ibid., p. 154
70. Charges of religious infidelity.
71. Harian Metro, "*Berhenti main isu kafir-mengkafir*", *Harian Metro*, 5 January 2013, at: *http://www.hmetro.com.my/articles/20130105051735/20130105051735/Article*, Accessed 3 February 2014

position of Islam and his observation from fieldwork of the beliefs and practices of Malay villagers in mid-1970s rural Negeri Sembilan. He described the villagers he encountered as being 'devout' in their practice of Islam and generally supporting UMNO and BN on account of their being 'trustworthy guardians' of Malay *and* Muslim interests. He also described how despite their not seeing any significant conflict between Islam and *adat*, they were happy to continue *adat* practices 'as long as it didn't contradict Islam.'[72] Even Kahn's middle-class respondents in Seremban, the state capital of Negeri Sembilan, agreed that Islamic values and practice trumped Malay values and *adat*.[73] Kahn suggested that, rather than being subject solely to the machinations of contemporary political actors, these developments of Islamic values trumping Malay ones, and the "conflict" over Islam in Malaysia must be viewed in context, specifically that of:

> …a longer standing contest between Malay-Islamic nationalism and a
> suppressed counter-narrative of modernist Islamic reform that has its roots
> in the early 20th century. Islamic reformism may never have constituted a
> fully formed alternative to the nationalist narrative. Nonetheless, the
> possibility of such an alternative has for some time served to destabilise
> attempts to narrate a history of the natural unfolding of a Malay race-nation
> within the territorial confines of British Malaya.[74]

Kahn does not view the Islamisation of Malaysia as an entirely unprecedented phenomenon, arguing that it corresponds with the enactment of Islamic laws during the colonial era[75]: he

72. Joel S. Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 2006, p. 87
73. ibid., p. 89
74. ibid., pp. 91-92
75. ibid., p. 87

specifically discusses how the British Residents allowed for just one matter to be controlled by the Sultans - that of religion. Kahn argues in the above extract that the concept of Islamic reformism, despite perhaps not being fully developed, has competed with the nationalist agendas behind a Malay-*Muslim* identity, which in turn was a direct consequence of the Malay rulers being able to focus on only one area. Since its arrival in the Malay peninsula, Islam had been largely practiced as an 'embedded version' of Malayness rather than in the 'pristine form' practiced by early Muslims in Mecca and Medina[76] – that is, the Islam that was practiced in the peninsula met and negotiated with existing local practices. The Malay Islamic reformists of the early twentieth century felt that a 'pristine' practice of Islam, however, was the solution to Malay-Muslim 'backwardness,' and even criticised some of the traditional *ulama*, holding high positions, for perpetuating the pitiful position of the Malay-Muslim population.[77] Any efforts to rehabilitate the colonial conceptualisations of Malayness have thus been successively thwarted because of the possibilities offered by Islamic reformism; a narrative so dependent on the lazy native figure that its continuous presence disabled the decolonisation of Malayness. ABIM, which in the late 1970s had some 30,000 members, and other movements of the *dakwah* decade could, therefore, be said to be drivers of the Islamisation race inasmuch as UMNO was responding to and directing it. Barr related how, when speaking with one 'fairly senior member' of the Malaysian elite about recent episodes that highlighted the more aggressive aspects of Islamisation, the individual was 'apologetic, explaining these actions as the result of a disconnection between Malaysia's modern elite and its more *backward* grassroots: either autonomous actions by overenthusiastic local authorities or *high-level political responses to grass-roots expectations*'[78] (italics mine). Islamisation involved the elite responding to pressure from

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76. Azmi Aziz and Shamsul A.B., "The religious, the plural, the secular and the modern", p. 345
77. ibid., p. 349
78. Michael D. Barr & Anantha Raman Govindasamy, "The Islamisation of Malaysia", p. 306

below to allow for less of the 'embedded version' of Islam in Malay identity and instead allow for a 'pristine' Islam to be practiced: it was no longer to be *Malay*-Muslim identity, but rather *Muslim*-Malay identity, with 'Malay' now clearly corresponding to *nafsu* and the realm of the feminine, and 'Muslim' with *akal* and the masculine.

Indeed, where the political elite and parties such as PAS would see Islamisation/hypermasculinisation as needing to be directed by the state through the creation of an Islamic state, ABIM and other *dakwah* groups were instead more concerned with doing so by Islamising 'the *ummah* or population first before getting to the upper echelons of the social structure.'[79] The *dakwah* movement was then promoting a construction of the *ummah* in which 'attacks on changing gender and domestic relations were central.'[80] In Ong's anecdote of the young scholar speaking at the village celebrations, she noted how he ended his speech by calling on the village women to follow the example of the Prophet's wife, Khadijah. In doing so, he was implying that the well-being of the Malays meant that women needed 'to adhere to a stricter Islamic version of male authority and of women's roles as mothers and wives.'[81] It was a position that clearly echoes McClintock's discussion of the use of familial imagery to determine colonial hierarchies of communities, where the men came first, as clearly demonstrated by the young scholar's call for women to 'first and foremost serve their husbands.'[82] The period since the *dakwah* decade has seen the passage of legislature that significantly affects gender and domestic relations amongst the Malay-Muslim population: women have been delegated the task of 'the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as the transmitters of its culture,' primarily due to their position as the

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79. Zulkifly Abdul Malek, *From Cairo to Kuala Lumpur: The Influence of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood on the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM)*, MA Thesis, Georgetown University, 2011, p. 17
80. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam", p. 176
81. ibid., p. 177
82. ibid., p. 176

'main socialisers of small children.'[83] This did not, by any means, make the needs and desires of women central – the focus was mostly on the output, that is, their children. As Yuval-Davis explained, 'the future of "the nation" is seen to depend on its continuous growth... The need for people – often primarily for men – can be for a variety of nationalist purposes.'[84] Again, a casual observer might be forgiven for assuming that the increasingly covered number of Malay-Muslim women were following the directives, of one or perhaps a combination of many parties, to embody a new Malay-*Muslim* identity. Yet, there is evidence of even Islamist women being aware of societal inequalities which disadvantage them, with Rachel Bloul noting how they view their positioning beneath men as unfair.[85] My own fieldwork pointed to the urban Malay-Muslim women participants, who despite being the target of the new (trans)national anxieties, often actively engaged with rhetoric linking Islamisation and nation-building, interpreting it and applying it how they felt appropriate. It then needs to be asked: what were these beliefs that affected their own interactions with the Islamisation/hypermasculinisation process, and how did these interactions affect their lived experiences as Malay-Muslim women and as mothers in a fast-evolving nation

83. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Woman Nation State*, Macmillan Press, London, 1989, p. 9
84. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, p. 29
85. Rachel Bloul, "Gender and the globalisation of Islamic discourses: A case study" in Joel S. Kahn (ed.) *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the politics of representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1998, p. 162

Chapter Four – Family and the *Melayu Baru*

4.1 The Family in Malay Nationalist Thought

In 1949, then UMNO leader Onn Jaafar (also the father of later Prime Minister Hussein Onn) said that in an independent Malaya, women's voices would be 'as powerful as that of the men – the voice of both will determine the shape of the administration of the country.'[1] Malay nationalists generally had high hopes for an independent Malaya, seeing the venture as providing a major opportunity to dismantle the inequalities and ethnic hierarchies of colonial discourse. Yet Malay nationalists, in their efforts to raise the position of the Malays, had chosen to respond to the imperial discourse on ethnicity on the terms of the coloniser: by conceptualising nationhood in familial and gendered roles. The family unit, as the site where nations were constructed, was therefore a fixation of imperial and Malay national discourse, so that as per the gendered division of labour that also informed this discourse, women as the "reproducers" of the nation were in fact the focal point of these discourses. Yuval-Davis suggested that women 'did not just "enter" the national arena; they were always there, and central to its constructions and reproductions,'[2] and certainly the roles and positioning of Malay women have been central to Malay hopes and aspirations. Malay mothering in the colonial era was the starting point – and thus the solution – to many of the Malays' problems, and this is a theme that has continued up until the present day.

Like many other modern states, the focus on the family has formed the basis of contemporary Malaysia. A 1955 advertisement promoting the then upcoming federal elections captures this well: a small family unit is pictured underneath the heading 'MALAYA IS OUR

1. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia, 1945-1972*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p 60
2. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 3

COUNTRY.' The family is very clearly Malay: the father is wearing a songkok, and the mother has a selendang[3] draped over her head. They have one child, who is sitting on the father's shoulder and pointing ahead. But the child is still very small, suggesting that this is a young family. 'We are going to register now. Have you?' the poster asks. The male is in the foreground of the picture, and is leading the way for both himself and his child; the woman is in the background, walking alongside the two, present but secondary. Here, the usage of familial imagery is key to capturing the sense of optimism and promise attached to these elections: this ideal family unit of Malaya is depicted as taking on the responsibility of electing a new government for the new country, selecting a midwife that will oversee its birth and promote long-term prosperity that their child will enjoy. Certainly, the 1955 elections were significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it was the only election to be held in Malaya before independence. More significantly, however, it also elected the members of the Federal Legislative Council, who would determine the constitution of the new country. By the time these elections were held, Onn had left UMNO on account of its refusal to admit non-Malays to the party; Onn subsequently went on to form the National Party. But Onn's party failed to win a single seat, and the undisputed winner of the 1955 elections was UMNO and the Alliance. Two years later, on 15 August 1957, the Federal Legislative Council passed the constitution, including, as discussed in the previous chapter, a clause on the special position of the Malays. About a fortnight later, Malaya became an independent country. As the Malay family in the poster looked ahead to the future, so too did the Malay nationalist movement.

As discussed previously in this thesis, a newly independent Malaya, with a constitution that specifically addressed Malayness, created an opportunity to affirm that Malays could command respect from the world within the framework of a colonial discourse vis-à-vis a

3. A shawl.

cult of domesticity. Malay nationalism, therefore, set out to reform Malay maternities and families, sites which had at first been ignored by the British and then later made a site of colonial – and by extension, Malay nationalist – anxieties. The tendency of colonial officials to keep Malays at the periphery of economic development meant Malay women's lives, and specifically their mothering, rarely intersected with those of the British.[4] There were, initially, some exceptions to this rule – many European men in the region were encouraged to take concubines to aid 'quick acclimatisation'[5] and prevent boredom. These arrangements were, however, soon seen to be eroding the basis for colonial rule, that is, the use of the cult of domesticity and family of man. Ideas centring around racial purity and classification were being threatened by the very real prospect of children of these unions, and there was also a concern that the influence of local women was detrimental to the wellbeing of the white man. English women were therefore brought in, not only to be wives to the colonisers, but also to guard against racial degeneracy and add to the respectability of the male coloniser.[6] As the new face of civility in the colony, these new arrivals focused their attentions on local women and moved, in the words of Lenore Manderson, 'into the lives of other women as English men withdrew from them.'[7] Malay motherhood quickly became the main feature of these new attentions and was subsequently critiqued from various aspects: there was much colonial-era commentary on the alleged tendency of Malay women to 'spoil' their children,[8] and criticism of Malay pregnancy and childbirth practices.[9] As per McClintock's discussion of the cult of domesticity, Malay mothering came to be understood in colonial discourse on

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4. Lenore Manderson, "Shaping reproduction: maternity in early twentieth-century Malaya" in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds.) *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 31
5. Ann L. Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1989, p. 637
6. ibid., p. 643-647
7. Lenore Manderson, "Shaping reproduction," p. 31
8. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother", p. 58
9. Lenore Manderson, "Shaping reproduction", p.31

Malayness as an explanation for the poor character traits of the Malays: here women, in their naturalised maternal roles and as the primary occupants of the private and domestic spheres, were the cause of the reproduction of degeneracy and the Malays' impoverished state.

After 1957, the Malayan state again visited the institution of the family, though this time in pursuit of economic growth. This development was in line with the position of both the World Bank and the United Nations Population Fund, which linked lower birth rates in a country to development. It also had many similarities with the ideas of Thomas Malthus, an eighteenth century clergyman turned economist, who believed the planet was running out of resources to support the world's population.[10] Across the globe, Malthusian-type discourses have inevitably targeted women, since focusing on male fertility was made akin to attacking male virility and masculinity. In India, for instance, sterilisation policies aimed at men were considered to be one of the reasons that the Congress Party was defeated in strongholds in one election.[11] In targeting men here, family planning went against the family of man and cult of domesticity which saw the private sphere as women's responsibility. In Malaysia too, Malthusian family planning policies were reported to have also been largely resisted by men, and specifically rural Malay men. This was despite men not being the primary target of family planning campaigns: relevant literature instead focused on the irritable housewife busy with children and housework who was 'inadequate to her husband's needs.'[12] Still, despite this portrayal of family planning as ultimately being in the male interest, the program largely failed amongst rural Malays because of its failure to recognise 'the value placed on female fecundity and its reflection of the husband's virility,'[13] and thus went against the cult of

10. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 33
11. ibid., p. 33
12. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam", p 169
13. ibid., p. 169

domesticity: family planning challenged the man's position as head of a family that, despite being run exclusively by women, ultimately was an extension of and reflected *him*.

Whilst the national birth rate fell as a whole following the implementation of family planning policies,[14] the birth rate amongst rural Malays actually increased during the 1970s and 1980s.[15] This period roughly coincided with the global Islamic revival that had also affected Malaysia, so that the national family planning approach was seen as a 'challenge (to) Islamic culture.'[16] There was also discussion that it 'threatened Malay racial power,'[17] a belief that stood as the polar opposite of the Malthusian discourse as it saw the primary strength of a nation to be in its numbers. This notion in turn lends to the propagation of a 'demographic race,' which as Yuval-Davis explained 'can take place only where there is a national conflict on a contested territory but also where an ethnic majority is seen as crucial in order to retain the hegemony of the hegemonic collective.'[18] The circumstances of Malaysia satisfy these conditions, and certainly the UMNO-dominated federal government was long concerned with advancing the position of the Malays and actively portraying itself as a defender of Malay rights. In 2001, for instance, the Malaysian government reacted angrily to a suggestion by then Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong that the Malays in Singapore were better off than the Malays of Malaysia. At least one UMNO politician, Hishammuddin Hussein, was quick to note that the Malays in Singapore were a minority whereas in Malaysia they formed the majority. He also asked how many Malays held positions of power within the

14. Tey Nai Peng, "Fertility Trends and Differentials in Peninsular Malaysia: Four Decades of Change" in Jamilah Ariffin (ed.) *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia: A Sequel*, MPH Group Publishing, Petaling Jaya, 2009, p. 306
15. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam", p. 169
16. ibid., p. 169
17. ibid., p. 169
18. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 30

Singaporean government, military, police and business.[19] Implicit in Hishammuddin's remarks was the fear that the Malays, if allowed to become a minority, would wield very little power in the country. The origins of these fears can be traced as far back as Malay protests following the 1931 census that showed immigrants in the country outnumbered Malays, and continues to inform anxieties over the position of the Malays. The Malaysian demographic race has thus been in place since at least 1931; and the very early Malthusian approach of the state in the immediate aftermath of independence was at odds with a goal of amending the family tree of man. Malaysia's post-independence development efforts, though, were dealt a severe blow in the wake of the 1969 racial riots. As stated previously, many UMNO politicians believed this to be a direct result of a failure to preserve a Malay hegemony; for instance, Mahathir's 1969 open letter said there had been too many concessions from the Tunku's administration in negotiations with the Chinese and Indians.[20] The position of the Malays in the country had to be safeguarded, and for Mahathir, this involved acknowledging what was allegedly one of the Malays' major weaknesses:

> That hereditary factors play an important part in the development of a race is an accepted fact. It does not need a scientist to point this out. Quite obviously if family characteristics are passed from father to son, racial characteristics must also be passed from generation to generation.[21]

The above excerpt from *The Malay Dilemma* demonstrated the extent to which Mahathir had internalised both the family tree of man and cult of domesticity in his ideas; he wrote of

19. Bernama, "Goh blasted for undermining Malays in Malaysia", *Bernama*, 1 February 2001, At: *http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-69799449/goh-blasted-undermining-malays.html*, Accessed 26 March 2013
20. Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne, *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir*, p. 22
21. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 28

'father to son' when describing the development of race, so that women's role in the nation was on the periphery, rather than central.

4.1.1 Urban Malay Family Lives

In my own fieldwork, there was a clear notion that certain Malay familial practices were increasingly outdated. Just as colonial administrators had previously taken the rituals that Malay women practiced to task, so too did many of the interviewees I spoke with. Such interviewees noted their belief that many of these rituals had non-Islamic or 'irrational' origins.

> My ex mother-in-law asked me to keep a nail by my window sill during my pregnancy. She said it would help ward evil spirits away from me… I just laughed her off. I did not do it. …Why? Because I refuse to give a nail power. I am not going to buy into that superstitious (belief), I'm a Muslim.
>
> -Nazirah, 46 years old

> When I was having my first child, we went back to my mother's *kampung* for Hari Raya, and I remember one of my aunts called the village midwife… The midwife wanted me to eat this food, she wanted me to turn the baby (reposition the foetus), (but) I said no. …Because she offered no rational explanation, it was all just old stories… Later, when I had my daughter, my mother moved in with us… She imposed all these rules of confinement on me. Like wearing socks all the time, I could not drink juice, could only drink water, no milk... I did follow the rules, for all forty days, but only when she was

around.

<div style="text-align: right">-Wardina, 35 years old</div>

In both of these vignettes, the interviewees, both professional working women who had lived most of their adult lives in urban settings, expressed opposition to practices that they saw as having no place in their lives as either Muslims or modern-day women. Carol Laderman, writing in 1987 of contemporary rural Malays, stated that Malay women 'who have accepted the precepts of hospital-based medicine…return, during the weeks that follow childbirth, to the humoral practices they have otherwise discarded.'[22] Such practices, framed in the 'metalanguage' of *adat*,[23] often focused on the different bodily elements that were said to be at play; during pregnancy, for instance, women were advised to avoid 'hot foods' that might 'overheat' their body and harm the baby,[24] whilst after childbirth, the concern was that women were losing body heat and as such should avoid 'cold foods.'[25] There was also a belief that the greatest threat to an unborn child was from the spiritual realm.[26] Such beliefs help to explain some of the experiences that Nazirah and Wardina had when they were having their children - such as why Nazirah's former mother-in-law wanted her to be 'protected' during pregnancy, and why Wardina had to wear socks all the time so as to avoid losing body heat - and it is interesting to note that in both of their cases, the advice they received was from older women. Indeed, generally interviewees had received advice on pregnancy and postpartum traditions from female relatives, with some of their relatives even

22. Carol Laderman, "Destructive heat and cooling prayer: Malay humoralism in pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period", *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1987, pp. 358-359
23. ibid., p. 359
24. ibid., p. 359
25. ibid., p. 359
26. ibid., p. 360

temporarily moving in with the new mothers to help them observe a confinement period. [27]

None of the interviewees strictly observed a confinement period, and even Laderman reports that, in an east coast village, most of the women she interviewed did not strictly follow a restricted postpartum diet.[28] Researchers from Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia reported, in 2014, little difference in the confinement practices of urban and rural Malay women.[29] Although Frisk did not specifically explore urban Malay women's postpartum practices, she did make reference to women needing to undergo an Islamic purifying ritual after confinement,[30] suggesting some continuing accommodation of *adat* in urban Malay lives. I received the impression that generally in cases where the advice was followed, it was not necessarily because of any real belief in the merit of the advice, but due to a desire to not be rude or cause unnecessary problems within the family. Alternatively, they followed the advice because they believed it to be harmless. With regard to Nazira and Wardina, despite being dismissive of the advice they received, neither of them directly challenged their female relatives, nor did they explicitly denounce the Malay family. Indeed, even amongst interviewees who did not observe any confinement period, it was mostly due to matters of 'practicality.' One woman, a lawyer who separated from her husband during her pregnancy, related that she couldn't observe confinement as she had to drive herself to doctor's appointments.

27. Confinement in this context generally refers to a woman staying home to recuperate for forty days following the birth of her child.
28. ibid., p. 363
29. S.A. Yusof, S. Zulkifli, S.S.H. Shaidan and M.S.Y. Kamaruddin, "The differences of food consumption and practices during confinement between urban and rural Malay women" in Noruzwana Sumarjan, Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari, Salleh Mohd Radzi, Zurinawati Mohi, Mohd Hafiz Mohd Hanafiah, Mohd Faeez Saiful Bakhtiar and Artinah Zainal (eds.) *Hospitality and Tourism: Synergizing creativity and innovation in research*, CRC Press, Leiden, 2014, p.437
30. Sylva Frisk, *Submitting to God*, p. 118

Unlike the women I encountered during fieldwork, Mahathir was much more critical of particular Malay family practices, believing the family unit to have a direct bearing on racial traits and successes. Scholars and commentators have made much of Mahathir's criticism of not only Malay parenting, but also a 'Malay partiality towards inbreeding.'[31] Stivens has asserted that such discourses are 'direct heirs of colonial discourses constructing the "lazy native,"'[32] thus demonstrating the continued power of such ideas today. Mahathir's thoughts on the co-relation between family life and racial enterprise – that the genetically inferior Malays would never match races such as the Chinese because their inbreeding only strengthened their lazy traits – were clearly captured in *The Malay Dilemma*, where he described the Chinese as 'hardened and resourceful' and noted that it was difficult for the Malays to compete with them since anything the Malays could do 'the Chinese could do better and more cheaply.'[33] Borrowing from the cult of domesticity, Mahathir explained the success of the Chinese by the construction of Chinese family units. He wrote that, unlike the Malays, the Chinese had practiced 'more cross-breeding than inbreeding,' ultimately helping to 'reproduce the best strains and characteristics which facilitated survival' of the Chinese race.[34] I spoke with one woman who had, amongst her in-laws, a couple of senior civil servants and titled individuals; she was of part-Malay parentage and had been educated at private institutions in Kuala Lumpur. Her husband, though largely from a Malay family, had a Chinese grandmother, and had done some of his studies overseas thanks to scholarship he had secured from a government-linked company. She shared with me the details of a conversation they had shortly after they found out they were expecting their first child:

31. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 38
32. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother", p. 56
33. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, p. 39
34. ibid., p. 38

He joked, 'Oh! But I wanted to weed out the Malay parts. Now this kid is

going to be more Malay than me.'

