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British Colonial Education and the Rise of Nationalism in Malaya: Tracing the Route of the *Merdeka*¹ Generation in Adibah Amin's *This End of the Rainbow*

Abstract

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) asserted the importance of colonial education for the emergence of “native intellectuals” who will be able to represent the masses and participate in the national agenda against colonisation. Likewise Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) draws attention to a secondary school in West Africa during French colonialism that offered colonial education to the local boys who eventually became nationalist leaders. Both Fanon and Anderson opined that colonial education was vital for the emergence of an elite indigenous group who possessed the key to mobilise the masses, contributing to the rise in nationalism. With the emergence of the Subaltern Studies in South Asia, the significance of the elite group and the ways non-elite members of a nation have been represented in nationalist discourses have been highly debated. This paper examines the relationship between British colonial education and the rise of nationalism in *This End of the Rainbow* (2006), a Malaysian life-writing in English by Adibah Amin, a female writer of Malay ethnic origin. Also, this paper looks at how as a nationalist writing, the narrative has deployed colonial education to distinguish the elites as decolonising agents from the masses, placing the latter at the margin as the subalterns.

To understand a nation through its narrative discourse is pertinent for a postcolonial nation like Malaysia due to the text’s engagement with emergent issues like nation, nationalism, and identity construction. Political scientist Benedict Anderson describes nation as an “imagined community” because, regardless of how small a country may be, its citizens may never know of one another, yet, in their imagination they exist as a whole community due to the sovereign geographical boundaries they share. It is also due to this that they have a “deep, horizontal comradeship” that brings them together under the collective identity of a nation (16). Homi Bhabha, a post-colonial theorist whose conceptualisation of a nation is based on post-structuralist thoughts, explains that nation is given meaning by its occupants through narrative discourses that construct or contest against a unified identity. In

the introduction to his edited collection of essays, *Nation and Narration*, he adds that a nation has no meaning until it is narrativised in the form of written text through “textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, subtexts, and figurative stratagems” by the people who do not just occupy the centre, but more importantly, by those who are in the fringes of the nation as a result of socio-political divisions like migration, ethnicity, religion, and so on (1990a, 2). A nation is an empty space until meaning is given to it through textualisation.

One of the key components in the narrativisation of a nation, particularly those emerging out of colonial occupation, is nationalism. As a matter of fact nationalist thoughts may be thematically or structurally manifested in a variety of ways in a text well after a nation has achieved its formal independence. Anderson draws on the newspaper and realist novel as forms through which nationalist thoughts may exist as they provide a shared culture, interests, and vocabularies for the people of the nation. The question then is, how does a text that is narrativised in the colonial language (English) able to address the construction of collective identity as it highlights the influence of British colonial education in the rise of nationalism in Malaya during the years preceding independence. It is along this line of thought that this paper examines the depiction of nationalism in *This End of the Rainbow*, published in 2006, a fictional biography by Adibah Amin, a Malaysian writer of Malay ethnic origin.² This paper will also examine how as a nationalist writing the narrative deploys colonial education to distinguish the elites as decolonising agents from the masses thus placing the latter at the margin as the subalterns – a term taken up shortly – in the construction of a collective identity for the soon-to-be independent nation.

1. Malaysian History and Socio-Political Structure

Peninsula Malaysia’s eleven states and two federal territories used to be individual Malay kingdoms where early contestations for power and territory between local chieftains and sultans saw the Portuguese (1511) and Dutch (1641) using the disputes to their advantage and establishing their rule in Melaka, an important port for trade within the Malay Archipelago. Disputes among chieftains in the local kingdoms also gave plausible causes for the British to arrive in Penang (1786) and later Singapore (1819). The Anglo-Dutch Treaty signed in 1824 divided the territorial interests of the Dutch and British, leaving Melaka, Singapore, and Penang to the British. British influence was soon extended to the other states of the peninsula which saw the formation of the Federated and Non-Federated Malay States bringing together individual Malay kingdoms under a British administrative system.

During British rule – in mid-19th and 20th centuries – indentured labourers from mainland China and India were brought to fill labour shortage in the tin mines and plantation estates. This seemingly new period of arrival has become a

major point of contention in present-day Malaysia as a person's origin is reiterated through terms like 'pendatang' (new arrival/immigrant) as opposed to 'bumiputera' (sons/daughters of the soil). The Chinese and Indians are collectively known as non-Malays, and due to their migrant ancestry, they are considered outsiders. The Malays are Muslims and accepted as insiders accorded by their *bumiputera* status.³ The justification that the period when the Chinese and Indians settled in Malaya accords them the status of immigrants or new arrivals is disputable. Historic records indicate that Chinese and Indian traders had long settled in Melaka even before the arrival of the colonial powers (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Sandhu and Mani, 1993). Even if the period of arrival is taken into consideration as it reflects the massive wave of migration, the question of belonging for those migrants who stayed back and their descendants who eventually made Malaya, later Malaysia, their only home, remains unanswered in contemporary Malaysia's socio-political makeup (*BBC News Asia*, 2013; *The Malaysian Insider*, 2013).