<div style="text-align: right">-Edith, 26 years old</div>

Edith's comment here demonstrates an awareness of racial origins on the part of her husband, including a view amongst her upper middle-class relatives that 'cross-breeding' is important. There were also other factors informing his awareness of the ethnic make-up of their child, though: his sister-in-law was Chinese and was also expecting a baby. Edith explained that her husband was anxious that his Chinese grandmother, who was regarded as the family matriarch and generally wielded a lot of power in the family dynamics, would favour that child more because it would be more Chinese. That there were ethnic politics, or at least a fear of interpersonal relationships being shaped by ethnicity, could provide evidence that there is still, even if it only lurks in the subconscious, a knowledge of familial-based racial hierarchies.

4.1.2 The Family and National Power

Edith and her husband were both born when Mahathir was Prime Minister, and up until they were about to attend university, they were part of a generation that had never known anyone else to be premier. Two decades at the helm allowed the formerly prominent Young Turk to articulate the *Melayu Baru* ideal and also reverse the family planning policies that had been a feature of a state that had failed to prevent the 1969 racial riots. The Malays needed to be more of a force to be reckoned with, and as he had strongly put forward an argument for hereditary factors in the *The Malay Dilemma*, it was inevitable that Malay families, but

specifically Malay women as mothers,[35] continued to be a focal point in his attempts at

Malay reformation. A pro-natalist approach was put in place, and scholars have discussed at

length the Mahathir administration's famous goal of achieving a population of 70 million by

the end of the twenty-second century. The pro-natalist approach appeared to be demanding

more people to satisfy a national purpose, in this case quality human resources to match the

country's economic ambitions.[36] Marina, however, contended the government did not

actually want a population of 70 million, but rather 'a country that's developed enough to be

able to support that population,' adding that many, and some bureaucrats in particular, had

interpreted it as a pro-natalist policy.[37] Ibrahim was also of the opinion that there was

widespread misunderstanding of the 70 million target, but his explanation as to the need for a

bigger population did invoke a 'strength in numbers' understanding:

> At the moment, roughly it's (the Malaysian population) about 26 millon or
>
> 27, but plus the foreigners…31 or 32 million. …It's small numbers. You
>
> see, if you want to progress, you need bigger population, you need
>
> purchasing power.[38]

Despite there being different interpretations of the 70 million figure, though, there was a very

clear family ideal which fitted into a pro-natalist approach. Mahathir, for instance, defined an

ideal family unit as 'a husband and a wife and their children…not a man being married to

35. Stivens related how a 1951 Malayan governmental report suggested that Malay children "get a less favourable start in life"; the report attacked certain aspects of Malay parenting, and Stivens suggested that we can read it as a critique of Malay mothering. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother", p. 57
36. Gavin W. Jones and P. C. Tan, "Recent and Prospective Population Trends in Malaysia", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1985, p. 262
37. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011
38. Ibrahim Ali, interview, September 2011

another man or a woman and a woman, or single parenthood.'[39] Such ideas, however, were by no means exclusive to the Mahathir era: earlier discussion in this chapter has demonstrated how central familial imagery and constructions were during the colonial period, and today similar ideas continue to hold sway. Ibrahim expressed the view that parents should be married with ideally four children as this figure was 'manageable with the (average) income.'[40] Marina discussed how the preferred family unit today is 'heterosexual' and 'married,'[41] whilst SIS activist Rozana Isa gave a description of the ideal Malay family unit as 'mother, father, two point five children, perhaps…two children for other races.'[42] Rozana attributed a 'stereotypical' image of Malay families having more children to:

> …This whole belief, *anak itu rezeki daripada Allah*,[43] I shouldn't have to worry about family planning or all that kind of thing, don't worry, God will sort it out. …A lot of people are very hesitant about (family planning), you know, (they think) isn't that like going against the will of God. So there's a lot of misinformation out there, and because the government policy on family planning has been not as rigorous as it was in the fifties and sixties.[44]

Rozana directly linked an image of larger Malay families with local understandings of Islam, specifically an idea not too dissimilar to *takdir*, as well as the notion that 'God will provide.' Family planning, then, was seen as being in opposition to such ideas, and in her view, it did

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39. Rais Nur and A R, "Queering the state: Towards a lesbian movement in Malaysia" in Monika Reinfelder (ed.) *Amazon to Zami: Towards a global lesbian feminism*, Cassell, London, 1996, p. 79
40. Ibrahim Ali, interview, September 2011
41. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011
42. Rozana Isa, interview, September 2011
43. The child is a gift from God.
44. Rozana Isa, interview, September 2011

not help that the government had in recent decades relaxed its promotion of family planning policies. Rozana stopped short of saying she believed there to be a policy with regards to numbers of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia, saying instead that a pro-natal approach was evident in 'not having a strong family planning program.'[45] Ibrahim also dismissed that any suggestion of a policy to ensure Malays remained the majority, but at the same time used population figures to reinforce his argument that Malays deserved a greater share of wealth in the country.

> I am not that sentimental (on the issue of Malays being the majority in Malaysia). …Once they become citizen of this country, whoever wants to have (large families), (it's) up to them. …So, at the end of the day, twenty, thirty, fifty years, one hundred years later, which races have more family (and) overcome any race, I mean, nobody can help it, we have to take it as a fact of life. The only thing that I want to make sure is that at anytime because we are multiracial, Malays, Chinese, Indian, the wealth of the country must be distributed fairly. …We are at the level (where) 67 per cent of population is *Bumiputera*; 55 per cent is the Malays…(but) we don't enjoy the 30 per cent stake of our economy. So after the New Economic Policy has been accomplished, (we are) still behind.[46]

Ibrahim was careful to emphasise throughout our discussion that he was ultimately concerned about 'fairness,' and it was clear that he believed that the *Bumiputera* and Malays in Malaysia, despite forming a majority of a population, were not receiving a fair share of the

45. ibid.
46. Ibrahim Ali, interview, September 2011

economic pie. He was not 'sentimental' about the Malays being the majority, and suggested that the size of families be left up to individuals to decide. None of the journalists, bureaucrats, policymakers or activists whom I consulted during fieldwork said that they unequivocally believed there to be a 'conscious policy' to increase the numbers of ethnic Malays. But there is, nonetheless, widespread suspicion that this may indeed be the case, as both Ong[47] and Stivens[48] mentioned in their work.

4.2 Malay Mothering: The Pillar of the Nation

With the family clearly designated as a site at which Malay reformation could occur, and with the articulation of what an ideal family unit is, it was clear that the important task of facilitating that metamorphosis fell specifically to Malay mothers. The attention paid to population numbers inevitably meant there was a very clear focus on the reproductive abilities of women. The family in contemporary Malaysia thus continued to be a site where roles were gendered. Mahathir famously suggested that women should consider having five children and, if the family was well-off, they should also consider staying home to raise them.[49] Today, the preferred family unit is, according to Marina, still influenced by ideas of traditional gender roles, 'where women have to do all the housework and child-rearing.'[50] In May 2011, Najib reinforced the relationship between mothering, the family, and the well-being of a nation when he posted on social messaging site Twitter the following message:

47. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam", p. 170-171
48. Maila Stivens, "Modernizing the Malay mother", p. 60
49. ibid., p. 59
50. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011

> Happy mother's day to all mothers. U are the pillar of strength for your
>
> family n the nation. I am very proud of all Malaysian mums.[51]

Here, Najib drew a definitive link between families as the realm of women, and the nation, as the realm of men. Borrowing on the theme of the 1999 *Hari Wanita* or Women's Day – women are the foundation of happy families – Najib, with his paternalistic tone, reminded Malaysian women that the best way they can serve their nation is by adopting their seemingly natural role as mothers. Malaysian women, by virtue of their reproductive abilities and roles as the first socialisers for children and future citizens, are central to the Malaysian nation-building discourse. But since one of the central tenets of nation-building in Malaysia has been the redistribution of wealth in the country, specifically, by increasing the number of middle-class Malays, the position of the Malays continues to be of the most concern to the would-be reformers. Malay mothers, as the 'pillar' of the Malay family and nation, were often a focal point for any anxieties about the reformation process, so that local policymakers continued the colonial pattern of concern over Malay womanhood and mothering.

Malay women have consequently been sent some confusing signals as to what the nation expects of them. Despite there being no official policy about the Malays remaining a majority, the Malaysian government has on the one hand invested much in resources for Malay families so that mothers can 'possess and transmit Malay cultural resources, and ensure the growth of the Malay population.'[52] The process of Islamisation, which eventually became a key component of Malay reformation, would also influence how ideal womanhood

51. Najib Razak, "Twitter", May 8th 2011, at:
https://twitter.com/NajibRazak/status/67121396748259328, Accessed 7 August 2014
52. Aihwa Ong, "Postcolonial nationalism: Women and retraditionalization in the Islamic imaginary, Malaysia" in Connie Sutton (ed.) *Feminism, nationalism and militarism*, American Anthropology Association, Arlington, 1995, p. 47

was understood. The embodiment of a more Islamic and hypermasculine identity was seen as a testament to how far the Malays had progressed from the lazy native myth. Women and their families became the main outlet through which this transformation could be seen. An investment in Malay-Muslim families starts before a couple weds: in Malaysia, Muslims cannot get married without attending a *kursus kahwin*, or marriage preparation course. Muslim marriage courses are run by a centre in the country usually featuring staff from the local religious department. There is no equivalent legal requirement for non-Muslim couples, despite the fact that some elements of the Hindu community have called for the government to organise similar courses for Malaysian Hindus, and some churches in Malaysia require couples to attend pre-marriage counselling before marrying there. A Muslim couple wishing to marry also needs to undergo an HIV test before they are allowed to marry. One interviewee described her experience of trying to organise her wedding:

> There was so much to do before the wedding. We had to do a HIV test… We also had to attend the *kursus perkahwinan*, which was a two-day course over the weekend… I was the only woman there not wearing a *baju kurung*, and only a few of us were not wearing the headscarf… So on the second day, I turned up appropriately dressed. …They gave a lot of good advice on all the forms, the bureaucracy, of getting married. But everything else was quite dull… The advice was basically, guys, be understanding, both of you, make sure your finances are under control. They also talked about time management… At the end of it, I got a certificate that said I was marriageable… When we were organising our marriage, we had to produce our certificates.
>
> -Lea, 29 years old

Lea came from an ethnically diverse background and had many relatives in Malaysia who were not Malay or Muslim. Lea's experience was typical of many interviewees who had had to attend marriage courses; the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) only made such courses a prerequisite to getting married in 1992, so only interviewees who had married since then had had to attend courses. The exact rules vary from state to state, but courses generally take a couple of days and can be done at any pre-approved centre, or, in Lea's case, an 'academy.' Lea's discussion of the dress code at the course was interesting: most of the participants wore *baju kurung*s and headscarves, so that even while Lea was not explicitly told by the course directors that she should dress the same, Lea chose to turn up 'appropriately dressed' the next day. In Lea's opinion, the course had been useful in helping to untangle some of the bureaucracy that was involved in getting married, but when it came to providing advice on ensuring a healthy and harmonious union, it fell flat. The *shariah* courts do not recognise marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims, so the non-Muslim partner of such a couple would need to convert in order for the union to be recognised. They would also need to attend such a course. The specific requirements here can be understood as a desire of the Islamic authorities to, from the outset, inculcate the values they want Muslim families to uphold: Muslim families must resemble an ideal, and by making pre-marriage courses compulsory, JAKIM is investing in 'healthy' Muslim families. The refusal to recognise interreligious marriages for Muslims, whilst officially done on that basis that such unions are not provided for in Islam, may be as a means of ensuring that 'traditional' Malay culture and present population numbers continue to be preserved. The failure to meet JAKIM's pre-marriage requirements can result in extra hurdles for a couple and sometimes even stigma and anxieties for the woman in particular. One interviewee described to me what happened when she got married without meeting JAKIM's pre-marriage requirements.

My husband and I got married in Thailand. …He's an Algerian Muslim from France, and he travels a lot for work. We met when he came to Malaysia in 2006, and spent a lot of time together…My mother was not happy, so we thought, OK, fine we'll get married, and we'll get married now. …We couldn't be bothered to do the whole *kursus perkahwinan*. I've heard friends say it's a waste of time, and that discussion of religion (during the course) is very superficial. So we decided to go to southern Thailand, where it's so easy, simple ceremony, no courses. …A month later, I fell pregnant, and my husband and I were so shocked when we learnt after our daughter was born that we could not put his name on her birth certificate because our marriage was not recognised in Malaysia. Then I learnt they have this practice where Muslim babies conceived out of wedlock can't have their father's name on their birth certificate.

-Zemira, 26 years old

Zemira considered herself to be a faithful, and sometimes critical, Muslim. She stood out amongst interviewees because she had earlier in her marriage been involved with a Kuala Lumpur-based Muslim youth group and had chosen to wear a headscarf, but had stopped doing so a couple of years earlier; nonetheless, her agency remained inherently religious, informing her negotiations with state requirements around the practice of Islam. At 26, she had travelled to many countries and was a self-employed businesswoman; she identified as a capable and intelligent woman, and was firm in her conviction that the pre-marriage courses in Malaysia were 'a waste of time.' For not following JAKIM's rules, Zemira was ultimately punished where her husband wasn't – she related how there was talk of *her* being required to

pay a fine for having a child without being married and not her husband. The treatment of women in episodes such as this reinforces not only that there is a preference for a heterosexual and married family unit as previously outlined by Mahathir, but also that women will be the ones penalised if such an ideal is not met. Women are held up from an early age as the main preservers of a healthy and happy family, to the point where even the circumstances of a female child's birth are considered important when she chooses to marry. Several interviewees discussed how, before getting married, they had to provide documentation that detailed the circumstances of their birth; this was to ensure that when they were given away at their marriage ceremonies, they were given away by their legal fathers. The circumstances of their husband-to-be's birth was not relevant, as he was not given away in a similar fashion. One official I spoke with from the Islamic Department of Selangor (JAIS) confirmed they needed to verify whether or not a prospective bride was born to married parents so as to help ascertain if she should be given away by her father or by a court-appointed judge. He further stated that a biological father had no rights to a child he fathered out of wedlock, to the point where the two could actually legally get married. In 2008, a doctor wrote a letter to online news portal *Malaysiakini* where she shared the story of a married couple she knew who had tried unsuccessfully to register the birth of their premature child, a baby girl. The officials at the National Registration Department (JPN) had refused to record the father's details, having determined after scrutinising the couple's marriage certificate that the child must have been conceived out of wedlock. After some enquiries, the doctor reported that she had learnt of a JPN internal circular asking staff to 'look out' specifically for Malay children conceived out of wedlock. The JPN director-general confirmed in 2011 that Muslim children born within six months of their parents' marriage could not have their father's details recorded on their birth certificate. She stated this was based 'on the laws of Islam,' but that the decision was made by the National Fatwa

Council.[53] Malay-Muslim families, and specifically the women in those family units, were clearly being judged by standards different to those imposed on the non-Malay population, and sometimes with very heartbreaking results. The doctor's letter related how the couple, upset at their treatment by JPN officials, did not register their child's birth, and that their baby daughter eventually died, without ever having had a birth certificate.[54]

4.2.1 Malay Mothers and Modernity

In addition to this particular pressuring of Malay-Muslim womanhood to represent ideal Malay-Muslim families, the government has also promoted the participation of Malay women in the workforce. This was particularly true in the Fifth Malaysian Plan, which saw women 'as key to improving the lot of "low-income households."'[55] But despite this officially positive response on the issue of women working, it is often understood to be secondary to a woman's 'main job,' that is, raising a family. Ong argued that middle-class women in particular were expected to realise this ideal by staying at home.[56] Most of the interviewees I spoke with in 2011 were employed professionals, often working full-time, maintaining that it was hard for a family to live comfortably in Kuala Lumpur on a single income. As working mothers, many of them utilised one singular resource to help them juggle their family and work responsibilities.

> I am a mother of three, two girls and one boy. …I do find juggling work
>
> and family quite tough, but it has become easier for us since we got a maid.

53. The Star, "NRD explains the Fatwa Council ruling", *The Star*, November 6th 2011, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2f2011%2f11%2f6%2fnation%2f9850643&sec=nation*, Accessed 11 August 2014
54. Yati Hewett, "JPN on the look-out for illegitimate Malay children", *Malaysiakini*, May 6th 2008, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/82418*, Accessed 11 August 2014
55. Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam", p. 173
56. ibid., p. 181-182

To be honest, I don't know how women in the West do it. I was getting so

exhausted, working all day, chauffeuring my children to school, their

grandparents', coming home to clean and cook and help with the

homework.

-Basmah, 36 years old

Yes, we do have a maid… I think if you are living in KL, and you don't

have any reliable family nearby, you definitely need one. Having a maid

helped me return to work after I had my second child.

-Natrina, 32 years old

Basmah and Natrina both discussed how their families were dependent on maids, and how

they found paying a maid's wages to be a worthwhile alternative to the exhaustion involved

with tending to all of their family's needs without any domestic help. In 2004, some 44.9% of

all non-Malaysian citizens were employed in the category 'private households with employed

persons,'[57] a statistic which underscores the dependence on domestic help in the country.

There were a few options when it came to recruiting domestic help: some interviewees had

maids from Indonesia, explaining that Indonesian maids were generally cheaper than, for

instance, Filipino maids; Filipino maids were said to be more 'expensive' but were more

likely to speak English; and at least one interviewee (a single mother) had an arrangement

with a local woman, who stayed with her daughter until she came home from work in the

evenings. Generally, interviewees that worked employed maids to help run the family home

and take care of their children whilst they were at work. The minority that did not – this

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57. Juanita Elias, "Struggles over the rights of foreign domestic workers in Malaysia: The possibilities and limitations of 'rights talk'", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2008, p. 291

included the single mothers I spoke with – instead tended to rely on nearby relatives, had their children sent to 'tuition centres' where they received extra tutelage until their parents were ready to pick them up, or had children old enough that they could look after themselves at home. Still, despite the high demand for domestic help to help manage both work and family responsibilities, maids often go unmentioned in dominant ideal family discourses, further emphasising the idea that sole responsibility of taking care of the family lies with the mother. As Rozana explained:

> If you look at what's portrayed in the media, you always see father, mother, two, three, four kids. …Mum probably has a job, but somehow still has time for the kids. You hardly see domestic helpers – I'm just going by advertisements. There is kind of this notion that a working mother is something that is accepted. With all these advertisements about eating fast food, and all of that. So a working mother is a role that is acceptable, but at the end of the day, it's still her that is thinking about what is the family going to eat. It's not about the Dad, you know, don't worry, you can stay back in the office, and I'll sort out the kids.[58]

The invisibility of domestic help in family discourse is hardly remarkable considering the official position that links healthy families with a prosperous nation. Some interviewees even expressed guilt about having to hire maids, believing it to be the ultimate manifestation of their inability to spend quality time with their children. Former Wanita UMNO chief and Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Jalil said in 2010 that many parents in the present-day 'franchise' their children to other carers instead of giving

58. Rozana Isa, interview, September 2011

them 'love, care and guidance.'[59] She further added that many youth involved in social problems tended to have been neglected by their families. This was a position embraced by many policymakers, who tended to make the woman who did not stay at home a scapegoat for their anxieties about modernity.

This is quite an important question (should a parent stay at home). You see, there is, the issue of moral decadence now, amongst the youngsters. Because the children were not taken care (of), because both parents, husband and wife, working, even at (an) early age…they hand over to the babysitters. …Whereas before, during our time, this Malay and Muslim culture, you see, the sons or daughter should be brought up by the family itself. By the parents itself. So before, the wives stayed at home. Before. Taking care of the children. Now, everybody, both of them, working. So the babysitters taking care of the children. This where you see the declining of the family institution. You see, because, it's quite scientific, I don't know how to explain… For the Muslim, when a baby is born, they take milk, you see. …(Clarifies) Breastfeeding. So it is ideal for the Muslim because it is stated in the Quran, in our religion, that the baby should be (breastfed), nothing less than forty days. It can be even more, better. But now, there's no more breastfeeding. It's all this made from, you know, bottle-made…that's why they make a joke. Now all the children will become like buffaloes and cows, not like the mother anymore. Because they take the, this animal milk. So it's very important. Very, very

59. Bernama, "Family love and care important to overcome social problems, says Shahrziat", *MySinchew*, 26 July 2010, at: ***http://www.mysinchew.com/node/42373***, Accessed 12 June 2018

important. …The mother is reluctant to (do) breastfeeding now because

(of) the modern culture, they want to take care of their body.[60]

In the above excerpt, Ibrahim echoed the concerns of Shahrizat that modernity was not redefining the family institution for the better, and therefore, not producing high-quality citizens. In this particular instance, he used animal imagery to exemplify the point that Malaysians today were guilty of 'moral decadence.' Although Ibrahim spoke about the effects of both parents working, he nonetheless brought the focus on mothering when he compared mothers today with the mothers he knew when he was growing up – and specifically Malay mothers. Ibrahim is not a paediatrician or neonatal expert, but he still offered the view that Malay mothers not performing what he saw as their 'natural' roles – in this case, breastfeeding – and instead replacing it with an 'artificial' alternative (that is, the milk of cows and buffaloes) resulted in Malays today not being of good character, behaving instead like cows and buffaloes. Perkasa patron Mahathir warned in 1990 that development and modernisation in Malaysia 'should not bring about the erosion of…the family institution as in some industrialised countries.'[61] Malay-Muslim women, on the one hand, are urged to play an active part in the development and modernisation of the Malay race, as mothers; and on the other hand, are urged to reject many maternal traditions of their forbearers while embracing other aspects of those traditions that is not incompatible with a new Islamic modernity.

60. Ibrahim Ali, interview, September 2011
61. Mahathir Mohamad, "Message - Prime Minister of Malaysia", *United Nations*, November 11 1990, at: ***http://www.un.org/popin/regional/asiapac/malaysiz/pm_messa.htm***, Accessed 7 August 2014

4.3 Obedient Wives and Muslim Womanhood

Successive UMNO-dominated governments, for all their investment in 'happy families,' were not alone in attempting to shape Malay-Muslim womanhood. *Dakwah* groups and locally produced popular materials, for instance, have also promoted particular brands of ideal Malay Muslim womanhood. There have also been efforts from Malay-Muslim women themselves to organise (often under the auspices of a mostly male group) and offer their own ideal of Malay-Muslim womanhood. In June 2011 – shortly before I went to Malaysia for fieldwork – one such group quickly gained notoriety, not just in the country but internationally too. The Obedient Wives Club (OWC) operated on the premise that wives who 'obey, serve and entertain' helped to ensure a happy family life. This in turn was seen as preventing undesirable issues such as prostitution and domestic abuse.[62] However, it was their references to sex as a building block of happy marriages that was the focus of many news stories – particularly after its vice-president spoke of introducing sex courses so that wives could 'serve their husbands better than a first-class prostitute.'[63] Like policymakers before them, the group unmistakably subscribed to and advocated a patriarchal and heterosexual family unit ideal[64] and had links to an organisation founded by former *dakwah* group *Al Arqam* members.[65] Like *Al Arqam*, the OWC was attacked for its position on women. Commentators and local activists denounced the group as sexist, and in July 2012

62. Isabelle Lai, "Wives can curb social ills like prostitution by being obedient and alluring", *The Star*, 3 June 2011, at:
http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/6/3/nation/20110603155349&sec=nation,
Accessed 1 April 2013
63. Isabella Lai, "Obedient Wives Club to offer sex lessons on how to pleasure husbands", *The Star*, 4 June 2011, at:
http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/6/4/nation/20110604151126&sec=nation,
Accessed 1 April 2013
64. BFM, "Obedient Wives Club", *Evening Edition: sex, gender, politics and religion* (podcast), 6 July 2011, at: *http://www.bfm.my/obedient-wives-club-6-july-2011.html?searched=obedient+wives+club&advsearch=exactphrase&highlight=ajaxSearch_highlight+ajaxSearch_highlight1,* Accessed 1 April 2013
65. Isabelle Lai, "Wives can curb social ills like prostitution by being obedient and alluring"

the group even won a satirical award for their position at an event organised by the local Joint

Action Group on Equality (JAG).66 However, any condemnation that the OWC received from

the government has thus far been considerably muted compared to that directed against *Al*

Arqam. Mahathir had, in 1994, come out very strongly against *Al Arqam*, calling female

members of the group 'sex slaves' there to satisfy the desire of the group's leaders.67 *Al*

Arqam, depicted as a backward group that deviated from 'true' Islamic teachings, was

promptly banned. However, as local journalists reporting on developments at the time were

surprised to learn, the membership base for *Al Arqam* consisted of a large number of Malay

middle class professionals.68 The OWC, like *Al Arqam* also targeted professionals, with club

spokeswoman Azlina Jamaluddin often drawing on her own work experience as a doctor

when informing her views on the OWC's relevance.69 The OWC has to date not been

officially banned in Malaysia, although the government did say they were 'monitoring' the

group70 and have banned their sex manual *Seks Islam, Perangi Yahudi Untuk Kembalikan*

Seks Islam Kepada Dunia (Islamic Sex, Fighting Jews to Return Islamic Sex to the World)

for violating a JAKIM censorship ban.71

In discussing the official response to these two groups nearly two decades apart, it is

important to note that the Malaysian political landscape, in 1994, was very different to the

one of today. The greatest threat to UMNO's hold on the Malay vote back then was PAS, and

66. Ahmad Fadli KC, "Obedient Wives Club shrugs off sexist award", *Malaysiakini*, 5 July 2012, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/202806,* Accessed 1 April 2013
67. Maila Stivens, "Sex, gender and the making of the new Malay middle classes", p. 87
68. ibid.
69. BFM, "Sex, gender politics and religion - Obedient Wives Club", *BFM The Business Station*, 7 July 2011, at: *http://www.bfm.my/obedient-wives-club-6-july-2011.html,* Accessed 7 August 2014
70. Bernama, "Govt monitoring Obedient Wives Club", *New Straits Times*, 27 January 2012, at: *http://www.nst.com.my/latest/govt-monitoring-obedient-wives-club-1.37939,* Accessed 1 April 2013
71. The Star, "Home Ministry bans Obedient Wives Club's sex guidebook", *The Star*, 2 November 2011, at: *http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/11/2/nation/20111102213319&sec=nation,* Accessed 1 April 2013

the likelihood of BN not being returned to power in any general election seemed remote. Today, Malaysia is in 'uncharted political waters,'[72] particularly given reports suggesting that support for UMNO amongst middle-class Malays has dropped[73] and the stunning victory obtained by the Opposition in the 2018 general elections. The Malay middle-class was, as was mentioned earlier, the main site at which official depictions of a happy family and reproductions of the *Melayu Baru* were concentrated. This was a site where the hopes and aspirations of Malay reformation were most evident, and so at first glance the presence of middle-class professionals in groups such as *Al Arqam* and the OWC may seem out of place, as might the reported decline in their support for UMNO. My discussion with several interviewees, however, has led me to conclude that a Malay middle-class shift away from UMNO may in fact be part of a more organic process of Malay reformation – one which saw more emphasis being placed on a religious rather than ethnic identity. It was not uncommon for an interviewee to have later in life assumed a strong interest in religion, and make it a focal part of their lives. This often changed the nature of their relationships, and long-held beliefs.

> …A lot of Malay-Muslim women (believe) that they have duty and
>
> obligation to obey their husbands. Everything you do, as a Muslim woman,
>
> you can do everything and achieve anything as long as you have the
>
> consent of your husband, the blessings of your husband. And despite you
>
> wanting to go out there and conquer the world with the permission of your
>
> husband, at the end of the day, if he still wants to have sex with you, as and

72. Clive Kessler, "In unchartered waters", *The Malaysian Insider*, 7 April 2013, at: ***http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/in-uncharted-waters-clive-kessler/,*** Accessed 7 April 2013
73. Shannon Teoh, "Umno has lost Malay middle class, says EIU", *The Malaysian Insider*, 2 June 2011, at: ***http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/umno-has-lost-malay-middle-class-says-eiu/,*** Accessed 1 April 2013

when he requests or demands, and you have basically no right to say no to

him. I think this whole idea of obedience is being more and more

inculcated, it is more entrenched in society. So much so, I have friends

who've studied in the UK, come home with a foreign husband, and then

after that they, you know, somewhere along the line, they attend this class,

and this thing keeps being drummed into their head, and then they have

these weird conversations with their husband. Like, I have to ask your

permission to go out, ask you who and where I want to go out, and the

husband is just like, what, what do you mean you have to ask my

permission, you've always gone out wherever you wanted to go. Why now

this thing about fitting into the role of a good Malay-Muslim woman? So

obviously there is what's been drummed up there in the *ceramah*, our

engagement with religious programs, authorities, it's all about, you know,

yes, they accept the modernity of the Malay-Muslim woman, but it's

always tied in to the consent and approval of the husband.[74]

I found Rozana's description here of her friends as re-discovering Islam and changing aspects

of their lives accordingly to be surprisingly accurate and applicable to many of the women I

spoke with. Rozana also spoke of obedience becoming more entrenched in society, and

becoming more accepted as something to aspire to. The family was indeed a site where

solutions to the Malay identity crisis could be formed and presented – and the solution for

many was to adopt a more Muslim identity.

74. Rozana Isa, interview, September 2011

I have previously discussed vignettes that have demonstrated how certain Malay practices are viewed as 'baseless' or out-of-place in modern times. Maznah, in writing on the influence of *shariah* laws on lived experiences, wrote that typically 'Islamic malehood (was) associated with entitlements, (while) Islamic femalehood (was) associated with good behavior.'[75] I did not speak with anyone who identified as being a member of the OWC, and generally responses were either ambivalent, dismissive or condemnatory – not one interviewee expressed support for the group. Nonetheless, I noticed amongst many interviewees a tendency to refer to an Islamic family, and the duties of an Islamic husband and wife. I asked interviewees about the impact religion had had on their lived experiences. Kloos' research on Acehnese Muslims observed the perceived role of life stages in his interviewees' religious agency;[76] similarly, the responses of the interviewees for this research project often traced various developments in their lives, as they explained how their faith had come to acquire the meaning it presently held for them. One interviewee spoke of rediscovering her faith during the breakdown of her marriage.

> I was doing quite well in my career, and my husband wasn't… It was such a stressful time. I was really raising the boys by myself, and managing the finances by myself. I was really starving for some peace, and that's when I started paying more attention to my faith. …Some of my friends were taking a more active interest in religion, I suppose that influenced me a bit… I cannot overstate the impact of that choice. My life suddenly had a purpose. I stopped thinking of raising my children to be survivors in this

75. Maznah Mohamad, "Gender battles and the Syariah: Translating Islamic marital law into everyday practice in Malaysia" in G. W. Jones, T. H. Hull and Maznah Mohamad (eds.) *Changing marriage patterns in Southeast Asia: Economic and socio-cultural dimensions*, Routledge, London, 2011, p. 175
76. David Kloos, *Becoming Better Muslims*, p. 158

world. I wanted to really help them to be good Muslims, because I think

Islam is a wonderful basis for justice and society. …I started wearing a

*tudung*77 about fifteen years ago, because I felt so at peace with myself.

Soon after, my husband and I got divorced. He was not fulfilling his duties

as a Muslim husband, he didn't apply himself to his work (was not doing

his job properly), doing things for the family, I carried the burden alone.

…I am very close to my sons today, and I am very proud of the people they

have become. They are very involved in campaigning for a new Malaysia. I

even went to the last *Bersih*78 rally (then in July 2011) with them. …I went

because I love my country, I think there is just too much at stake now. I

think UMNO has passed its use-by date.

-Salimah, 52 years old

Salimah was from a fairly comfortable background, and as a government scholarship holder

was also a direct beneficiary of the NEP. Difficulties in her marriage, coupled with the

stresses of juggling motherhood, running a household and her work, saw her turn to religion

for comfort. Salimah's religious reorientation caused her to reevaluate several aspects of her

life. She and her husband divorced, with her citing his not being a proper Muslim husband.

Her agency towards major life decisions was very much inherently religious in nature, much

like the individuals Kloos wrote about; and as an individual who had rediscovered her faith

later in life, did not appear to find any contradictions between her faith and her political

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77. Headscarf.
78. *Bersih*, which literally means "clean" in Malay, is a coalition of civil society groups that campaign for free and fair elections in Malaysia. The coalition has organised a number of rallies in Kuala Lumpur, the latest being in November 2016, drawing tens of thousands of people. One scholar has discussed how Bersih is supported by a number of Malays who in turn do not support UMNO. Kikue Hamayotsu, "Towards a More Democratic Regime and Society? The Politics of Faith and Ethnicity in a Transitional Multi-Ethnic Malaysia", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2013, p. 79

leanings: she was one of two interviewees who disclosed that they had attended a *Bersih* rally. She did add that some of her friends started exploring religion too. This increased emphasis on religion, although a very personal experience, has by no means been limited to a few individuals here and there; this has been happening for many urban Malay-Muslim women, and is a trend that has become increasingly visible. A 1979 article in the local broadsheet *New Straits Times* spoke of there being 2000 women in Kuala Lumpur covering their heads in some fashion, with the article broadly describing it as 'Arabic-like clothings.'[79] When I mentioned this to local academic and commentator Chandra Muzaffar, he expressed surprise and explained that he believed the numbers to be much higher today.[80] The question then would be what is it that is causing this shift towards religiosity in the urban Malay-Muslim demographic group, and therefore towards a fundamentally religious agency.

A key part of the lazy native mythology was the idea that the stupidity of the lazy native had actually allowed for colonisation. Recent attempts at denying that Malaysia was ever colonised could be interpreted as an attempt to manage the traumatic and lingering effects of colonial discourse: in 2011, a National Professors' Council representative said that Malaya had been a protectorate of Britain rather than a colony, with Mahathir weighing in to agree with this view. However, the government quickly dismissed the idea after widespread debate about the claims.[81] When I raised this issue in discussions, to help uncover interviewees' engagement with the lazy native mythos, interviewees either dismissed such attempts to revisit Malaysian history or professed disinterest in such debates. One thing that was clear

79. Heng Tsu Chen, "Women of the Veil", *New Straits Times*, 25 June 1979
80. Chandra Muzaffar, interview, September 2011
81. Clara Chooi, "Putrajaya says Malaysia was colonized, disputes MPN's version of history", *The Malaysian Insider*, 5 October 2011, at: *http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/putrajaya-says-malaysia-was-colonised-disputes-mpns-version-of-history,* Accessed 1 April 2013

from interviews, though, was how faith was often viewed as empowering, and perhaps transcending the baggage surrounding ethnic identity politics in Malaysia.

> I identify as a Muslim woman first and foremost because I see my religion as being more important than my race. …Race can change, there are many in-betweens there, but with faith, it's constant. …My grandmother is Siamese, my husband is part Chinese, my kids are so mixed up, I can't raise them as Malay.
>
> -Ramah, 38 years old

In the above vignette, Ramah explained her preference for a religious rather than ethnic identity by noting that ethnicity is an unstable construct. She used as an example her own family's background, and in doing so, challenged the 'naturalness' of ethnic positioning, a point similar to the views propagated by the cult of domesticity in colonial order. In this sense, Ramah is engaging with typical imperialist discourse. For Ramah and other interviewees, their agency in negotiating identity politics was an inherently religious one since Islam was for them a transcendent force, where ethnicity has not been. In an essay on the works of a Malaysian Sufi filmmaker, Khoo described individuals choosing to define their subjectivity away from an entirely racialized lens as engaging in:

> …a struggle; a struggle in the soul; a struggle to relieve our paranoid fears of losing our pure selves while becoming and merging with the other (and

ultimately with God in the Sufi vocabulary); a struggle to move beyond

stereotypes, binaries and boundaries which…(will) yield rich results.[82]

Similarly for interviewees then, their faith provided them an overarching framework for

negotiating modernity, identity politics and various stages of life. The state, though, viewed

the adoption of an increasingly Islamic character as a mark of Malay national progress vis-à-

vis the binarist ethnic constructions of old; the next two chapters explore how the political

elite continue to use gender to inform Malay-Muslim identity.

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82. Khoo Gaik Cheng, "Reading the films of independent filmmaker Yasmin Ahmad: cosmopolitanism, Sufi Islam and Malay subjectivity", p. 213

Chapter Five – Malay-Muslim Femininity in the Public Sphere

5.1 UMNO and Gender

The status of Malaysian women is a topic often visited by the political elite, particularly during the onset of a general election. Since the 2008 general elections, where BN lost its two-thirds majority, BN was largely concerned with 'winning back' support. The UMNO leader at that time, Prime Minister Badawi, was quickly replaced by Najib, who soon began promoting his 1Malaysia campaign in response to the 'historic' loss of support for BN amongst ethnic Chinese and Indian votes in 2008.[1] Positioning himself as a progressive figure, however, was always going to be something of a balancing act for Najib, since he also had to contend with pressure from the UMNO party base and also organisations like Perkasa. Najib needed to be able to sell himself and his vision for the country in terms that would appeal to not only the non-Malay electorate, but also those who were concerned with 'Malay rights'[2] and who stridently believed in the ideal of the forward-looking *Melayu Baru*. Ultimately, his policies whilst demonstrating a multicultural approachability had to lead back to UMNO. His attempts to manufacture inseparable links between BN, with UMNO as its largest stakeholder, and a progressive outlook with multicultural appeal are arguably most evident in the extraordinary steps his administration took on the issue of women's representation in politics. In early 2012, his administration's Minister for Women, Family and Community Development announced she would be resigning from her ministerial post. Shahrizat's departure was in the face of corruption allegations that had dogged her in the preceding months. Najib soon announced that he would be taking over the women's ministry,

1. Ong Kian Ming, "Malaysia in 2010: Resurgent Najib and BN, Stumbling Anwar and PR", in Daljit Singh (ed.) *Southeast Asian Affairs 2011*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2011, p. 132
2. Michael O'Shannassy, "Malaysia in 2010: Between a Rock and a Hard Place", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2011, p. 178

prompting an outcry from local women's organisations who noted that Shahrizat's departure meant a reduction in women's representation in cabinet.[3] Shahrizat, however, described Najib as the 'best choice' for the role, saying that 'under the BN government, women's achievements have been something to be proud of.'[4] Najib infamously continued with the theme when he said some six months later, to renewed outcry, that there was no need for a women's rights movement in Malaysia as there had been equality in the country from its early days.[5] In using women as a symbol for his administration's forward-looking and 'modern' views, Najib was continuing a pattern set by his predecessors in UMNO. Crucially though, in stating that there had been equality 'from the beginning,' he was also attempting to link women's empowerment and equality with the history and development of BN, the coalition that had then ruled Malaysia since independence. These manufactured links are useful in recognising the repetition of a particular pattern when it comes to women's representation in Malaysian politics.

In its early days, the role of women in the Malay nationalist movement took many observers by surprise, although their organisation into groups was not entirely a postwar occurrence. Groups often made up of women from expatriate and 'immigrant communities' existed in the pre-war period, and were largely concerned with philanthropy and craftwork.[6] Although some Malay women were members of these groups, there were also organisations specifically

3. Malaysiakini, "Women's group pooh-poohs Najib's new role", *Malaysiakini*, 10 April 2012, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/194657*, Accessed 19 May 2013
4. Nigel Aw, "Najib best man for women's ministry, says Shahrizat", *Malaysiakini*, 8 April 2012, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/194479*, Accessed 19 May 2013
5. Marina Mahathir, "Women's rights not there yet", *The Star*, 11 October 2012, at: *http://thestar.com.my/columnists/story.asp?file=/2012/10/11/columnists/musings/12142682*, Accessed 19 May 2013
6. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 50-51

for Malay women,[7] the first of which, the Malay Women Teacher Union, was set up in 1929.[8] Many of these groups 'lapsed' during the war years, despite the attempts of the Japanese to encourage women's participation in public life.[9] They were just beginning to re-establish themselves as *kumpulan kaum ibu* (literally mother's groups) after the war, when the plans to form the Malayan Union were announced. The term *kaum ibu*, as this chapter will explore, reflected an understanding of Malay womanhood as being connected specifically with mothering and the private sphere;[10] such an understanding offered no contradiction to the imperial family of man that was repeatedly articulated in colonial discourse. To see not just the 'inferior native,' but the 'inferior native woman' step outside of their designated positions in this hierarchy would likely prove extremely unsettling to the privileged coloniser as it turned their colonial worldview on itself. Such an incident, as it turned out, was indeed to become the first victory for modern Malay nationalism. The Union, first conceived by the British during the war, was meant to result in a federation of Malay states under one government and simplify administration. There was to be equal citizenship for all, and the Sultans were to lose their power on everything but religious matters. These two points caused serious consternation among Malay nationalists, who also objected to what they felt were unfair methods being used to gain the Sultans' approval for the Union.[11] Opposition to the Union became widespread, and rallies were organised to put pressure on administrators. When a visiting British parliamentary mission arrived to survey the response to the Union, there was little doubt that the terms would have to be renegotiated. For many observers, there

7. Lenore Manderson, "The Shaping of the Kaum Ibu (Women's Section) of the United Malays National Organization", *Signs*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1977, p. 212
8. Meredith L. Weiss, "Malaysian NGOs: history, legal framework and characteristics", in Meredith L. Weiss and Saliha Hassan (eds.) *Social Movements in Malaysia*, Routledge/Curzon, New York, 2003, p. 28
9. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 51-52
10. Manderson has discussed some of the opposition to proposals to rename the group in 1964. .ibid., p. 99
11. Anthony Milner, *The Malays*, p. 152

was one unique feature of these rallies that appeared to add a dimension of significance and legitimacy: 'What interested me most,' said British politician Sir David Gammans in 1946, 'is to find Malay women who in my day took no part in public affairs at all, making speeches.'[12] Manderson, whilst acknowledging that traditional Malay society, did accord women 'a certain flexibility … to play active and forceful rules beyond the confines of the home,'[13] wrote that many Malay women had a new political awareness as a result of their wartime experiences.[14] British administrator Sir Theodore Adams went so far as to call the women's political participation as signalling 'a revolution' for the country, and believed that their presence in the issue was a 'forecast' of the contribution women would later make to the country.[15] Adams' latter point would later prove to ring true, though perhaps not in the way he may have hoped: while the issue of the Malayan Union provided many of the emerging *kaum ibu* their first political platform, the episode also helped establish a pattern regarding political women's wings which, as this chapter will demonstrate, has continued until the present day. The *kaum ibu*, organised and vocal in their opposition to the Malayan Union, were undeniably central to the success of the rallies, with their presence in them continuing to be highlighted by scholars today when discussing the success of the anti-Union movement. Yet, when it came to deliberations on forming a successor to the Union, Malay women were nowhere to be seen: British officials and the male Malay elite developed the Federation Agreement, with women remaining 'peripheral to the decision-making process.'[16]