The reason for the divisiveness between Malays and non-Malays is traceable to the forming of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 when the British heeded the pressure from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a Malay nationalist political party that successfully campaigned against Malayan Union, an immediate post-war plan by the British that proposed equal citizenship for Malays and non-Malays. Historians conclude that, had Malayan Union materialised, all citizens, regardless of their origin, would have had equal rights in the country (Cheah, 2002; Hooker, 2003). By withdrawing Malayan Union, the British had restored Malay sovereignty and Malay ownership where Malay political primacy among different ethnic groups became guaranteed. This is why the formation of UMNO and the period when UMNO, MCA (Malayan Chinese Association), and MIC (Malayan Indian Congress)⁴ came together to form the Alliance preceding independence is considered as the peak of nationalism in Malaysia.⁵ Nationalism as explained by Malays is that non-Malays would gain citizenship rights *in return* for a guarantee of Malay special position, termed the 'social contract' and is used time and again to legitimise the Malays' hegemonic position in the country.⁶ Such notion of nationalism is contrary to the non-Malays' imagination of a pluralist multi-cultural nation and the on-going disputes in contemporary Malaysia is evidence of such disparaging view. As a person's national identity is shaped along the lines of a country's official markers and policies, Malaysia's markers are founded on the Malays' history, language, culture, economy, and religion, justifying the approach taken in this paper that situates a life-writing by a Malay writer as a nationalist text.

2. Malaysian Literature in English, MLE⁷

It is important to trace the development of literature writings in English, commonly known as MLE, and examine how such materials have provided crucial cultural,

linguistic, and literary evidence to the construction of nation-ness in narrative discourses alike. The seeds of literary writings in English were sown in the late 1940s when the undergraduates of the University of Malaya in Singapore were involved in the print publication of the literary journal *The New Cauldron* as they hoped for a shared linguistic identity.

In spite of efforts to cross ethnic boundaries through a common language, the use of English kept the pioneers of MLE away from the anti-colonial agenda of both Malaya and Singapore. This was because Malay was the most important linguistic instrument to mobilise the rural and urban folks under the collective efforts of nationalism. Moreover, the university that served as the colonial educational centre of British Malaya was distinguishable among the various ethnic groups occupying the land along class lines since English education was considered a privilege availing those in the urban areas. The location of the university in Singapore, a British Crown Colony and separated from the Federation of Malaya, further divided the noble intentions of the pioneer writers.

It also has to be noted that language has always been a point of contention in Malaysia and was one of the catalysts in the 1969 racial riots following which a pro-Malay nation was founded. This is because up to that point, then Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had used a multi-cultural model to steer the newly independent nation towards unity much to the disdain of numerous pro-Malay extremists (Cheah, 2002; Brown, 2007). Following the riot, one after another policies were introduced and implemented to safeguard the Malay language and the economic as well as cultural empowerment of the Malays.

Linguistic distinction became pronounced after the implementation of the New Economic Policy and the 1971 Amendment Act (to reinforce the 1967 Language Act) that witnessed a peak in the 1970s and 1980s as the nationalisation of Malay language was fervently undertaken. It went to the extent of denouncing writings in English, Mandarin, and Tamil as Sectional Literatures as opposed to those written in Malay as National Literatures. Such trying period for English was also noticeable in schools when teaching hours were significantly reduced. In the local literary circle, some bilingual local writers chose to continue writing only in Malay as a mark of resistance against the English colonisers and their language. Some others who felt English was their only language of literary expression left the country; those who stayed back chose a long period of silence without any serious literary outputs in that duration.

Years of having de-emphasised English had caused more problems than expected as young Malaysians are not competent users of the language. There is a marked problem at the tertiary level where materials are still in English.⁸ Youngsters' employability is at stake as private and foreign companies require fluent speakers. To overcome this problem, in recent years the state's efforts to reinstate English and to improve the standard of the language among Malaysian school-goers in order for them to be employable at the international market has seen the implementa-

tion of numerous educational policies – the latest of its kind – making English a must-pass subject at the SPM level starting from 2016.⁹ It can also be said that the hostility that English suffered from during the immediate years following the New Economic Policy has been overcome since it does not pose a threat to the status that Malay has as the national language of the country. The state's move to offer fully sponsored studentships in English-speaking countries has also allowed Malaysians to return as fluent users of the language to the point where some have joined the country's literati preferring to use English as their literary medium.

Another reason to why writings in English may be used to study issues pertaining to the nation is because of the way in which the language was introduced in British Malaya. Unlike the tradition that was practised in the other colonies of the Empire, say India, English education in Malaya was not aimed at Anglicising its users; instead it was to produce competent speakers to join the administrative machinery of the colonisers (Hirschman, 1972). This was seen as one of the cost-effective measures of the colonial government. Mohammad A. Quayum points out that it is due to such difference that English writings in India flourished way before the retreat of the British Raj whereas in Malaya such writings came into prominence only a few years before formal independence was granted (2007, 17). The introduction of English education in Malaya therefore did not involve the erasure of local culture; rather it was a process through which colonial administration was made easy. This meant that the cultural identity of the colonised masses remained intact. Additionally, the formation of MLE in the 1940s that coincided with heightened nationalistic sentiments is proof that the use of English as a creative medium for the select group of writers was not a psychological conflict that involved a decolonising of the mind. Such mind-set nonetheless could not infiltrate the majority since it was mainly popular among the idealistic undergraduates in Singapore. The homogeneity that MLE provided could not surpass the demographical and class-oriented differences that existed in Malaya then.