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12. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 43
13. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 26
14. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 57
15. Lenore Manderson, "The Shaping of the Kaum Ibu (Women's Section) of the United Malays National Organization", p. 215
16. Virginia H. Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 91

Buoyed by the success the rallies had brought their cause, the UMNO leadership quickly grasped the value of having women involved with their nationalist cause: a *kaum ibu* office was established within the UMNO headquarters a few months after the rallies, after the idea of creating a single Malay women's association that shared the goals of UMNO was first raised nationally at a party congress.[17] This goal was subsequently realised at an UMNO General Assembly in 1949, when the system of having various Malay women's associations affiliate with UMNO was replaced by the formation of the Kaum Ibu UMNO, a single body for women within UMNO.[18] The occasion was one of the earliest where an UMNO leader used feminist rhetoric when discussing Malay nationalism and national development. The then UMNO president Onn assured the new women's wing that their voice would be 'as powerful as that of the men' in shaping the country, and directly linked the fortunes of the new auxiliary to the position of the Malay race:

> I hope before the end of the year the (Kaum Ibu) will work together with
> one aim, that is to strengthen its position in UMNO beside the men. If the
> (Kaum Ibu) did not strengthen its position, when the time comes for
> election of members to the various councils, the (Kaum Ibu) will be left
> behind, which means the Malays will be left behind…[19]

Gender equality, Onn suggested, would be a tenet of not only the newly-emerging country, but also central to the efforts of the Malays to 'be ahead.' The usage of women as a symbol in this anti-colonial approach is unmistakeable – their presence in the public sphere was new and an obvious sign of a break from the colonial mould. Yet, as the politics in the next few

17. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 57
18. Lenore Manderson, "The Shaping of the Kaum Ibu (Women's Section) of the United Malays National Organization", p. 215
19. Virginia H. Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 95

years (and indeed up until the present day) was to demonstrate, the position of women as symbols meant that opportunities for them in the political sphere remained limited. It took very little time after the formation of the Kaum Ibu for it to become clear that there existed, within UMNO, a gendered political pyramid based on obvious gender dualisms. Soon after the Assembly, the new women's wing began organising itself in a fashion reminiscent of the earlier *kaum ibu* at the anti-Malayan Union rallies. Its successful management of various community activities and fundraising initiatives saw the Kaum Ibu come to be regarded as a 'stable' UMNO auxiliary.[20] Its work on the former, in particular, is widely regarded as having helped build support for UMNO: one scholar argued in 1983 that such activities may actually have made UMNO 'meaningful at the immediate level.'[21] The effectiveness of the Kaum Ibu at this level helped to appropriate an UMNO hierarchy based on a gender division of labour scheme. At the bottom of the pyramid, the 'stable' foundation, were the women, that is the Kaum Ibu, doing the groundwork and canvassing potential votes. Higher up the pyramid were the men acting as decision-makers; they were able to assume these positions because of the solid foundations of the hierarchical UMNO structure. In the Malay political sphere, women were relegated to the more private ranks and men to the public realm. The 1955 federal elections appeared to confirm that UMNO's early discussion encouraging women's participation in public life was merely symbolic: out of the 35 UMNO candidates nominated to contest, only one was a woman.[22] The cycle of events between 1949 and 1955 established a model that has continued to be repeated up until the present day: the UMNO women's wing has been relied on for delivering votes and maintaining grassroots relationships. UMNO, in turn, has continued to largely exclude women from any real political power, although would

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20. ibid., p. 95
21. Marvin L. Rogers, "Changing Patterns of Political Involvement among Malay Village Women", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1986, p. 329
22. Helen Ting, "Gender discourse in Malay politics: Old wine in new bottle?" in Edmund Terence Gomez (ed.) *Politics in Malaysia: The Malay dimension*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 78

on occasion continue to celebrate its record on gender issues as a symbol of its progressiveness. The latter point, in particular, often involved minimum acknowledgement of the potential and abilities of women.

5.2 Gender, Ethnicity and the "National Interest"

At least one scholar has argued that these unequal gender power relations were 'a manifestation of the general political dynamics' within UMNO and a reflection of its hierarchical function as a 'protector' to the Malays.[23] Based on feedback obtained during fieldwork and my own reading of contemporary Malaysian history, I agree insofar as concerns for the fate of the Malays (or other Muslims) often superseded concern on gender issues. For instance, I asked one of the nine self-professed UMNO members whom I interviewed[24] why she supported the party.

> My family is from Johor, and my parents were both very active within UMNO since before I was born… I think UMNO has a got a good track record. I've seen it with my own eyes, lots of people from my hometown going to universities when their parents didn't. …BN has helped transform the country for the better, and UMNO has helped make sure everyone gets a fair share of that.
>
> -Shareen, 57 years old

23. ibid., p. 82
24. Although politics was discussed with every interviewee, some chose not to disclose whether or not they were members of any political party or indeed which way they leaned politically.

Shareen worked for an oil and gas company in Kuala Lumpur, and said she knew some of her younger colleagues supported the opposition. She also stated that one of her nephews had voted for the opposition in 2008; she explained these actions by saying that the Malay-Muslim opposition voters had 'forgotten about their rural brothers.' Shareen's support for UMNO hinged largely on the fact that her family supported UMNO, but also significantly on the progress and rate of development in her hometown in Johor. She related how when she attended University, she was only the third person and first woman from her mostly Malay district to go. Nowadays, she said most of the young people in the village went on to pursue some form of further education past secondary school, either within Johor or interstate, a development she attributed to UMNO's continued advocacy for Malay interests over the years. I asked her what she thought of UMNO's track record with women.

> I don't think BN is perfect, and I think some of the men who run UMNO
> are really stuck in the past. But, they have really supported opportunities
> for women.

Like Shahrizat would later do when she left her ministerial position, Shareen made sure to note that BN had created opportunities for women. Shareen also noted that these opportunities had resulted in there being some very high-profile Malay women in Malaysian public life – a feat she attributed directly to the work of UMNO. Despite her admission that UMNO faced some challenges ahead with regards to gender equality, she stated her intention to vote for BN at the next general elections. At the time that I was doing fieldwork, Malaysia was more than three years into only the second term in its history of a federal BN government that did not have a two-thirds majority in parliament. Nearly all of the interviewees I spoke with either lived or worked in an area that had elected an opposition candidate in the twelfth

general election. It was at the time widely anticipated that there would be another general election within the next couple of years. Federal politics was a topic most of the interviewees were familiar with, and I found that only a small handful either did not want to disclose how they would be voting or had not yet decided. Just over half of the women I spoke with indicated they were going to vote for BN or were leaning towards voting for BN at the thirteenth general elections, often in a line of thinking not dissimilar to 'better the devil you know.'

> I think I will vote for BN, just because I know they can be counted on to
> bring stability to this country. I think BN has handled this country's
> uniqueness well…in that we are multicultural, but also a Muslim country.
>
> > -Khatijah, 33 years old

> Mahathir, Anwar, they are all the same to me. But Malaysia has changed so
> much since I was younger, for the better.
>
> > -Tina, 40 years old

Khatijah and Tina were both women whose career success could be said to owe much to the pro-*Bumiputera* policies of the BN government. For instance, Khatijah worked for a government-linked company (GLC); GLCs are often regarded as vehicles to improve Malay participation in the private sector.[25] Tina and her family had benefited from many NEP-era policies, which in turn had almost certainly helped Tina reach a financial position where she

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25. PKR politician Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad and commentator M. Bakri Musa have both, for instance, discussed their view of GLCs as being linked with improving the economic prospects of some Malays. See Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, *Moving Forward: Malays for the 21st Century*, Marshall Cavendish, Subang, 2010, p. 59, and M. Bakri Musa, *Moving Malaysia Forward*, iUniverse, Bloomington, 2008, p. 410-411

could afford to establish her own beauty salon. Khatijah and Tina's sentiments were echoed throughout the group of individuals who were likely to vote for BN: BN had been in power and had proven its mettle, so to speak. It did so by navigating the complexities of a multicultural society. Tina's assertion that politicians were all the same to her – she named Mahathir and Anwar, two politicians from different sides of politics after the former sacked the latter from his post as Deputy Prime Minister in 1997 – indicated a preference not so much for individuals but for a party. In some interviews, we discussed the prospects of an electoral win for the opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (PR). I asked what they thought of Anwar, specifically what they made of the main charge underpinning Anwar's fall from power: since his admission to UMNO, Anwar had enjoyed a meteoric rise to the top; but the 1997 Asian financial crisis brought into view clear differences of opinion between Mahathir and Anwar.[26] The 1998 UMNO general assembly foreshadowed Anwar's imminent dismissal in more than one way: Mahathir used the occasion to reassert his authority;[27] and a then-recently published book written by Khalid Jafri, a former editor with Malay-language paper *Utusan Malaysia*, was circulated at the general assembly. Khalid's book was titled *50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Become Prime Minister* and included allegations of illicit sexual relations with both men and women. Within months of the general assembly, Anwar was instructed by Mahathir to resign, but refused. He was then sacked, and the very next day charged with sodomy as well as abusing his office by attempting to interfere with the sodomy investigation.[28] *Reformasi* (reform) demonstrations soon broke out across the country; Jason Abbott has argued that Anwar's dismissal was a 'catalyst' for the expression of popular discontent amongst some sections of the middle class and also students who had studied

26. Jason Abbott, "Vanquishing Banquo's ghost: the Anwar Ibrahim affair and its impact on Malaysian politics", *Asian Studies Review,* Vol. 25, No. 3, 2001, p. 295
27. ibid.
28. ibid., p. 286

abroad.[29] The poor performance of UMNO during the 1999 general elections, where it was believed that over half of the Malay electorate had voted for the opposition,[30] is thought to have been very much influenced by the 'Anwar factor.'[31] Amongst interviewees, the unanimous response to the sodomy charges against Anwar was one of ambivalence, possibly due to general skepticism about politicians. The lack of attention to the accusations against Anwar amongst urban Malaysians was likely a setback for BN, who may well have thought that the sodomy charge could neutralise Anwar as a political opponent to BN. Indeed, at least one scholarly piece described the repeated claims[32] as being widely 'ridiculed' in urban areas, though perhaps more likely to harm Anwar's image in rural seats.[33] Funston, though, has contended that, at least in the context of the 1999 general election results, Anwar's treatment likely struck a chord with 'traditional Malay norms against shaming opponents, and being cruel.'[34] A blasé attitude regarding the sodomy claims and any notion that Anwar was treated cruelly by UMNO did not mean, though, that urban voters were not prepared to offer other criticisms of Anwar:

> Anwar was the Deputy Prime Minister for many years. He could have changed Malaysia then. So for me, he is all talk but no action… I will support UMNO because I think the Malays are the greatest race.
>
> -Sue, 53 years old

29. ibid., p. 296
30. See Jason Abbott, "Vanquishing Banquo's ghost", p. 300, and John Funston, "MALAYSIA: UMNO's Search for Relevance", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2001, p. 189
31. John Funston, "MALAYSIA", p. 189
32. In 2008, Anwar faced fresh charges of sodomy, after he was accused of sodomising a former aide. He was acquitted of the charge in 2012, but the acquittal was overturned in 2014. In 2015, the charge was upheld and Anwar returned to prison. He was granted a royal pardon following BN's defeat at the 2018 general elections.
33. James Chin, "Malaysian Politics", p. 273
34. John Funston, "MALAYSIA", p. 189

Sue was a stay-at-home mother to five children, the youngest of whom was in her mid-teens. She was the only interviewee to say she would vote for UMNO because of race; she had been born and raised in the conservative state of Terengganu, and had moved to the mostly Malay city of Shah Alam (located just 25km from Kuala Lumpur) a decade before on account of her husband's work. Perhaps, to borrow Shareen's idea, Sue had not 'forgotten' about her rural roots: she did not think Anwar was capable of properly protecting Malay interests, saying that he had held a high office once before and could have implemented some *reformasi* initiatives then. Like most interviewees generally, Sue did not list improving gender equality as a main concern for her as a voter: none of the interviewees who supported UMNO listed gender as a priority issue. The same cannot be said of all women who have supported UMNO, however, and in particular the *kaum ibu* of the pre and post-independence years. Since before independence, UMNO's women's wing lobbied for gender to be placed firmly on the political agenda: its first call for provisional seats for women in 1949[35] was echoed more recently in Shahrizat's early 2013 call for more women candidates in elections.[36] But progress has been slow, with women comprising only 10 per cent of Malaysian parliamentarians today compared with three per cent five decades ago. Meanwhile, Wanita UMNO has continued to support UMNO, using what it calls its 'election machinery' to deliver electoral success for the party.[37] Manderson, writing in 1980, listed three reasons for a continuing lack of opportunities for women within UMNO: doubts about the capability of potential women candidates, doubts from women themselves about their ability to be in government rather than assist government, and also a belief that women would not be voted

35. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 149
36. Nuradilla Noorazam, "More women should run for election, say Shahrizat", *New Straits Times*, 11 March 2013, at: *http://www.nst.com.my/latest/more-women-should-run-for-election-says-shahrizat-1.232739*, Accessed 30 May 2013
37. The Star, "Shahrizat is satisfied with Wanita Umno election machinery", *The Star*, 12 August 2012, at: *http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2012/8/12/nation/20120812170118&sec=nation*, Accessed 30 May 2013

for anyway.38 Marina, in 2011, also listed 'general attitude' as a barrier for women in Malaysian politics, noting 'a belief that women cannot be leaders, (and) that there's something inherently irreligious about women leading – and you even have women saying this.'39 Marina specifically referred to the then relatively recent case of a Perak state assemblywoman from UMNO, Hamidah Osman, who said in 2010 that women could not become state chief ministers as they 'had to meet the (monarch), where protocol is involved, and one has to meet religious officers,'40 and indeed, the idea that it is somehow impractical for a woman to be a state chief minister was strong in 2014. In July of that year, UMNO legal advisor Mohd Hafarizam Harun said, in response to the prospect of Anwar's wife Wan Azizah being appointed Selangor chief minister, that chief ministers had always been men 'because should a woman (chief minister) suffer from 'uzur syarie' (period), there will be a number of obstacles for her to accompany the Sultan at several religious functions.'41 Marina also pinpointed the structure of UMNO as a reason for the continuing low levels of women's political participation.

> I really think it's high time we abandon this women's wing business…and
> even youth wings. Because what it does is it creates a playpen for (women)
> to play games but you can't come anywhere near the real power which is
> the main body of the party.42

38. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 159
39. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011
40. Vizla Kumaresan, "Women can't become menteri besar?", *The Nut Graph*, at: *http://www.thenutgraph.com/women-cant-become-mb/*, Accessed 1 June 2013
41. Syed Umar Ariff and Nuradilla Noorazam, "Azizah may not be MB", *New Straits Times*, 15 July 2014, at: *http://www.nst.com.my/node/13277*, Accessed 13 August 2014
42. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011

Marina's thoughts here neatly sum up the attitude of UMNO towards its women's wing over the years: there was an explicit expectation that they would stay loyal supporters of the party, rather than lead the party. I would add here that this view of the relationship of women to UMNO has been allowed to persist over the years because of a shared belief among both its male and female members in the vision of UMNO: that is, to reform the stereotype of the hapless and dependent rural Malay and help navigate, in a fast-changing world, a path for a group so crippled by colonial imagery and discourse. Women on par with men is not central to that vision: on the periphery as an optional extra to be co-opted at will, perhaps, but by no means a cornerstone.

On the other side of the political spectrum, there is little to suggest Malay-Muslim women have ever held any more power than their UMNO counterparts. In PAS, for instance, the women's wing 'remained under the firm control of the party,'[43] so that when the leadership suggested they may field 20 women candidates in the 1964 elections, there was no outcry when they did not follow through with it. Nominating women candidates continued to be a non-issue for PAS until after the 1999 elections, when BN and UMNO attempted to paint PAS as not being supportive of women's rights.[44] Since then, PAS has quickly been catching up with UMNO in terms of the number of women candidates it fields in national elections, with one political scientist writing that PAS has had 'the biggest increase over the past elections (since 1999)' in this regard.[45] Other opposition parties have also fielded some notable Malay-Muslim women candidates, including Wan Azizah and her and Anwar's daughter Nurul Izzah. Still, the prospects for women in opposition parties are not necessarily

43. Virginia H. Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 135
44. Maznah Mohamad, Cecelia Ng, and tan beng hui, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Malaysia: An Unsung (R)evolution*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 96
45. Bridget Welsh, "BN's femme fatale – the power of women", *Malaysiakini*, 27 April 2013, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/228256*, Accessed 1 June 2013

better than in UMNO, a fact that Marina attributes to wider attitudes regarding women's roles in society:

> …I would say that the opposition parties aren't actually any better (in promoting women's political participation). They might say, oh, we're all for equality and all that, but I sincerely don't think that when it comes down to it, they will actually do it. (In Parti Keadilan Rakyat, the largest component opposition party) Wan Azizah is there because she's the wife, now they're promoting daughters, but the point is they're daughters rather than the fact that they're females. And the others too, as I understand it there are a lot of problems in trying to (have) about 30 per cent of the candidates female candidates…at the grassroots level because there is always someone who says, it (the seat) should be mine, it should be mine, that sort of thing. …(There's) this attitude, one, that women can't lead, two, you put a woman there, you're going to deprive a man.[46]

Marina's quote here is significant because it points to a lack of priority afforded to gender equality within Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) In the context of PKR's reformist and modernist platform, a lack of support for women's issues can seem somewhat paradoxical, but only inasmuch as it assumed that gender is a fundamental part of that vision. In fact, even though interviewees that indicated support for the opposition often described themselves as 'progressive,' very few actually said policies on gender would influence how they voted. Where those who supported BN said they valued security, interviewees who supported PR

46. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011

instead leaned towards addressing what they saw to be divisive ethnic and religious politics in the country.

> It's true women have been left behind in the development process…
> (Gender inequality) is an important issue, but there are bigger problems in
> Malaysia. For instance, we are still divided along ethnic lines, when we go
> to schools and university, even politically. I support Pakatan (Rakyat) and
>
> movements like Bersih because they are not so focused on race.
>
> -Izzah

> As a Muslim, I believe in egality, and I don't think we've achieved that yet
> in Malaysia. Opportunities are still limited by race, religion. … I'm
> surprised that there are Muslims who actively support (BN), as they seem
> to go a lot of the values that Islam stands for.
>
> -Fatin, 38 years old

Izzah and Fatin had both attended public universities in Kuala Lumpur, and continued to reside near the city. As individuals who kept up with local political and social developments, their remarks underlie an emphasis on matters of race and religion rather than gender. Izzah clearly stated that she believed the issue of division along ethnic rather gendered lines was more important in Malaysia, whilst Fatin did not mention gender as being a factor in limiting opportunities. Interestingly, where individuals such as Shareen may have described people like Fatin as having forgotten about other members of their ethnic group, Fatin used her Islamic faith to explain her support for the opposition. For Fatin as a Muslim, it made sense

to not vote for BN, a party she saw as not being compatible with her interpretation of Islamic values. Islamic values were in fact a recurring theme in many conversations with interviewees; as I have indicated previously in this thesis, there was far more emphasis on religion than on bonds of ethnicity. When applied to the political sphere, however, this preference for a religious identity over an ethnic one resulted in some sharp differences. As an example, only one interviewee specifically mentioned race when discussing who to vote for (Sue).

5.3 Public Discourse on Malay-Muslim Womanhood

Malay-Muslim women are asked to both help recognise and advance the cause of national transformation, yet also observe persistent gendered and familial roles that will aid the Malay-Muslim identity reformation. For Malay-Muslim women who appear in the political sphere, this is typically demonstrated by their assuming a supporting role rather than that of leader, as per the gendered dichotomy that has underpinned the hypermasculinisation of Malayness. This pattern does, however, present a challenge for a party that has used women's issues to claim progressive credentials that can help move the country forward. UMNO has maintained that, under a BN government, women have been guaranteed equality and have had access to a range of opportunities, with one 2003 governmental report insisted that there were other reasons for the low numbers of women in political and corporate decision-making positions 'despite the Government's supportive policies for the advancement.'[47] Among the reasons offered in the report were that there was a shortage of qualified women willing to assume a leadership position[48] - an explanation that allowed for BN's insistence that it had

47. Rashila Ramli and Saliha Hassan, "Women and Political Development in Malaysia: New Millenium, New Politics", in Jamilah Ariffin (ed.) *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia: A Sequel*, MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd, Petaling Jaya, 2009, p. 74
48. ibid., p. 74

created opportunities for women. This explanation was repeated in 2011 when Shahrizat, defending women's wings as a platform to 'nurture' women, said that BN had always fielded women candidates, but that it was 'just not enough.'[49] Rather than examining the party structure to look for clues as to why women were choosing not to assume high-profile roles in the public sphere, BN administrations have instead taken the position that the issue was beyond their control. By bringing attention to a lack of suitable women, successive administrations have also implied that women may themselves have a role in perpetuating a cycle where men lead whilst women follow. This has doubtless been a deliberate strategy by the government to limit discussion and action on empowering women in the public sphere. Furthermore, it has allowed feminist rhetoric to be co-opted at will for a political purpose whilst letting very public examples set the standard for how women wishing to take up a position in national politics need to behave. Malay-Muslim women, more than women of any other ethnic and religious group in Malaysia, are routinely upbraided for upsetting power structures. For example, this might occur when they make decisions in their personal lives that go against Malay-Muslim femininity, or when they have a public persona that is not suitably feminine. Public discussions on social issues almost always contain a subtext that features Malay-Muslim women. As Marina explained, in these discussions Malay-Muslim women feature 'very prominently':

> For one thing, we are the majority, therefore our representation in all these
>
> issues is proportionate, if not more. I mean the drug problem (is) very
>
> Malay, the *mat rempit*[50] problem is very Malay, the single mother problem

49. Liz Gooch, "Halls of Power Narrow for Malaysian Women", *New York Times*, 28 August 2011, at: ***http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/29/world/asia/29iht-malay29.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0***, Accessed 1 June 2013
50. The term *mat rempit* is used to refer to young men involved in illegal motorcycle racing; David C.L. Lim noted that *mat rempit*, frequently conflated with *mat motor* (a typically Malay-Muslim male motorcyclist), is often thought of to be a "conceptually lower-class Malay, young, unpolished,

is very Malay. When almost all the time when you talk about this you are

talking about Malay families. …Anyone discussing these issues, you are

really talking about Malay women and their families.[51]

The focus on Malay-Muslim women is deliberate and a result of a unique combination of

factors; modern Malaysia is a country that has been heavily influenced by Malay-Muslim

nationalism and efforts to exorcise the lazy native ghost. A widespread persistent anxiety

over Malay-Muslim identity means that the special burden placed on Malay-Muslim women

to publicly perform a specific construction of femininity will remain exclusively theirs and

theirs alone.

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the private lives of Malay-Muslim women

are policed by influences such as local Islamic law and official pronouncements on the status

of women. But these influences also work to depict the political realm as undesirable for

women to aspire to. I spoke with one local activist who said she was concerned that this was

indeed a message Malay Muslim women may be imparting to their children:

…The thing that I'd really like to know is, OK, Muslim women are

bringing up their children to make sure they are educated and all of that,

but how far do they actually go to push their daughters to say, you could

potentially be a Prime Minister of this country. I think a lot of (women) do

tend to bring up their children as equals. If their daughters say they want to

become doctors, lawyers or engineers, they wouldn't say no, I don't think

masculine, and straight." David C.L. Lim, "Cruising Mat Motor: Malay biker masculinity and queer desire in/through KL Menjerit", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2006 p. 67-68
51. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011

there's any (mother who would say no) anymore. But now in terms of

leadership roles, I'd like to analyse it more. How much do we actually say

to our daughters you can potentially be Prime Minister, head of the

government.[52]

Rozana was careful to note during the interview that she thought women generally were

made the 'bearers of culture,' but that 'because of how Islam is expected to be lived in

Malaysia…you will see that (Islamic parenting is) a little bit more visible.'[53] In the above

excerpt, Rozana stated her worries that Malay-Muslim women may not be encouraging their

daughters to aspire to positions of leadership in the public sphere – possibly because of

concerns that it may conflict with Islamic teachings, and as such go against the increasingly

Islamically-tinged *Melayu Baru* ideal. Certainly, there are few examples of female leaders

that could serve as role models for young women: outspoken women leaders have always

been required to pay a penalty for their brazenness, particularly if the women are Malay and

Muslim. In the political realm, for instance, the third Kaum Ibu chief, Khatijah Sidek, was

twice expelled from UMNO after demanding in her uniquely 'combative style'[54] that UMNO

field more women candidates. Her case was useful for UMNO because it allowed them to set

a precedent for discipline and also establish that party unity had to come before all other

interests, including that of gender: despite there being some unease amongst Kaum Ibu

members, there was little protest, as per the directive of UMNO headquarters.[55] In more

recent years, yet another UMNO women's wing chief was put in her place: Rafidah Aziz's

appointment as trade minister was celebrated for many years as an example of the success

Malay women could achieve. When in 2005 she broke down in tears at a press conference

52. Rozana Isa, interview, September 2011
53. Rozana Isa, interview, September 2011
54. Virginia H. Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 99
55. ibid., p. 98

after a dispute in the media with Mahathir, an editorial cartoon in the Malay language daily *Utusan Malaysia* was quick to mock the tears of the woman it had, a year earlier, referred to as an 'iron lady.' Despite her achievements as a minister, she was, as her tears and 'melodrama' demonstrated, only a woman after all,[56] with *Utusan* cartoon clearly enjoying exposing the myth of the strong Malay woman public figure. After the next general elections, Rafidah was dropped from her trade portfolio and the cabinet, seemingly without warning. Her commenting on the development was, 'I'm a human being.'[57] One year later, she lost the leadership of the women's wing to Shahrizat. It was the latest in a long line of episodes which demonstrated that ambitious women in the public sphere can expect 'retribution.'

The standards for Malay men in politics, however, are markedly different. For instance, UMNO has had over the years its fair share of 'sex scandals,' almost always involving its male members. But for the most part, these 'sex scandals' have worked to accentuate an ideal of Malay masculinity and virility. As one scholar wrote in the context of the sodomy allegations involving Anwar:

> Heterosexual misdemeanors in the form of polygamous marriage or illicit sexual relations are considered normal for UMNO males. They may be 'immoral' but are, nevertheless, accepted as something masculine or macho, and in Malay, these are described as *bukti kejantanan* (proof of one's 'machismo').[58]

56. Imran Ho-Abdullah and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, "The semantics of gender, sexuality and women in the Malaysian editorial cartoon *Senyum Kambing*", paper presented at New Zealand Discourse Conference, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, 6-8 December 2007
57. Izatun Shari, "Wanita Umno chief not one to sulk", *The Star*, 20 March 2008, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx?file=%2f2008%2f3%2f20%2fnation%2f20703252&sec=nation*, Accessed 16 June 2013
58. Shamsul A.B. and Mohamad Fauzi bin Sukimi, "Making Sense of Malay Sexuality: An Exploration", *Sari*, Vol. 24, 2006, p. 65

There is no history of women in UMNO being permitted to get away with the odd 'misdemeanour.' In the context of the recent political 'sex scandals' and the unhappy endings vocal women politicians meet in their UMNO careers, Rozana's open query about how young Malay-Muslim women specifically view the prospect of leadership raises the issue of just what Malay-Muslim women stood for in the contemporary Malaysian political realm.

5.4 Malay-Muslim Womanhood and the Burden of Representation

There is no similar case with a Malay-Muslim woman politician that can serve as a precedent here, but the 2002 accusations that Azalina Othman, the leading candidate for the leadership of the UMNO young women's wing was a lesbian,[59] does indicate that sexual politics can be used to discredit a woman politician. In many ways, Azalina's career within UMNO serves as a stark reminder of the necessity of gender to Malay nationalist thought. Azalina first gained prominence when, after 1999, she was hand-picked by party elders to form a young women's wing, Puteri UMNO. The formation of this new wing served a few important purposes. The first being that the government was again reminded after the 1999 elections that 'women could be more trusted to be loyal voters to one party than…men.'[60] Puteri UMNO would help make sure women continued to support the party, but specifically young Malay women, since, according to one local observer, such a task could 'hardly be accomplished' by Wanita UMNO.[61] Finally, the wing would also help to present an image of a 'new Malay woman.'[62] The one area where it was easiest to challenge PAS was on women's rights, and by having

59. Maznah Mohamad, "Women's engagement with political Islam in Malaysia", *Global Change, Peace and Security*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2004, p. 139
60. ibid., p. 139
61. Marzuki Mohamad, "Malaysia's 2004 General Elections: Spectacular Victory, Continuing Tensions", *Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2004, p. 31
62. Maznah Mohamad, "Women's engagement with political Islam in Malaysia", p. 139

Puteri UMNO members serve as the face of their internal reforms, UMNO was attempting to reestablish itself as the progressive party for Malays. The 2004 polls saw BN win in a landslide. There were many factors for this, but undoubtedly the work of Puteri UMNO helped in amassing Malay support. Funston went so far as to call the formation of Puteri UMNO 'perhaps the most successful of UMNO reforms after the 1999 debacle.'[63] However, despite overseeing the establishment and growth of Puteri UMNO into a successful party mechanism, Azalina's political career quickly began to fizzle out. From the beginning, Azalina's position within Puteri UMNO had been dogged by controversy and political point scoring. The unmarried and outspoken woman was noted by political analysts as not fitting the 'traditional image of a Malay woman.'[64] Perhaps it was on this basis that Wanita UMNO appeared at first resistant to the idea of establishing a young women's wing; they initially wanted a 'club' as opposed to a separate and equal wing for young women.[65] Azalina soon gathered political enemies who appeared to want her sidelined as much as they had wanted Anwar out: the individual who first published the allegations that Azalina was a corrupt lesbian who spent taxpayers' money on her lover was former editor Khalid Jafri, the same individual who had previously authored the infamous *50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Become Prime Minister*.[66] Jafri's *50 Reasons* had been a key text in signalling the turning of the tide within UMNO against the once popular Deputy Prime Minister. Indeed, upholding the image of ideal Malay masculinity and femininity has long been a key factor to an individual's success within UMNO. After all, Anwar was not officially sacked as deputy prime minister because of his politics or policies: his fall from grace was largely due to the

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63. John Funston, "The Malay Electorate in 2004: Reversing the 1999 Result?" in Swee-Hock Saw and K. Kesavapany (eds.) *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2006, p. 149
64. Helen Ting, "Gender discourse in Malay politics", p. 91
65. Wang Lay Kim, "Ways of Seeing Malaysian Women: Sketches of Women in Magazines in The Global Age", *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 22, 2006, p. 122
66. Simon Obendorf, "Sodomy as Metaphor", in Phillip Darby (ed.) *Postcolonizing the International: Working to Change the Way We Are*, Institute of Postcolonial Studies, Melbourne, 2006, p. 194

allegation of sodomy against him, an allegation that ultimately 'tarnished the essentially masculine image of UMNO.'[67] For her part, Azalina was able to successfully her retain her leadership of the young women's wing in 2002, largely because of the support she received from Mahathir and Badawi.[68] In 2004, Azalina was promoted to Badawi's cabinet, as a Minister for Youth and Sport. But the poor showing for BN in 2008 made her position less stable, and allegations of corruption against her made her a political liability for new Prime Minister Najib. She was dropped from the cabinet shortly after he assumed the premiership. When, after the thirteenth general elections, she attacked Najib for not doing enough for women, there was no mention of corruption allegations amongst her critics – after all, corruption itself is not unheard of amongst UMNO members. It was her distinctly 'unfeminine' qualities that were the focus of attacks, with one newspaper columnist referring to her 'overly ambitious' nature.[69] In the months leading up to the thirteenth general elections, Puteri UMNO was reported to be 'intensifying' efforts to 'woo' voters.[70] All the signs appeared to point to Puteri UMNO being regarded by party elders the same way they regarded Wanita UMNO: as ultimately, voter recruitment. The message to women, carefully cultivated over many decades through countless examples, was: if they wanted to leave their allocated space, the private sphere, and venture into public life, they had to be prepared to preserve the masculine/feminine dichotomy – and especially so if they were Malay-Muslim women.

67. Shamsul A.B. and Mohamad Fauzi bin Sukimi, "Making Sense of Malay Sexuality", p. 66
68. Maznah Mohamad, "Women's engagement with political Islam in Malaysia", p. 139
69. Paul Sir, "Azalina is wrong, PM has done his best for Malaysian women", *The Borneo Post*, 6 July 2013, at: *http://www.theborneopost.com/2013/07/06/azalina-is-wrong-pm-has-done-his-best-for-malaysian-women/*, Accessed 26 June 2013
70. Bernama, "Puteri Umno to approach fence sitters", *New Straits Times*, 28 November 2012, at: *http://www.nst.com.my/nation/umno/puteri-umno-to-approach-fence-sitters-1.177932*, Accessed 26 June 2013

In this respect, the initial name of Wanita UMNO – Kaum Ibu UMNO – clearly reflects the early development of Malay nationalist gender discourse. According to Noraini Abdullah, the official use of the term 'Kaum Ibu' meant that, 'both symbolically and psychologically, (it) tended to denote a manifestly narrow meaning for its members'[71] – one that emphasised the centrality of motherhood to a new Malay womanhood, and clarified the roles for and positions of women in Malay nationalism. The name itself was a key step by the emerging Malay nationalist institution UMNO to firmly establish a division of a public sphere ruled by men and a private sphere ruled by women in the Malay nationalist political lexicon: women who wanted to aspire to leadership were always certain as where their foremost priorities should lie. However, in what would later be echoed in discussions regarding the formation of Puteri UMNO, there was some concern that the women's wing was not as inclusive as it could be, and that this was largely due to the literal meaning of the wing's name. Concern about possible limitations within the name had first been raised in the very early days of the Kaum Ibu.[72] But by 1964, UMNO was looking to attract more urban women to its ranks;[73] the backbone of the group's membership base was undoubtedly rural Malay women, but the involvement of other women was seen as key to 'energising' the wing and possibly providing future leaders.[74] Some members suggested than a name change may help to project a more 'age-neutral and less matronly' image[75] that could help draw in the targeted group. In 1964, a motion to change the name sparked much debate, with the concepts of Malay femininity and the question of UMNO as a rural or urban-based party coming into the fray. Manderson shared the views of one contemporary local newspaper on the proposed name change:

71. Noraini Abdullah, "Women's Participation in the Political Development Process in Malaysia", in Jamilah Ariffin (ed.) *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia*, MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd, Petaling Jaya, 1994, p. 102
72. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 98
73. Noraini Abdullah, "Women's Participation in the Political Development Process in Malaysia", p. 102
74. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 98
75. Rashila Ramli and Saliha Hassan, "Women and Political Development in Malaysia", p. 77

To the mother in the *kampong*, Malay womanhood is typified by the shy wife, clad in her modest sarong, baju kurong and the traditional headdress, who goes about her daily business in the kitchen, tending to the needs of her husband and her family without much interest for the glamour of modern life. …Kaum Ibu has presented this image of Malay womanhood throughout the years and it has brought the party votes and victory to the polls. A precipitate change could be destructive.[76]

A particular image of Malay womanhood, it was suggested, was a key component of UMNO's image as a 'protector of the Malays.' This, in turn, was understood to inform its base appeal. Malay femininity was understood to be typified best by the image of mother: nurturing and always supportive of her family, the future of the nation. If her family was meant to stand for progression, then the role of a woman was to serve as a symbol of continuity, a link between the traditions of the past and the promises of the future. To borrow the words of Yuval-Davis, this was their 'burden of representation,'[77] so that Malay mothers were the symbol of Malay collectivity. This concept of motherhood has, therefore, always been pivotal to UMNO's efforts to establish itself as the party for Malays and hence the organisation which could be entrusted to rebuild Malay esteem. It was partly for this reason that the motion to change the name of UMNO's women's wing was quietly dropped in 1965: the imagery of motherhood was seen as too important for the cause of Malay nationalism to totally dispense with. However, concerns about building up an urban membership base continued. Kaum Ibu leaders thought that an increase in 'educated women' members would

76. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 99
77. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 45

increase the political clout of the wing, as 'the problems of the appointment of a woman

minister who had calibre would not arise,'[78] and in 1971, a change of name to 'Wanita

UMNO' was finally approved by both a special delegates' assembly and the UMNO Supreme

Council.

The name change, however, did not result in a new influx of 'intellectuals.'[79] It also did not

result in Wanita UMNO having any more influence on the UMNO Supreme Council, not

even in the longer term. Instead, the pattern of the women's wing canvassing votes for the

party and supporting the (male) party leadership continued. Even the theme of appealing to a

new generation of voters remained, as evidenced by the discussion surrounding the formation

of Puteri UMNO. Despite this formal break by UMNO with the image of mothering, little

had changed in terms of women's imagery in the public sphere. In fact, the outcome of the

thirteenth general elections appeared to precipitate a turn of events that would see Wanita

UMNO's imagery of women come full circle: after the thirteenth general elections, Azalina

announced that she would be challenging Shahrizat for the Wanita UMNO leadership, saying

that change was necessary to ensure UMNO's survival at the next general elections.[80] Najib

made clear he didn't support Azalina's move for change, by appointing Shahrizat as advisor

to the Prime Minister, and there were indications that other Wanita UMNO leaders felt the

same way. Wanita UMNO information chief Hamidah Osman, for instance, described

Azalina as 'too alien' to be a leader.[81] Azalina had, from the onset of her candidacy,

anticipated she would be viewed as an outsider, telling one interviewer how her status as an

78. Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change*, p. 103
79. ibid., p. 102
80. Stephanie Sta Maria, "Azalina: This isn't a comeback, it's progression", *The Edge*, 26 July 2013, at: ***http://www.theedgemalaysia.com/highlights/247754-highlight-azalina-this-isnt-a-comeback-its-progression.html***, Accessed 8 January 2014
81. Bernama, "Azalina 'too alien' to lead Wanita Umno, info chief says", *The Malay Mail Online*, 9 September 2013, at:***http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/azalina-too-alien-to-lead-wanita-umno-info-chief-says***, Accessed 10 January 2014

unmarried woman made it easier for others to pick on her.82 Azalina eventually withdrew her

challenge, but the essence of her earlier remarks about her femininity continued to

reverberate throughout the leadership contest. When Shahrizat did eventually win the

leadership over two other challengers, it was allegedly after sending a message to voting

division heads where she spoke of her ties with her family, preparing food, and how she

would continue to pray for Wanita UMNO's future.83 Shahrizat's conformity to UMNO's

idealised Malay-Muslim femininity, coupled with her position as a defender of UMNO's

status quo, were therefore instrumental in her victory, whereas Azalina's entry into the

contest caused internal consternation mainly due to her talk of change and her 'suitability.'

Fresh from winning the leadership on the basis of her feminine attributes, Shahrizat soon

began a campaign during that year's UMNO general assembly to have Wanita UMNO's

contributions 'recognised,' although inevitably in distinctly feminine and supportive terms:

> After 66 years of women's struggle in UMNO, I insist for the contribution
>
> and sacrifice of Wanita UMNO to be recognised accordingly... It is time for
>
> Wanita UMNO to be recognised as the core, the backbone of UMNO, and
>
> not one of the three wings in UMNO anymore... I want to tell the Supreme
>
> Council delegates, if the women did not give them all this (their support),
>
> don't even dream of it.84

82. Stephanie Sta Maria, "Azalina"
83. New Straits Times, "WANITA: Shahrizat's win creates history", *New Straits Times*, 13 October 2013, at: ***http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/wanita-shahrizat-s-win-creates-history-1.374837***, Accessed 10 January 2014
84. Zurairi AR, "Wanita Umno chief seeks meatier role for 'mother'", *The Malay Mail Online*, 4 December 2013, at: ***http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/wanita-umno-chief-seeks-meatier-role-for-mother***, Accessed 10 January 2014

Shahrizat had previously been reluctant to criticise the party leadership for the lack of opportunities for women within UMNO; yet part of her speech here was aimed at the Supreme Council, suggesting that they had failed to properly acknowledge the role that women's support had played in their being in their present positions. Referring to Wanita UMNO's long history with the party, Shahrizat also bluntly stated that without Wanita UMNO the party would have had to 'close shop,' suggesting that according Wanita UMNO proper recognition was critical to UMNO's success in future elections; it deserved a position more in line with its history as 'mother' rather than being accorded as a wing as one of the 'children' of UMNO. Although such strong sentiment against UMNO was rare for Shahrizat, it was not completely unexpected; she had, in October, told an interviewer she wanted to 'convince the UMNO president' to acknowledge Wanita UMNO as the backbone of the party so as to 'create a mental shift for' and help empower women.[85] In any case, the day after Shahrizat's speech, Najib said in a speech at the UMNO general assembly that he had heard and considered 'the demand':

> ...When I thought about it, I realised that the role and persistence of Wanita UMNO in the party should be highly appreciated and honoured. Hence, I officially declare the Wanita UMNO movement as the backbone or the mother of the party. Thank you Wanita!

Najib's words here emphasised the centrality of women to UMNO; earlier in this chapter, I mentioned how Onn had also done so decades earlier. It was in essence the same message that had been so often repeated over time, however, on this occasion it both invoked the

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85. Shahanaaz Habib, "Wanita Umno wing determined to break the glass ceiling", *The Star*, 27 October 2013, at: ***http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/10/27/Determined-to-break-the-glass-ceiling/***, Accessed 10 January 2014

motherly image that had once been thought as crucial to UMNO's electoral success, and also further formalised the symbolic gendered pyramid in UMNO by referring to Wanita UMNO as the 'backbone.'[86] Despite the recycled content, Najib was promptly hailed by Shahrizat as having 'courage, mission and vision,' with Shahrizat adding that the date should be remembered as a historical day for Malaysian women.[87] The efforts that had gone into broadening the appeal of UMNO's women's wing appeared to have been for nought; the 2013 Wanita UMNO leadership contest and Najib's announcement brought the purpose of the wing back full circle, in emphasising the importance of Malay-Muslim mothering to UMNO's work and as a means to furthering Malay hegemony.

86. Karen Arukesamy, "Najib: Wanita is the backbone of UMNO", *The Sun Daily*, 5 December 2013, at: ***http://www.thesundaily.my/news/898223***, Accessed 10 January 2014
87. Bernama, "Shahrizat: Recognition a gift for women", *New Straits Times*, 5 December 2013, at: ***http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/shahrizat-recognition-a-gift-for-women-1.422592***, Accessed 10 January 2014

Chapter Six – Gender and the Ummah in Malaysia

6.1 The Melayu Baru and the Ummah

The expansion of the Islamisation/hypermasculinisation project in Malaysia has involved an increasing articulation of the *ummah* as the end goal, with particular attention being paid to defining an ideal citizen of the *ummah*. One of Mahathir's earlier moves in his administration's attempts to manage the Islamisation of the country was the establishment of an International Islamic University (known today as the International Islamic University Malaysia or IIUM) in 1983. As a concept, the university was widely understood to be one which would appeal mostly to the Malay-Muslim population. There were, at the time, some grumblings that the university's establishment was unfair since the government had not allowed the creation of a Chinese Merdeka University.[1] In fact, there had long been pressure for the creation of an Islamic university,[2] including from the influential student group ABIM.[3] Mahathir's hopes for the university, though, were not just confined to the effects it might have on the country; he envisioned it having a profound effect on Muslim societies worldwide. In 1993, on the tenth anniversary of the university's founding, Mahathir explained to his audience:

> Those in the university, whether academics or students, have a heavy
> responsibility. You are part of the struggle to restore Islam, to restore the
> faith, to restore the respect and the dignity of Islam and to reinstate the role
> of the *ummah* in wordily affairs. You have to do this without neglecting the

1. Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, "The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia: Discipline through Islam", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 1983-1984, p. 640
2. William R. Roff, "Patterns of islamisation in Malaysia, 1890s-1990s: Exemplars, Institutions, and Vectors", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1998, p. 219
3. Judith Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revival in Malaysia", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 1980, p. 410

akhirah. You always have to achieve a balance between the two. This, after all, is not just any university. *This is an Islamic university. It has a duty to Islam and the Muslim* ummah. *And you have a duty to Islam and the Muslim* ummah (italics mine).[4]

Mahathir had written, earlier, in *The Challenge* of the positive influence that Islam had on the development of a civilisation. His speech here appeared to further demonstrate the strength of that conviction, and do so in a way that continued with the theme of uplifting the nation that Mahathir frequently visited in his speeches. A couple of years before giving his IIUM anniversary address, Mahathir had begun to articulate the *Melayu Baru* discourse when he spoke, in a speech to prominent local businessmen, of the necessity of a 'mental revolution and cultural transformation' amongst Bumiputeras, stating that otherwise the nation's progress would be 'retarded.'[5] In his IIUM address that celebrated a largely Malay-Muslim institution, the script remained unchanged: whilst not calling specifically for a revolution, he did emphasise the necessity of 'skills and knowledge'[6] to strengthen what he said was obviously a weakened global community.[7] The parallels between the *Melayu Baru* discourse and his call for IIUM students and staff to remember their duty to the *ummah* were no accident; the figures in these two gradually merging discourses were meant to be interchangeable and ultimately the same. Mahathir further solidified the link between the two when he declared in 2000 that 'the NEP is almost synonymous with enhancing the economic status of the *ummah* in Malaysia.'[8] The *Melayu Baru* figure, the embodiment of NEP success, was an exemplary citizen of the *ummah*, and would possess typical *Melayu Baru*

4. Mahathir Mohamad, *Islam and the Muslim Ummah: Selected Speeches of Dr Mahathir Mohamad*, Pelanduk Publications (M) Sdn Bhd, Subang Jaya, 2001, p. 243-244
5. Terence Chong, "The Construction of the Malaysian Malay Middle Class", p. 577
6. Mahathir Mohamad, *Islam and the Muslim Ummah*, p. 241
7. ibid., p. 240
8. ibid., p. 53

characteristics. The Mahathir-overseen Islamisation of the country was thus cyclical in nature, reflecting the place of Islam in the reformation of the Malay character, and also incorporating a very localised construction of a global ideal.

Whenever Mahathir spoke on the *ummah*, there remained clear references to some of his earlier writings about the past of and challenges facing the Malays. He was, for instance, critical of Muslims in the present day who were 'less tolerant' and and less willing to study the works of non-Muslim scholars than 'the Muslims of the Golden Age of Islam.'[9] According to Mahathir's earlier writings Islam had once upon a time been a positive force for the Malays, but the insular nature of Malays, and the rural Malays in particular, had negated any benefits. In the context of the way forward for the *ummah*, Mahathir repeatedly made it clear that he did not view an insular Islamisation as desirable, and so set up a prototype for the rest of the *ummah* to ensure that Islamisation in Malaysia fitted with the model of progressiveness he had envisioned as necessary for the well-being of the Malays. Islamisation in Malaysia was cast as being 'at home with global capitalism,' as Malaysia sought to give an Islamic character to the non-Muslim world's economic ideas, knowledge and skills[10]. The IIUM was established, as was an Islamic bank, and an Islamic office within the Prime Minister's department to advise the Prime Minister on the Islamisation policy. Ong even referred to Kuala Lumpur as 'a centre for enlightened Islamic capitalism.'[11] The transition of Malaysia into a model of Islamic capitalism was meant to serve as a deliberate rebuke to colonial constructions of Malayness. Chandra describing Islamisation thus:

9. ibid., p. 47
10. Aihwa Ong, "Muslim feminism: Citizenship in the shelter of corporatist Islam", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1999, p. 366
11. ibid., p. 366

The *emasculation* of non-Western cultures … (has) helped to spawn mass

religious movements which are often opposed to Western cultural and

political hegemony (italics mine).[12]

Chandra's usage of the term *emasculation* to explain Islamisation as a response to Western

hegemony is revealing; it frames the loss of power in gendered terminology so that the

solution to this predicament necessitates a gendered approach. It also serves to construct a

national collective identity as an inherently masculine one. The latter point in particular is a

position that Kristeva has detailed as being key to how peoples may relate to one another:[13]

collectives are masculinised as a means of defining power. Indeed, both Chandra's use of

emasculation to discuss a rejection of Western hegemony by 'mass religious movements' and

Kristeva's point about the masculinity of collective identities tie in with the gendered view

Mahathir himself had of the *ummah*: Mahathir repeatedly referred to the 'brotherhood' of the

ummah,[14] and its subjects as 'brothers.'[15] For instance, in 2000 Mahathir delivered a speech

at a seminar on Islamic law, touching on unity in the *ummah* whilst making clear he regarded

the community of believers as a masculine construct:

…whereas Islam enjoins the brotherhood of the Muslim *ummah*, most

Muslims would find any number of reasons for not regarding other

Muslims as their brothers. Indeed they are likely to emphasise the minor

differences between them or to declare that other professed Muslims are

not Muslims in order to justify the enmity and rejection of brotherliness.[16]

12. Chandra Muzaffar, "Power and Dialogue - Asymmetries in the Global Intercultural Dialogue",
paper presented at the conference Visions 2000, House of World Cultures, Berlin, 2000
13. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991
14. Mahathir Mohamad, *Islam and the Muslim Ummah*, p. 27; .ibid*.,* p. 132; .ibid., p. 161
15. ibid., p. 27
16. ibid, p. 27

The construction of the *ummah* as a masculinised space occurred in other Muslim-majority countries, too; Fatema Mernissi, for instance, first writing in 1975 of Islamic revivalism in Morocco, referred to the *ummah* as 'a society of male citizens who possessed, among other things, the female half of the population.'[17] Mernissi explains this to be a result of 'the territoriality of Muslim sexuality' that 'reflects a specific division of labour and a specific conception of society and power.'[18] She traced this effect back to the time of the Prophet, arguing that he 'saw the tightly controlled patriarchal family as necessary to the creation of the (*ummah*).'[19] In the Malaysian context, though, I would argue that rather than tracing back the gendered foundations of a society back to the time of the Prophet, such a gendered approach to constructing the *ummah* can be understood by considering Islamisation under Mahathir. The hypermasculine essence of Islamisation in Malaysia was routinely drawn upon by local politicians and academics alike, so that the circularity of Mahathir-overseen Islamisation and the close relationship between the *Melayu Baru* and the ideal citizen of the *ummah* was also repeatedly evoked. The problems, then, of the *ummah* and the Malays were both understood through a gendered lens, and were both viewed to be so fundamentally similar in nature that the solution was inevitably made out to be the same too: a good dose of hypermasculinisation was needed for both the Malays and the *ummah.* The development of a masculinised *ummah* thus allowed for the rehabilitation-cum-reformation of Malayness to be packaged as part of a wider narrative. Chandra made reference to it in the earlier excerpt: the rescue of the wider Islamic community, a bloc that had suffered at the hands of Western hegemony. Riaz Hassan explained how vague understandings of the term *ummah* 'allows Muslim leaders and ideologues to manipulate its meaning and usage' to suit their own

17. Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*, Saqi Books, London, 1985, p. 186
18. ibid., p. 186
19. ibid., p. 95

agendas.[20] In Malaysia, the *ummah* has been developed as an ideal to soothe the still raw wounds of colonialism/emasculation. By virtue of the perceived need to defeminise Malayness, the *ummah* as the way forward for the Malays was constructed and presented in Malaysia as fundamentally androcentric in nature.

In the conflation of a Malay-Muslim struggle with that of the wider *ummah*, the question of Malaysia's position within the *ummah* inevitably comes up. When speaking on the affairs of the *ummah*, Mahathir spoke of cooperation and inclusivity amongst Muslim nations, with his 'Cooperation for Growth' speech at the 1997 inaugural summit for the Group of Eight Islamic Developing Countries serving as a typical example of this.[21] His willingness to stand up to an 'oppressive' West,[22] and active championing of pressing issues in the Muslim world, saw him become a respected figure for many Muslims around the world. Mahathir was not one to back down, and had no qualms about openly criticising what he saw as the flaws of Western society. Exchanges such as the following clearly outlined how he saw the Western model of development as being unsuitable for Malaysia and the Islamic world:

> STEPHEN SACKUR: You're not anti-Western, and yet in June 2003 before you left office, you said Anglo-Saxon Europeans are essentially proponents, and I'm quoting here, 'proponents of war, sodomy and genocide.'
>
> MAHATHIR: Which is true, you must admit.
>
> SACKUR: But you're not anti-Western?

20. Riaz Hassan, "Globalisation's Challenge to the Islamic *Ummah*", *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2006, p. 312
21. Mahathir Mohamad, *Islam and the Muslim Ummah*, p. 137
22. Sven Alexander Schottman, "God helps those who help themselves: Islam according to Mahathir Mohamad". *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2013, p. 66

MAHATHIR: I'm stating the fact. This is their character and I will continue to say so.

SACKUR: So when you come here, you sit in the Hardtalk studio, in the heart of London, you regard yourself do you, as in one of the headquarters of war, sodomy and genocide?

MAHATHIR: Well, I come here of course, expecting to be lambasted by you, because that is the way you work.

SACKUR: Well, I'm not lambasting you at all. I'm trying to tease out whether you believe it was a mistake for you to use this sort of language. Because you clearly cut yourself off, from any sort of meaningful dialogue with the West when you use these words.

MAHATHIR: Well, the Europeans used to call us the lazy Malays, the incompetent Malays, untrustworthy Malays, we couldn't say a thing about you. So when I was in a position to say what we think about you, and I said it, and you didn't like it. When you said it to us, you expect us to like it. We didn't like it, but we had no way of making our voices heard.[23]

The above extract comes from an interview Mahathir did for the BBC program *Hardtalk*, and took place after Mahathir left office. When interviewer Stephen Sackur challenged one of Mahathir's descriptions of Western values, Mahathir responded with a discussion of colonial constructions of Malayness. Sackur attempted to argue the point that Mahathir's language alienated the West; Mahathir, instead, contended that it was the other way around, that the West had initially done the alienating with the first exchange of essentialist categorisations.

[23] Chedet2, "Mahathir – Hard Talk Part 2", *YouTube*, 7 December 2009, at: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psjDoIMn7dc**, Accessed 25 June 2018

Later in the interview, Sackur brought up Mahathir's speech at the 2003 Organisation of Islamic Countries in which he had stated that that Jews 'rule the world by proxy' and that 1.3 billion Muslims 'cannot be defeated by a few million Jews'; Mahathir's comments were roundly condemned as anti-Semitic by the European Union, as well as Australia and the United States, but many representatives from Muslim-majority countries, including those from Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Somalia and Yemen, stated that there was nothing racist about the speech. In the interview with Sackur, Mahathir defended his speech as 'stating facts'; throughout the interview, Mahathir's frequent reference to facts and truth in his representations of particular communities echoed his own candour on the subject of Malayness. Where Mahathir's forthrightness was justified as being necessary in empowering the Malays, so too was it understood as being beneficial to the *ummah*; an article in the IIUM journal *Intellectual Discourse* referred to Mahathir as 'one of the true visionaries of the (contemporary) age,' citing amongst other reasons his 'endless efforts to serve the Muslim *ummah*' and also his '(call for) Muslim countries to embrace modernity.'[24] In 2001, the *New Straits Times* carried an article first published in the British publication *Q-News - The Muslim Magazine* that spoke of Malaysia's unique place among Muslim countries, and also the country's (and Mahathir's) 'ascendancy into the leadership of the *ummah*.'[25] In Malaysia, there was a growing sense that a measure of Mahathirist-style modernisation had given the country, but specifically the Malays as Muslims, a new relevance on the global stage. His prototype of an ideal, modern-day Muslim nation - and that this relevance was the final step in the process of a hypermasculinised Malay identity reformation.

24. Muhammad Shahriar Haque and Mahmud Hasan Khan, "Muslim Identity in the Speeches of Mahathir Mohamad", *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2004, p. 184
25. Fuad Nahdi, "Global ummah leader", *New Straits Times*, 13 December 2001, p. F11, at: ***https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=x8G803Bi31IC&dat=20011213&printsec=frontpage&hl=en***, Accessed 25 June 2018

6.2 Malaysian Womanhood and the Ummah

In 2004, Najib wrote about the potential for Malaysia to be a leader in the *ummah*: '…if we extrapolate the Malaysia experience to the OIC, perhaps we can move forward. Like Malaysia, the OIC is a diverse entity, yet united in its faith in Allah S.W.T. Malaysia has defied its critics, so must the OIC.'[26] Najib's declaration that Malaysia had much to impart to the OIC was certainly no departure from Mahathir's rhetoric on Malaysia's position within the OIC, but I note it now for two particular reasons: firstly, because it ties in with Najib's later promotion of women's contributions to not only Malaysia, but also a wider Islamic community (I will further elaborate on this point in due course); and secondly, because in this same publication within which Najib's assertion was made, was an article by Mohamad Abu Bakar arguing that even with an Islamic revivalism 'in vogue,' Islam did not occupy a central positioning in Malaysian foreign policy.[27] Mohamad did, however, allow room for conjecture that Malaysia may in the future 'place a greater emphasis on Islam in international relations,'[28] noting, for instance, that Kuala Lumpur had been 'forced to adopt a more pro-Islamic stance in international relations' following the domestic politics of the 1959 general elections.[29] Farish has also observed the link between Islam, foreign policy and Malaysian domestic politics, detailing how PAS' criticisms of, and students' disenchantment with, the pro-Western government helped to fuel the *dakwah* decade.[30] For Mohamad, though, one key potential driver in the centralising of Islam to Malaysian foreign policy was development:

26. Najib Razak, "Foreword" in Abdul Razak Baginda (ed.) *Malaysia and the Islamic World*, ASEAN Academic Press, London, 2004
27. Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islam in Malaysia's Foreign Policy: The First Three Decades (1957-1987)" in Abdul Razak Baginda (ed.) *Malaysia and the Islamic World*, ASEAN Academic Press, London, 2004, p. 17
28. ibid., p. 29
29. ibid., p. 29
30. Farish Noor, "The One-Dimensional Malay"

With the expansion of Islamic projects, including the building of new

mosques and opening of Islamic centres, Kuala Lumpur may have to turn

more often to the Muslim Middle East for help. *In the process it may have*

to increase its espousal of Islam at the international level, in order to

appear more Islamic (italics mine).[31]

The more Malaysia attempted to establish itself as an Islamic state, the more likely it would

seek expertise in doing so from the Middle East; and, Mohamad argued, such a process might

result in Malaysia adopting a more Islamic aspect. Mohamad's argument is one which might

not gel completely with the notion of Malaysia as a leader in the *ummah*: Mahathir would

bluntly speak of Muslims throughout the *ummah* that had 'retarded the rehabilitation of the

Muslim *ummah*,'[32] and as this chapter has already detailed, both Mahathir and Najib clearly

saw the potential of Malaysia to be a role model to other Muslim countries. Rather, perhaps

any efforts of Malaysia to appear more Islamic might be a part of its ambition to be regarded

as a leader in the *ummah*. In point of fact, the same 2004 publication that carried the writings

of Najib and Mohamad also had a chapter in which the author argued that since the country's

independence, Islam been an important part of Malaysian foreign policy,[33] and that as such:

…Malaysia's deft use of Islam in its foreign policy has not only reaped

moral and material rewards in terms of respect, investment and assistance

from the wealthier members of the Muslim world, but also increased

acceptance among the *ummah* and the non-Muslim world as a potential

31. Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islam in Malaysia's Foreign Policy", p. 30
32. Mahathir Mohamad, *Islam and the Muslim Ummah,* p. 41
33. Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen Shaikh Mohd Salleh Suzalie Mohamad, "Malaysia and the OIC" in
Abdul Razak Baginda (ed.) *Malaysia and the Islamic World*, ASEAN Academic Press, London, 2004,
p. 81

model and leader that could lead the *ummah* out of its present state of

weakness and disunity in the new millennium.[34]

In Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen's view, Malaysia's skilful cultivation of itself as a country that

used Islamic principles to help shape its foreign policy and outlook was the reason it had the

potential to lead the *ummah*. There was, then, something after all to the Mahathirist increased

emphasis on an Islamic identity: combined with the significance accorded to the concept of

modernity, it allowed for the construction of a narrative where Malaysia featured as a

respected pioneer of Islamic modernity in the global Muslim brotherhood.

The development of a local narrative of Malaysia as a leader in the Islamic brotherhood runs

parallel to the entrenchment of hypermasculinity in contemporary discourse on Malayness -

mostly stemming from the role of gender in constituting local conceptualisations of both the

ummah and Malayness. Where reforming Malayness involved an erasure of colonial-era

associations of femininity, Malaysia as a global force within the *ummah* involved attaining a

high level of credibility and authority within an androcentric community - and where women

had been a symbol for Malay nationalist aspirations, so too did Malay-Muslim womanhood

become a site for Malaysian aspirations to lead the *ummah* by way of emphasising its Islamic

identity. Leading the *ummah* was after all, as I have detailed previously in this chapter, a

natural outcome of the Islamisation/hypermasculinisation process. Where UMNO was able to

use contesting ideologies of Malay-Muslim womanhood to attack PAS, so too was the

Malaysian government able to use Malay-Muslim womanhood to demonstrate that the

country was indeed an Islamic state. In recent years, legal safeguards for Muslim women

have been eroded with the apparent purpose of 'standardising' Islam throughout the country.

34. Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen Shaikh Mohd Salleh Suzalle Mohamad, "Malaysia and the OIC", p. 82

The result has been minimal fuss from government ministers over cases that represent an increasingly Islamic legal system and that also, by chance, disadvantage Muslim women. This unique policing of Malay-Muslim women has been noted by women's activists in the country, with Marina using the term 'apartheid' to refer to the two-tiered legal system that can see Muslim women judged by different laws from non-Muslim women. Yet this uncomfortable aspect of gender inequality was one the Malaysian government remained largely officially oblivious too. Indeed, where Najib utilised a platform of women's empowerment in an attempt to rebrand the struggling BN as a party of progress and wide appeal, he also used the issue to establish himself as a progressive statesman across both the non-Muslim and Muslim world. At the 2013 Women Deliver Global Conference, he spoke of improved opportunities for Malaysian women and girls and touched on how his then newly re-elected government would continue to empower women and girls as a part of the country's development.[35] A few months later, Najib would again reference the importance of empowering women, though this time in address to the World Islamic Economic Forum, and in the context of the economic prosperity of Muslim countries.[36] Despite Malay-Muslim women being accorded a position as a symbol of progress in nation-building rhetoric, it remained clear, as the case studies in this chapter will represent, that the hypermasculinisation of Malay identity meant that the Malay-Muslim male was very much occupying a position of privilege; and that those who questioned this privileged position of the Malay-Muslim male would pay a very dear penalty.

35. Najib Razak, "3rd Global Conference on Women Deliver 2013", *Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia*, 28 May 2013, at: *http://www.pmo.gov.my/?menu=speech&page=1676&news_id=653&speech_cat=2*, Accessed 26 June 2014
36. Shane Croucher, "Malaysian PM Najib Razak: Islamic World's Economic Prosperity Depends on Female Equality", *International Business Times*, 29 October 2013, at: *http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/malaysia-najib-razak-wief-islam-womens-rights-517957*, Accessed 26 June 2014

Coinciding with attempts to fashion Malaysia as a pinnacle in the *ummah* was an increasing

prescription for the embodiment of Muslim identity in Malaysia. Khoo Gaik Cheng observed

that in Malaysia, the state favours Muslim identity 'because Islam organises, constrains and

disciplines the "lazy" Malay body, turning it into a docile and productive labour for a stable

capitalist economy eager to attract foreign investment.'[37] Since the mid-1990s, a globalised

image of Malaysian womanhood been closely monitored by local Islamic authorities in order

to distinguish between Malaysian Islamic womanhood, and Malaysian non-Islamic

womanhood; ultimately, the contest over Islamic and non-Islamic womanhood in Malaysia

has helped to further accentuate the new Islamic face of Malaysia and its leaders.

Worryingly, despite initial signs of dismay from UMNO leaders, there have in recent times

been hints that the distinction between Islamic and non-Islamic womanhood is slowly

eroding with, at best, UMNO's inaction, and at worst, their support. In 1997, officials from

the Federal Territories Islamic Affairs Department (JAWI) stepped on-stage towards the end

of a beauty pageant and, in full view of the audience and television cameras, arrested three

Muslim contestants. The women were arrested under a then little-known 1995 *shariah*

enactment that allowed for prosecutions based on local Islamic authorities' *fatwas* (religious

edicts).[38] They were subsequently charged with and convicted of indecent exposure - there

existed a *fatwa* that banned Muslim women from taking part in beauty pageants.[39] Many

Malaysians were taken aback by this development: beauty contests had helped to launch the

careers of several local actresses and models, including Muslims such as radio presenter

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37. Khoo Gaik Cheng, "Reading the films of independent filmmaker Yasmin Ahmad: cosmopolitanism, Sufi Islam and Malay subjectivity" in Daniel Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Khoo Gaik Cheng (eds.) *Race and Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, United Kingdom, 2009, p. 202
38. Roger Mitton, "Islam Calling: A compulsory course and a beauty contest ban worry non-Muslims", *Asiaweek.com*, July 18 1997, at: *http://edition.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/97/0718/nat4.html*, Accessed 14 July 2014
39. Zainah Anwar, "Modern, and Moderate, Islam: One Muslim's view of the new national challenge", *Asiaweek.com*, September 19 1997, at: *http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/97/0919/nat6.html*, Accessed 14 July 2014

Yasmin Yusoff, the 1978 Miss Malaysia Universe representative, and Erra Fazira, the 1992 Miss Malaysia World whowent on to appear in several local popular films. There was some speculation about the timing of the event because the arrests took place during a period when Mahathir was on leave and his then-deputy Anwar was running the country. Mahathir described the arrests as extreme and the work of 'people who want to show their power.'[40] The public outcry, reflected in the national media's coverage of the issue, led Zainah to conclude at the time that 'obscuritanism has little resonance among the educated, modern middle class of Malaysia.'[41] Nonetheless, the arrests also revealed the potential political danger involved in openly questioning the actions of local Islamic authorities. Mahathir was criticised by local Muslim leaders following his rebuke of the Islamic authorities. The then Selangor State Mufti Ishak Baharum quoted in the PAS newspaper *Harakah* as saying that an individual who rejected religious rulings was an apostate.[42] It was a dangerous allegation to be making against the Prime Minister, and the government moved quickly to contain it. A government minister denied that the mufti had said the Prime Minister was not a Muslim, and said that the *Harakah* report was incorrect. Obscurantism might have started the saga, but as a result of the arrests, two things had become abundantly clear: firstly, that the imagery associated with womanhood was now being strictly policed, so that that there was a clear distinction between the image and clothes that were allowed to be publicly associated with Muslim and non-Muslim women. There would be no 'image policing' for men: as Zainah noted, a few days after the arrests, the Mr Malaysia contest was televised, with none of the participating Muslim men - appearing 'in the skimpiest of swimming trunks' - arrested for

40. Michael Richardson, "In Malaysia, Pressure Builds Over Enforcement of Islamic Laws", *The New York Times*, August 18 1997, at: ***https://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/18/news/in-malaysia-pressure-builds-over-enforcement-of-islamic-laws.html***, Accessed 25 June 2018
41. Zainah Anwar, "Modern, and Moderate, Islam"
42. Norani Othman, "Islamization and democratization in Malaysia in regional and global contexts" in Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K. Mandal (eds.) *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 132

indecency.[43] Secondly, and perhaps, more crucially for the purposes of establishing a hierarchy within the Islamisation/hypermasculinisation process of the country, questioning an individual's religiosity was a valid method of discrediting that individual and also silencing them. Advocating for a Muslim woman's autonomy - something that was undoubtedly different from that of a Muslim male's - would need to be done carefully, so as to avoid any accusation of apostasy.

The case's lessons were to reverberate for the UMNO elite: when the issue of Muslim women participating in beauty pageants again came up a decade and a half later, the response of government officials and the national press was rather muted compared with the 1997 outcry. In July 2013, four Muslim contestants were disqualified from the Miss Malaysia World pageant on the basis that Muslim women were not allowed to take part in beauty contests;[44] it was a decision that was later upheld by JAWI, with its director Che Mat Che Ali calling the pageant organiser to inform her that the women could not take part.[45] None of the UMNO elite criticised JAWI's role in this particular affair; indeed, Azalina, one of the few UMNO politicians to go on the record about the case, criticised the affected contestants: 'The girls shouldn't have joined in the first place. The ruling has been known for the past few years... They should also have been more sensitive. It is a sensitive environment right now especially during the fasting month.'[46] When some of the disqualified contestants expressed

43. Zainah Anwar, "What Islam, Whose Islam? Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Women's Rights" in Robert W. Hefner (ed.) *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia*, University of Hawaii Press, United States of America, 2009, p. 239
44. Victoria Brown, "The girls behind the Miss Malaysia World controversy", *The Star*, July 25 2013, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/07/25/Miss-world-malaysia-profile/*, Accessed 15 July 2014
45. Keshia Mahmood, "End of road for Muslim Miss Malaysia hopefuls", *The Malay Mail Online*, July 30 2013, at: *http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/end-of-road-for-muslim-miss-malaysia-hopefuls*, Accessed 15 July 2014
46. Victoria Brown, "Organiser regrets ban on Muslim girls to join pageant in Malaysia", *The Jakarta Post*, July 23 2013, at: *http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/07/23/organiser-regrets-ban-muslim-girls-join-pageant-malaysia.html*, Accessed 15 July 2014

disappointment with Muslim women being unable to participate, the Federal Territory *shariah* chief prosecutor responded with a line of thought that had first been expressed in 1997: anyone that questioned a *fatwa* was insulting Islam.[47] JAWI promptly opened an investigation into the four women,[48] so that although they were invited by organisers to attend the finals, the women were warned by JAWI, in no uncertain terms, to stay completely away from the event. Echoing the 1997 saga, JAWI reportedly warned one contestant she would be 'arrested on sight' if she attended the finals; JAWI had apparently made preparations for enforcement operations surrounding the event.[49] The lessons of 1997 had been learnt and were now firmly in place: the right of the Islamic authorities to police local beauty pageants and help define Malaysian womanhood was unquestionable, and those that did question that right would be irrefutably accused of insulting Islam and were, therefore, liable to be investigated on that charge. Neither the Miss Malaysia Universe nor Miss Malaysia World pageants have had any Muslim contestants since, although it became apparent that, contrary to the *fatwa*, some beauty pageants were perhaps acceptable to JAWI: a couple of months after the Miss Malaysia World disqualifications, Malaysia's entrant to the World Muslim Women Beauty Pageant won the competition's 'World Muslim Woman Netizen' title.[50] Shortly before that victory, it was announced that Malaysia would be hosting the 2014 Mrs Universe pageant, despite there being entrants from Muslim countries.[51] On the

47. The Star, "Action can be taken against anyone belittling a fatwa", *The Star*, 25 July 2013, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2013/07/25/Action-can-be-taken-against-anyone-belittling-a-fatwa/*, Accessed 15th July 2014
48. Keshia Mahmood, "End of road for Muslim Miss Malaysia hopefuls"
49. Benedict Ng, "Disqualified beauties warned against attending 'finals', says pageant organiser", *The Malay Mail Online*, 30 July 2013, at: *http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/end-of-road-for-muslim-miss-malaysia-hopefuls*, Accessed 15 July 2014
50. Diyana Ibrahim, "How a Malaysia miss entered the World Muslim Women Beauty Pageant", *The Malaysian Insider*, 26 September 2013, at: *http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/how-a-malaysia-miss-entered-the-world-muslim-women-beauty-pageant*, Accessed 15 July 2014
51. Karen Arukesamy, "Malaysia to host Mrs Universe", *The Sun Daily*, 2 September 2013, at: *http://www.thesundaily.my/news/819728*, Accessed 15 July 2014

issue of Muslim women participating in beauty pageants, there was a certain inconsistency, with the only arbiter being local Islamic authorities; authorities that were determined to stare down any controversy and continue to unquestioningly raise the bar on local standards of Islamic behaviour.

Islam in Malaysia always needed to come out on top, and if there was ever any doubt that this had not been the case, then a face-saving solution would need to be engineered lest the hypermasculine essence of the new Malay-Muslim identity appear weakened. When, after being arrested for drinking beer at a hotel in the state of Pahang, Kartika Sari Dewi Shukarno was sentenced to six strokes of the cane, and a public outcry ensued, as Kartika looked set to be the first woman to be caned in Malaysia.[52] The Malaysian Bar Council called for the sentence to be overturned,[53] as did several other local non-governmental organisations,[54] with one individual writing to English-language daily *The Star* to say that the punishment disgusted him.[55] For her part, Kartika appeared willing to accept the sentence, saying that she wanted to get it over and done with, and even requesting that the caning be carried out publicly.[56] The government subsequently stepped in, with Najib urging Kartika to appeal her sentence,[57] and at the government's request, Pahang's *shariah* High Court Appeals Panel was

52. BBC News, "Malaysia beer drink woman's sentence commuted", *BBC News*, 1 April 2010, at: *http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/asia-pacific/8598190.stm*, Accessed 16 July 2014
53. The Star, "Bar Council: Whipping cruel and inhuman", *The Star*, 26 August 2009, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2009%2f8%2f26%2fnation%2f4582115*, Accessed 16 July 2014
54. Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, Suara Rakyat Malaysia and National Human Rights Society, "Stop the whipping of Kartika", *The Malaysian Bar*, 1 October 2009, at: *http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/letters_others/stop_the_whipping_of_kartika.html,* Accessed 16 July 2014
55. Asia Sentinel, "Caning Kartika", *Asia Sentinel*, 26 August 2009, at: *http://www.asiasentinel.com/society/caning-kartika/*, Accessed 16 July 2014
56. Reuters, "Kartika: I want to get on with caning", *The Star*, 22 August 2009, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2F2009%2F8%2F22%2Fnation%2F4571118&sec=nation*, Accessed 16 July 2009
57. The Sun, "Najib urges Kartika to appeal her sentence", *The Sun Daily*, 26 August 2009, at: *http://www.thesundaily.my/node/151958*, Accessed 16 July 2014

asked to review the verdict. A month later, though, the appeals court upheld the sentence,[58] in an embarrassing rebuke to the government's remarks and actions on the case. Despite the sentence being upheld by the appeals court and Kartika's insistence that it be carried out as soon as possible, there were delays in carrying out the sentence. Speculation that the government was behind the delay was so rife that the Attorney-General was forced to deny any involvement in the implementation of the sentence.[59] It seemed, for a while, that there was no way both the government and Pahang Islamic authorities could 'win' on the case: if Kartika was caned, the government that had earlier appeared to move for clemency, would have 'lost'; if she was not caned, than the Islamic authorities might appear to be impotent. Yet, as in 1997, a solution was found that allowed the government to once again reaffirm its position on Islam's influence in the country and also allowed for the Islamic authorities to preserve their status as an unquestionable sphere of power. In February 2010, the government announced that three Muslim women had been caned more than a week earlier for illicit sex.[60] The three women told the *New Straits Times* that they had turned themselves in after feeling guilty for having premarital sex with their boyfriends and then becoming pregnant;[61] they all agreed that they had 'deserved' their punishments.[62] In announcing the canings, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein was at pains to note that the women had not suffered physically, but had been helped to repent. He also confirmed that the reason the government

58. Al Jazeera, "Malaysia caning sentence upheld", *Al Jazeera*, 26 September 2009, at: *http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2009/09/2009929524586283.html*, Accessed 16 July 2014
59. The Star, "AG denies delaying Kartika's punishment", *The Star*, 8 November 2009, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2009%2f11%2f8%2fnation%2f20091108153059&sec=nation*, Accessed 16 July 2014
60. James Hookway, "Malaysia says Muslim women caned", *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 February 2010, at: *http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB20001424052748704398804575071173912460414*, Accessed 16 July 2014
61. Associated Press, "Malaysian women: caning was opportunity to repent", *The Jakarta Post*, 19 February 2010,at: *http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/02/19/malaysian-women-caning-was-opportunity-repent.html*, Accessed 16 July 2014
62. David Chance, "Malaysian women say caning 'good' for them", *Reuters*, 19 February 2010, at: *http://in.reuters.com/article/2010/02/19/us-malaysia-caning-idUSTRE61I0CC20100219*, Accessed 16 July 2014

was announcing the canings was because of the controversy over Kartika's sentencing:

'People are saying that no woman has been caned before and that Kartika should not be caned. Today I am announcing that we have already done it (caned women)... I hope there will be no more issue arising from caning sentences which the (*shariah*) court can impose on Muslim women, so much so that it can affect the sanctity of Islam.'[63] It was, in many ways, 1997 all over again, except that this time it was the government warning that questioning local Islamic rulings affecting Muslim women equated to questioning Islam.

The announcement of the canings was predictably condemned by the groups that had earlier called for Kartika's sentencing to be overturned; yet there was also a degree of suspicion about the announcement in Kuala Lumpur's activist circles. From the beginning, there were questions about the timing of the announcement, with the then SIS Executive Director stating soon after that 'the expediency and the secrecy (around the canings) reeks of bad faith and betrays a troubling disregard for public opinion.'[64] As a result of the announcement, it looked almost certain that Kartika would soon be caned; yet, a few weeks later, Kartika received a letter from the Pahang state Islamic and Malay Culture Council, informing her that the Sultan of Pahang had decided to commute her caning sentence to three weeks of community service.[65] The Sultan, as the guardian of Islam in the state, had the power to commute Kartika's sentence and had done so following a meeting between Kartika and the Crown

63. Mazwin Nik Anis, "Three women caned under syariah law (Updated)", *The Star*, 17 February 2010, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2010%2f2%2f17%2fnation%2f20100217171607*, Accessed 16 July 2014

64. The Star, "Whipping must be fair and just, says Shahrizat", *The Star*, 19 February 2010, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2010%2f2%2f19%2fnation%2f5705560&sec=nation*, Accessed 17 July 2014

65. The Star, "Kartika's sentence commuted to community service (Updated)", *The Star*, 1 April 2010, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2010%2f4%2f1%2fnation%2f20100401132811*, Accessed 17 July 2014

Prince of Pahang.66 Several government officials welcomed the development, whilst being careful to note that it was the Sultan's decision and as such should be respected.67 But Kartika's sentencing commutation remained a curious development, and Marina shared that there were even questions amongst some local activists as to whether the canings of the three women even took place:

> ...We still don't know whether it actually happened, because we're all relying on what the government said ... but nobody knows who these girls are... (The announcement of the canings) came after the whole Kartika thing. It's related to that... So we think it's just to appease certain quarters more than anything, because the timing of it was strange, everything was strange. ...(Appeasing) the conservatives, a lot of people baying for Kartika's blood.68

In the above extract, Marina voiced a degree of scepticism about the motives for the announcement, mainly due to the announcement's proximity to the Kartika event and the fact that, apart from journalists from the national media, nobody had spoken with the women. Nonetheless, as Marina suggests, the announcement of the canings did appear to point to one clear winner: conservative forces as key drivers in the Islamisation/hypermasculinisation of Malay identity. So that while there did appear to be some 'strange' facets to the issue, whatever the circumstances leading to the announcement, it did nonetheless provide a way

66. Associated Press, "Malaysia spares woman from caning for drinking beer", *The Guardian*, 1 April 2010, at: ***http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/01/malaysia-commutes-caning-sentence***, Accessed 17 July 2014
67. Bernama, "Kartika's caning sentence commuted to community service", *Borneo Post*, 2 April 2010, at: ***http://www.theborneopost.com/2010/04/02/kartika%E2%80%99s-caning-sentence-commuted-to-community-service***, Accessed 17 July 2014
68. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011

for both the government and the Islamic authorities to address the case without looking as though it had been weakened or figuratively emasculated by the other side. The Islamic authorities would be able to point to the reported canings as a reaffirmation of their power, with the government appearing to let this happen with its blessing. Consequently, Kartika would be allowed to escape being caned, and the government's earlier wishes on the case would be heeded: she did not need to be caned, now that it had been established that the policing of Muslim women in Malaysia had reached new heights. There was no immediate word on whether the men involved with the women had been similarly caned, with SIS in particular raising it as an issue;[69] but that was hardly the issue here. Muslim women in Malaysia could now be sentenced to physical punishment by a court of law for not upholding a particular moral standard. Marina described what the three women were allegedly punished for:

> (The women) were being caned for being unmarried mothers... The girls
> that voluntarily come out to say that they've had these babies and they came
> to the religious department to sort of confess and then they got punished.
> One of them had wanted to marry her boyfriend, but ... they couldn't find
> the *wali*. This is another problem, when fathers run away, when fathers
> disappear, daughters cannot get married. Now belatedly, they say she
> could've got a *wali hakim* - but who was there to advise the girl? She got
> punished for it.[70]

69. Mazwin Nik Anis, "Caning of Muslim women was legal: DPM", *The Star*, 19 February 2010, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2010%2f2%2f19%2fnation%2f20100219142900*, Accessed 18 July 2014
70. Marina Mahathir, interview, September 2011

As Marina discussed here, there were indicators that at least one of the women reported to have been caned had actually wanted to get married, but that her family's circumstances - which Marina speculates might include a father abandoning his family - prevented her from doing so. Despite the woman's own account indicating that she had wanted to do 'the right thing,' she was nonetheless punished after confessing to having a child out of wedlock - undeniable proof that she was guilty of having had premarital sex. There was a stronger gendered dimension to the caning of the three women than there ever would have been in Kartika's case - their status as unmarried mothers could not help but be noticed by observers including Marina. In many ways, it presented a more direct attack on Malay-Muslim family values than consuming alcohol did. The caning announcement thus signalled that not only were Muslim women being judged according to harsher standards and penalties, but that that they would be judged specifically for acts that threatened the gendered pyramid on which Islamisation/hypermasculinisation was founded.

Despite the deliberate construction of the *ummah* as an androcentric concept, Malay-Muslim women continue to be designated as supporting pillars of the nation. In the context of Malaysian constructions of the *ummah* though, this has involved the formulation of a notion of Islamic femininity, a concept that captures an idealised Malay-Muslim womanhood, yet crucially permanently erases Malayness as a defining marker. This erasure is part of a purposeful strategy to permanently dissociate Muslim identity in Malaysia from the *nafsu* and feminine realm, and is, therefore, yet another manifestation of Islamisation/hypermasculinisation. For the most part, interviewees did not report having dealings with the *shariah* legal system in the way that Kartika, Muslim beauty pageant hopefuls or the three unmarried mothers did. That did not mean that they were unaware of the

potential effects of increasingly vigilant religious police. One interviewee shared some of the lessons she had imparted to her daughters on the issue.

> There are very different rules for Muslim women and non-Muslim women
> in this country, no question. In a way, I feel sorry for young Muslim
> women today… For example, I used to tell my daughters, you can't be as
> carefree as your Chinese friends, make sure you're careful around members
> of the opposite sex.
>
> -Fida, 51 years old

Fida alluded specifically to the possibility of being charged with *khalwat* in her warnings to her daughters. There were clear expectations of how the ideal Muslim woman should behave, and those expectations were made clear not just through the actions of JAWI officers, but also sometimes as a result of societal pressures. One such issue that represented the negotiations that Malay-Muslim women have with a new Islamic modernity was the act of wearing a headscarf.

> I'm not really ready to wear a headscarf yet. I don't know if I ever will be.
> At the place I work at (a prominent GLC), though, I do feel a lot of
> pressure to wear a headscarf. …For instance, all the Muslim employees are
> required to go for an Islamic component at their orientation, so all the
> women have to cover up and wear headscarves, even if they don't usually.
> And during the event, people kept complimenting me saying, 'You look so
> feminine and graceful, you should keep wearing it.' But I don't really feel

comfortable in one, and I agree with what my husband says, don't do it if

you don't want to.

-Eva, 36 years old

Eva had completed her undergraduate degree in London, where she had met her husband. She had ended up securing a job with a GLC in Kuala Lumpur, whilst her husband worked as a lawyer within the civil judicial system. The GLC that Eva worked for was certainly regarded as overwhelmingly Malay in character and continues to be known as such; it is also known for having a fairly progressive salary system for its employees. It is fair to say that most of its employees can be viewed as fitting in with the construction of the *Melayu Baru*. Eva's report of having to go for an Islamic class as part of her orientation is intriguing, as is her report of having to wear a headscarf for it. This testifies to how central both Islam and a display of Islamic womanhood were to the company she worked for, and therefore also, the government's expectations of how the *Melayu Baru* would look. The GLC Eva worked for is not the only institution to have a mandatory headscarf policy in place at certain times; the dress code for IIUM makes clear that Muslim female students are expected to wear a headscarf whilst on-campus, although a veil that covers the face is not allowed. The pressure that Eva faced to continue wearing the headscarf, mostly centring around the notion that by wearing it she embodied a graceful and dignified womanhood, was also not unique to her place of work. Norhayati Kaprawi's film *Aku Siapa* features Muslim women discussing the pressures they faced about wearing headscarves, with one woman notably talking about the pressure she faced from her new in-laws. The response of Eva's husband to the prospect of her wearing the headscarf – 'don't do it if you don't want to' - is one that fits with what other interviewees discussed in their choices about wearing a headscarf.

I have thought about wearing a headscarf, but it's not a decision you take

lightly. As my father says, you have to be ready for it, put it on if only if

you mean it. Because then you have to stop going to certain places, you

have to stop associating with certain people. …I will do it one day, for sure,

because it's mandated in the Quran.

-Chloe, 33 years old

I actually want to wear the *tudung*. A lot of my girlfriends are wearing it,

and they have this contentedness that I want for myself too. But my

husband (a Chinese-Malaysian who had converted to Islam) does not like

the idea of me wearing it, so, OK, the sin is on (him).

-Ayza, 33 years old

I would like to share with you that I am going to start (regularly) wearing a

tudung shortly. After all the life experiences I've had, I just feel like I am

ready.

-Nazirah

For many interviewees, wearing a headscarf represented a sort of 'maturity,' something that

had to be 'grown into.' The act of wearing a headscarf was something that Chloe, Ayza and

Nazirah all took seriously - not something to be lightly entered into, and not merely a fashion

statement. According to Chloe, an advertising executive who worked long hours and often

had to entertain clients, it would signal a complete lifestyle overhaul - something that would

presumably have repercussions in how she did her job. For Ayza, her husband, an individual

who had converted to Islam before their marriage, was the reason she said she did not wear a

headscarf despite wanting to. Her husband's objection to wearing the headscarf was in and of itself is interesting (I gathered it was mostly on grounds of aesthetics), but also telling was how Ayza chose to respond to his objection, that is, by not pursuing the cause and absolving herself of any blame for not doing so. When I asked Nazirah what her thoughts were on headscarves, her emphasis on sharing something personal with me left no doubt it was a turning point of sorts for her. Indeed, amongst Frisk's interviewees, wearing a headscarf was mentioned as something of a turning point in their relationships with Islam, with some women mentioning how pleased their husbands were with their decision.71 Although the interviewees I spoke with generally viewed veiling as a woman's personal choice, it is still interesting to note how male family members played an important part in the veiling decisions of Eva, Chloe and Ayza in presenting points of view that opposed wearing a headscarf. That there is pressure on urban Malay-middle class women to increasingly embody an idealised Islamic womanhood symbolising Malaysia's aspirations within the *ummah* is without doubt; but their own negotiations of those pressures are highly reflective of personal journeys and struggles that they navigate through a nuanced religious lens.

The growing pervasiveness of Islamisation/hypermasculinisation has not just been felt by Muslim women in the country; there is increasing evidence that non-Muslim women are becoming a key focus of Islamic authorities and local proponents of Islamisation - particularly when the rights and/or autonomy of those non-Muslim women are somehow deemed as threatening the position of Muslim men. One of the earlier indications that this might be the case was when Christian convert Lina Joy applied to the civil courts to have the term 'Islam' removed from her identity card. Joy had been born a Muslim, but had practiced Christianity for more than a decade prior to her application. She specifically wanted 'Islam'

71. Sylva Frisk, *Submitting to God*, p. 90

to be removed because, as long as she was legally recognised as a Muslim in Malaysia, she would be unable to marry her Christian boyfriend; in Malaysia, a non-Muslim must convert to Islam to marry a Muslim. If Joy was still legally a Muslim, then her marriage to a non-Muslim would not be recognised in Malaysia; and any children that she might have would be legally recognised as both Muslims and fatherless. The clear impact of the case on Joy's reproductive rights was noted by many women's groups at the time.[72] The High Court first ruled, in 2001, that it would not decide on Joy's application on the grounds that the issue should be decided by the *shariah* courts;[73] but apostasy was not something the *shariah* courts were known to approve of, preferring to send would-be converts out of Islam for counselling, or sometimes even fines or jail. As a legal counsel for the Federal Territory Religious Council would eventually tell a civil court: 'We cannot have a back-door method for people who try to avoid facing the (*shariah* court) by going to the (National Registration Department, the body which issues identity cards) to change their status from Muslim to non-Muslim.'[74] Those who were legally Muslims, the legal counsel appeared to be suggesting, could not be allowed to ever escape from the jurisdiction of the *shariah* legal system. With the reproductive autonomy of a legally Muslim woman at stake –that is, her ability to have children who would grow up as non-Muslims – it seemed even less likely that a *shariah* court would recognise her decision to leave Islam. As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, there were elements of concern from Malay-Muslim men about relationships between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. Following the High Court ruling, Joy once again attempted to bypass

72. All Women's Action Society, Sisters in Islam, Women's Aid Organisation, Women's Centre for Change and Women's Development Collective, "Women Groups' Media Statements on Lina Joy case", *The Malaysian Bar*, 31 May 2007, at: *http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/letters_others/women_groups_media_statement_on_lina_joy_case.html?date=2011-07-01*, Accessed 18 July 2014
73. Chelsea L.Y. Ng, "All eyes on Lina Joy case", *The Star*, 25 June 2006, at: *http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2006%2f6%2f25%2ffocus%2f14641732&sec=focus*, Accessed 18 July 2014
74. ibid.

the *shariah* courts by making an application to both the Federal Court and Court of Appeal, sparking considerable concern amongst some Muslim quarters. Muslim groups also frequently interrupted forums organised by a group called Article 11 on the subject of religious freedom; the Article 11 forums' chief organiser was a lawyer who had presented a brief in support of Joy's application.[75] Then Prime Minister Badawi later issued an executive order forbidding forums on religious freedom, in a move welcomed by several Muslim non-governmental organisations.[76] Death threats were issued to Joy and her lawyers;[77] the stakes in this battle over Joy's freedom were very high indeed. In 2007, the Court of Appeal ruled in a 2-1 verdict that the Islamic authorities had to confirm Joy's renunciation of Islam in order for it to be recognised on Joy's identity card; the only non-Muslim judge was the lone voice of dissent.[78] Whilst Muslim groups celebrated the verdict, with some Muslims gathering outside the courtroom and shouting, '*Allahu Akbar* (God is great),'[79] the earlier fears of one of Joy's lawyers - that there was no room for Joy and her partner in Malaysia[80] - appeared to have been confirmed. In the years since, rumours have circulated that Joy emigrated from the country, ostensibly to be able to practice her chosen faith and generally live her life in peace. Maznah argued that Joy's case was an instance of Muslims in Malaysia being 'deprived of their civil rights in order to keep the *ummah* intact,'[81] as well as further evidence of 'a new Muslim masculinity being fashioned.'[82] Indeed, if Joy had succeeded in her legal challenge,

75. Jane Perlez, "Once Muslim, Now Christian and Caught in the Courts", *New York Times*, 24 August 2006, at: *http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/24/world/asia/24malaysia.html*, Accessed 18 July 2014

76. Malaysiakini, "Muslim NGO's laud PM's call to zip up on Islam", *Malaysiakini¸* 26 July 2006, at: *http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/54474*, Accessed 18 July 2014

77. Jane Perlez, "Once Muslim, Now Christian and Caught in the Courts"

78. Thomas Fuller, "Malaysian Court Refuses to Recognise Woman's Conversion to Christianity", *New York Times*, 30 May 2007, at: *http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/30/world/asia/30cnd-malaysia.html?_r=0*, Accessed 18 July 2014

79. Tucker Reals, "Malaysian Woman Stuck With 'Islam'", *CBS News*, 30 May 2007, at: *http://www.cbsnews.com/news/malaysian-woman-stuck-with-islam/*, Accessed 18 July 2014

80. Jane Perlez, "Once Muslim, Now Christian and Caught in the Courts"

81. Maznah Mohamad, "Making majority, undoing family: law, religion and the Islamization of the state in Malaysia", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2010, p. 370

82. ibid., p. 362

the very essence of Malay-Muslim hypermasculinity would have been threatened: she would have been a born Muslim female who had rescued her autonomy and civil rights from the jurisdiction of the Malay nation and the androcentric Malaysian model of the *ummah.* Joy's challenge meant she had stepped defiantly outside of the fashioned role of Muslim woman as a key contributor to what Maznah defines as the 'ideal Islamic family - (consisting of) male virility, female fecundity and *ummah* productivity.'[83] Therefore, being told in no uncertain terms that she had no place in Malaysia was the only way that Malay-Muslim hypermasculinity could be preserved.

As Maznah notes, prior to Joy's challenge, there had been many cases of born Muslims converting to another faith and marrying non-Muslims - all under the radar, so to speak. They were able to live their lives in relative peace since they did not formally challenge the position of Islam in the country.[84] There did appear to be methods of negotiating and largely avoiding the impacts of Islamisation in everyday life if one so desired, particularly so if an individual happened to be a non-Muslim from birth. However, there are increasingly no assurances that being a non-Muslim from birth guarantees that the s*hariah* legal system will not attempt to rule on matters that involve non-Muslim individuals. This is especially so if, again underpinning the centrality of family and gender to Malay-Muslim hypermasculinity, the matter is a familial issue involving a Muslim, and typically male, party. Two child custody cases have made headlines both locally and internationally in recent years due to clashing directives from both civil and *shariah* courts, along with questions as to the jurisdiction of each. Both cases began on very similar notes: two non-Muslim women discovered that their husbands had one day, with little warning, become Muslims - and in

83. ibid., p. 377
84. ibid., p. 371

doing so, had also unilaterally converted their non-Muslim children. The estranged husbands

then applied to the *shariah* courts for custody of the children, which they were promptly

granted. Both Indira Gandhi and Deepa Subramaniam went to the civil courts to obtain

custody of, and to also challenge the unilateral conversion of, their children, noting that their

marriages had taken place under Malaysian civil law. In both cases, the civil courts awarded

custody to the mothers, yet the husbands did not comply fully with the orders of the civil

court, both abducting from their estranged wives one child each and subsequently refusing to

return the child. The cabinet, noting that unilateral conversions were being used to obtain

custody of children, decided in 2009 that 'a child's religion must be in accordance to the

common religion at the time of marriage between the parents'[85] - but in 2013, federal

minister Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz strongly hinted that the Conference of Rulers had

objected to the 2009 decision, and that as such the cabinet was unable to pass a bill on the

issue.[86] Perkasa, though, has explicitly endorsed unilateral conversions, 'to solve the mess (of

child custody cases)';[87] the 2009 cabinet decision was then ultimately not allowed to stand

because for some powerful quarters, making unilateral conversions illegal was an attack on

Malay-Muslim hegemony. The backing and power that the *shariah* legal system gives men in

these cases has not been missed by activists, with prominent women's rights activist Ivy

Josiah commenting, 'It becomes a weapon to wield power over a wife – "not only can I wield

power over you, but so can the whole state apparatus."'[88] Deepa has reported receiving

85. Shashi Kala, "Cabinet bars forced conversion of children", *The Nut Graph*, 23 April 2009, at: *http://www.thenutgraph.com/cabinet-no-to-forced-conversion-of-children/*, Accessed 15 August 2014

86. Hemananthani Sivanandam, "Open secret that Rulers objected to cabinet's decision on conversion", 4 July 2013, at: *http://www.thesundaily.my/news/761331*, Accessed 15 August 2014

87. Zurairi AR, "Allow unilateral conversion to avoid custody mess, says Perkasa", 18 June 2014, at: *http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/allow-unilateral-conversion-to-avoid-custody-mess-says-perkasa*, Accessed 14 August 2014

88. Reuters, "In Malaysia, Islam's legal advance divides families and nation", *The Malaysian Insider*, 13 July 2014, at: *http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/in-malaysia-islams-legal-advance-divides-families-and-nation*, Accessed 14 August 2014

regular calls from government officials urging her to convert to Islam so that she might get her children back. In the new Islamic Malaysia, to be a Muslim male is to occupy a position of privilege, so that the rights of all Malaysian women are increasingly taking a backseat to the hypermasculinisation and hegemony of Malay-Muslim identity.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

7.1 Gender, Ethnicity and Empowerment

This thesis has examined the existing scope of Malay-Muslim identity politics and its strong links to colonialist, and inherently gendered, thought. In this concluding chapter, I will assess the political implications of the previous chapters' analyses to explore potential new areas for research. I will also locate my research findings in the context of very recent political developments, and offer some concluding thoughts on Malaysia's sociopolitical prospects. In Chapters Two and Three, I explored the gendered and familial foundations of Malay-Muslim identity, and have argued that current developments in Malay-Muslim identity politics are best understood in terms of gender. Attempts by various Malay nationalists to reform Malayness have resulted in a reinforcement of early colonial thought on Malayness. As with other colonisation and subjugation processes,1 the *Melayu Baru* construct is heavily predicated on a feminised figure. Malaysian modernity is similarly concerned with the contribution of the colonialist legacy to Malayness and the reforming of Malay men and women's roles. I have supported my arguments primarily with the work of Nandy and McClintock, applying their insights to deconstruct Malayness and examine its gendered and colonial origins. This analysis was further explored in Chapter Four to assess both the expectations of Malay women over the years as well as how Malay women position themselves in relation to Malayness. The theme of ideal Malay femininity continued into Chapter Five, where I explored the gender dynamics within UMNO, the main Malay nationalist political party since before Malaysia's independence, and a significant influencer in Malay-Muslim identity politics. In Chapter Six, I argued that the Malay nationalists' championing of the *ummah* concept provided them with a narrative of further heights that Malays could aspire to. Women continue to be encouraged to be the bearers of culture in this

1. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 67

new aspiration, policed to a specific Islamic standard. My attempts to deconstruct the gendered origins of Malayness are a necessary part of any inquiry which strives to move beyond ethnoreligious politics; but the voices of Malay women offer insights into how an alternative model of identity might be built in the Malay sociocultural context.

Spivak argued that deconstruction was a necessary element in developing alternative models of politics: '(Deconstruction says) that because it is useful it ought not be monumentalised as the way things really are.'[2] In Malaysia, Malayness was originally constructed so as to serve one primary purpose: the subjugation of a people in a way that could be understood as 'natural' and, therefore, legitimate. Early colonial influences relied on gender and familial politics to achieve this purpose, and in doing so disempowered, to varying degrees, the collectives of their colonial realms in Malaya. The independence of Malaya was a missed opportunity for Malay nationalists to divorce themselves from the colonial mindset, and indeed, UMNO and other Malay nationalist actors were for many years successful in using colonial discourse on Malayness as a means of legitimising the country's race-based politics and their rule. In doing so, they have established a structure that increasingly disenfranchises Malaysian women and privileges the Malay-Muslim male. Creating a more equitable sociopolitical environment in Malaysia involves continuing to examine where and how the legacy of colonisation is embedded in the country's institutions and the policies that govern them. This thesis has explored the gendered and familial foundations of Malayness; future studies on ethnic politics in Malaysia must continue to consider these elements in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the power dynamics at the heart of Malaysian modernity and scope potential alternatives to current identity political practices. This is in

2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Reflections on cultural studies in the post-colonial conjecture", *Critical Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1991, p. 65

itself may not be enough, though: Yuval-Davis has identified a key pitfall of the identity

politics of difference as '(homogenising and naturalising) social categories and groupings,

denying shifting boundaries and internal power differences and conflicts of interests.'[3]

Yuval-Davis instead prescribed a model of dialogues 'which give recognition to the specific

positionings of those who participate in them as well as to the "unfinished knowledge" that

each such situated positioning can offer.'[4] My 2011 fieldwork was an attempt to further

develop that dialogue, and in doing so, uncover the various factors informing urban Malay-

Muslim womanhood. There are various other perspectives that need to be explored to

illustrate a more complete picture of Malaysian womanhood and modernity – for instance,

those of Malaysian women across different locations, ethnic groups and socioeconomic

backgrounds. This thesis is one piece of that project; though in light of recent events in

Malaysian politics, there are now fresh questions about the centrality of UMNO to

perpetuating Malayness.

7.2 A New Malaysian Political Landscape

The prospect of Malay-Muslim identity continuing on its course of ever-increasing

hypermasculinisation is inextricably linked with UMNO-sanctioned narratives that harken

back to the lazy native. The original conclusion for this thesis was that such a trajectory was

likely to continue unfettered whilst BN and UMNO remain in power. Recent developments in

the Malaysian political landscape, however, have made me examine the necessity of UMNO

being in power for hypermasculinisation/Islamisation in Malaysia to continue, and in doing

so, to ask if the feminine lazy native' and *orang kampung* characters are powerful enough to

continue sustaining themselves in postcolonial Malaysia. The 2018 general elections took

3. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 131
4. ibid., p. 131

place whilst I finalised this thesis, with the results catching most commentators off-guard. In the lead-up to the vote, speculation was rife about whether or not a 'Malay tsunami' would take place, with Mahathir himself stating an opposition victory was possible due to growing Malay support.[5] Various UMNO leaders took to newspapers to deny that a Malay swing would occur, with Najib himself saying: 'I don't detect a Malay tsunami. A Malay tsunami would mean a rejection of UMNO. I don't see that (happening).'[6] The opposition bloc, now named Pakatan Harapan (or the Hope Pact), ended up taking 121 seats in parliament, a majority; BN only took 79. UMNO's shock relegation to the opposition benches will no doubt continue to be studied over the next few years, but whilst the jury may still be out on whether or not a Malay tsunami really did take place, the results did nonetheless signal a clear rejection of UMNO. 'UMNO was simply seen as an organisation for political patronage, and a purveyor of racism and crony capitalism,' Chin wrote shortly after the election. 'It was no longer seen as a Malay nationalist party.'[7] UMNO's position as undisputed champion of the Malays was irrevocably damaged, and the outlook of Malay nationalist politics looked changed forever. The usage of the lazy native mythos to underpin the case of UMNO did not work in this instance.

It is premature, though, to conclude that Malay nationalist politics is in for a radical overhaul, with a number of indicators pointing to a continuing Malay nationalist rhetoric of old. For one, Najib's replacement as Prime Minister is Mahathir, the author of influential Malay

5. Associated Press, "Mahathir says opposition can win with growing Malay support," *Fox News*, 18 April 2018, at: ***http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/04/18/mahathir-says-opposition-can-win-with-growing-malay-support.html,*** Accessed 10 June 2018

6. The Star, "Malay tsunami at GE14 unlikely, says Najib", *The Star*, 5 April 2018, at: ***https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/04/05/najib-malay-tsunami-unlikely-malay-tsunami-at-ge14-unlikely-says-najib-ground-work-shows-mood-and-se/***, Accessed 10 June 2018

7. James Chin, "Malaysians celebrate the return of Mahathir and hope for a brighter future," *The Conversation*, 11 May 2018, at: ***https://theconversation.com/malaysians-celebrate-the-return-of-mahathir-and-hope-for-a-brighter-future-96420,*** Accessed 10 June 2018

nationalist texts such as *The Malay Dilemma* and *The Challenge*. Mahathir, as Chin observed, is 'no ordinary opponent.'[8] Mahathir commanded tremendous levels of support amongst Malay voters,[9] such that Najib warned Mahathir was being used by the DAP to 'split the Malay vote.'[10] Even so, Mahathir has remained true to the essence of *The Malay Dilemma*, criticising rural Malays' culture in a forum held a few months before the elections:

> I believe that the Malays' capabilities are the same as the Europeans and the Japanese, but the problem is the culture. We find that we are not so committed, not so hardworking and sometimes we are not so trustworthy. We always try to find the easy way out, that is why we are left behind. We like it when there is less work, but high pay. It is not because we cannot but because we do not want to, that is the problem.[11]

As evidenced throughout this thesis, Mahathir has long been unabashed in discussing race, and from when he first left the premiership, Mahathir has been consistent in his concerns that Malays have a 'problem.' Malhi suggested it was Mahathir's presence that finally allowed the opposition to control the race factor – 'an essential factor in Malaysian politics.'[12] Indeed, a number of observers have discussed a sense of familiarity being present in the campaign – Weiss spoke of déjà vu at seeing Mahathir back on the political stage,[13] whilst Reuters

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8. ibid.
9. New Mandala, "What mattered in GE14: campaigns, Islam, 1MDB, cost of living," *New Mandala*, 10 May 2018, at: ***http://www.newmandala.org/what-mattered-in-ge14/,*** Accessed 10 June 2018
10. The Sun, "Mahathir being used by DAP to split Malay vote: Najib," *The Sun Daily*, 26 April 2018, at: ***http://www.thesundaily.my/news/2018/04/26/mahathir-being-used-dap-split-malay-vote-najib,*** Accessed 10 June 2018
11. Geraldine Tong, "Dr M says 'Malay culture' reason for lack of progress," *Malaysiakini*, 13 January 2018, at: ***https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/408577,*** Accessed 10 June 2018
12. Amrita Malhi, "Flipping the Chinese Threat"
13. New Mandala, "What mattered in GE14"

referred to him as a 'comeback kid.'[14] For Malhi, there was another element of recall to Mahathir's return: a return to the heyday before 1998, when Mahathir was Prime Minister, Anwar was Deputy Prime Minister and the economy was booming.[15] Although still in jail at the time, Anwar was still a key figure during the 2018 elections: Mahathir promised to secure a pardon for him. Anwar's wife Wan Azizah was part of the new administration by becoming the first female Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia; but when the time came, it was understood that she would vacate her parliamentary seat to allow Anwar to once again enter parliament and that Mahathir would step aside for him. The old players were back and, in a fashion reminiscent of the gender politics in UMNO, women were kow-towing to them.

7.3 Implications for the Future

The hypermasculinisation/Islamisation of Malay-Muslim will not end now that UMNO is in opposition. I have argued throughout this thesis that reforming Malayness remains wrapped up in gendered and colonial notions; Mahathir, again in power, remains ideologically close to that base. A new approach to understanding Malay identity will need Malay leaders to seriously examine the ideological roots of many of their long-held beliefs, specifically its origins in 'natural' gendered and familial foundations. Part of any attempt will need to be examining why there are those in the Malay-Muslim community who choose to identify as Muslim rather than Malay. I interpret the fieldwork I conducted in 2011 as participants demonstrating a desire to fashion a modernity on terms that best suit the circumstances of them and their families, through a religious framework that they see as going beyond limitations such as ethnicity and class. Informing their efforts are a variety of factors, some

14. Praveen Menon, "At 92, former strongman Mahathir is Malaysia's comeback kid," *Reuters*, 10 May 2018, at: ***https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-election-mahathir-newsmaker/at-92-former-strongman-mahathir-is-malaysias-comeback-kid-idUSKBN1IB05J***, Accessed 10 June 2018
15. Amrita Malhi, "Flipping the Chinese Threat"

personal but many sociocultural; the lazy native mythos and the awareness that theirs is not a Eurocentric worldview are but two of them. Embracing religion rather than ethnicity as an identity-marker then becomes for many an empowering act; which begs the question of the fluidity and sense of empowerment attached to ethnicity vis-à-vis faith. The study of the discourses linking gender, family and ethnicity in Malay nationalist politics as well as by urban Malay-Muslim women for this thesis is by no means exhaustive. Further research will need to build on the work here, by: exploring the effects of the new political dynamics on Malayness; examining the identity politics among rural Malay women; further consideration of nationalist standards for Malay men; and a detailed examination of Malay-Muslims' engagement with colonial constructions of Malayness. It is a certainty, though, that Islamic identity will continue to flourish in a Malaysian modernity where a feminised Malay figure of the past continues to hold sway in the Malay psyche. It is, after all, the one established and successful response to the lazy native and colonial humiliations. As of yet, there is no tangible alternative. Either way, if Anwar does become Prime Minister, he will have to navigate tensions and fault lines that were etched out long before and are likely to remain long after.

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