To dismiss these materials on linguistic distinctiveness may be far-fetched and the continuous development of MLE proves the accessibility of the writings to a wider group of people in present-day Malaysia. It is also evident through the contemporary group of writers who have chosen to express in English that, despite having attended national (Malay) schools, the colonial language in some way provides writerly freedom to address controversial themes which may not be readily accepted in Malay. In fact, the dissemination of some materials in Malay has been controlled by the government yet the English version of the same materials is permitted in the market, giving writings in English a steady readership.¹⁰

Life-writings – that later became MLE's offshoot – first appeared in the forms of memoirs, sketches, and semi-documentary biographies as they were written by colonial administrators and expatriate writers residing in British Malaya.¹¹ The real impetus for life-writings came during post-war years with works like Sybil Kathigasu's *No Dram of Mercy* (1954) and Janet Lim's *Sold for Silver* (1958). Although

sporadic attempts were made thereafter, it can be said that the genre has remained relatively unexplored until recent years. One possible explanation for this neglect is that life-writings became increasingly synonymous with political biographies and national autobiographies.¹²

Although Malaysian life-writings of public figures and founding fathers deserve an examination of their own, the aim of this paper is to analyse the common, largely obscured life-writer's work so that the way nation is imagined can be understood through a representative text of a particular ethnic group. Moreover, life-writings, not exclusively about public figures, have made a comeback in Malaysia in the recent years calling for an in-depth examination of such materials in relation to Malaysia's evolving status as a nation (Quayum, 2007; Abdul Manaf and Quayum, 2001). It is precisely for this reason that this paper does not deal with issues concerning life-writings where distinctions are drawn between terminologies or the critical development of the genre;¹³ rather, the focus of this paper is to read Amin's narrative as a critical practice as it centres on the country's most nationalistic period through the perspective of a hegemonic Malay-Muslim protagonist.

The perception that colonial values continue to live on through the use of English persist in Malaysia which is not uncommon for a postcolonial nation. With this reason in mind, this paper discusses the appropriation of nationalism in Amin's narrative as it traces British colonial education and examines how it contributes to the rise in anti-colonial nationalist sentiments. It also goes a step further to address the conceptualisation pertaining to nationalism and examines if the term itself is a European/Western adoption so that the dynamics of Malaysian nationalism in literary texts may be addressed. This paper in doing so analyses the de-limiting tendencies of nationalist texts where in the pursuit to homogenise a country's people, such texts unwittingly normalise exclusions. In Amin's text these exclusions are observable through the representations given to the non-elites as they are cast, in Gramscian terms, as subalterns, and will be taken up accordingly.

3. This End of the Rainbow

The setting of Amin's text covers a pre-independent Malaya based on the author's experiences as an undergraduate during the late 1940s at the University of Malaya in Singapore. The story is narrativised in third person with a focus on the protagonist, Ayu, thus bringing to light the fictional element of the biographical piece.¹⁴ Ayu is a young Malay girl who shares close friendships with her multi-ethnic friends in Johor and at the university in Singapore. The narrative is set against the backdrop of British rule after the surrender of the Japanese army. Ayu is contemplating to switch course from medicine to journalism as talks for self-government proceeds in the land. As the spirit of nationalism heightens, Ayu and her friends are caught in uncertainties, with Ayu constantly assuring the rest that the power transition will

benefit everyone regardless of class and ethnic differences. Her biggest challenge comes in the form of a university friend, Han, a Chinese, who persuades her to join a multi-ethnic youth movement that strives for equality among the different ethnic groups. Ayu eventually changes her course and decides not to join Han's movement. She feels that the aftermath of the world war and communist attacks have made people disillusioned but believes that these will be overcome when independence is granted.

In many ways the narrative is about reading the past in the present. It is also about reading the present in the past. Such juxtaposition in narrative temporality draws attention to the text's postcolonial complexity.¹⁵ More importantly, the deployment of a third person narrator to relate ethnic relations of pre-independent Malaya calls into question the text's engagement with the genre of life-writing and the theme of nationalism as a whole. The disconnectedness between the narrator and protagonist may be viewed as a move to locate the 'voices' of those occupying the centre *and* fringes of the nation. Such presumed impartiality and omniscience nonetheless becomes ambiguous as the story focuses on Ayu, highlighting an individualised agency. As a nationalist text, the distancing of the narrator depicts the need for neutrality; it also demonstrates the archetypal portrayal of a nationalist through the Malay-Muslim protagonist. To unravel the complexity in the authorial identity as the text is a life-writing, this paper forwards a relational reading between the narrator, fictive protagonist, and the supplementary characters.¹⁶

It is my contention that by giving voiced representation to some characters – mostly non-colonial educated non-elites – the narrativisation casts them to a position of class oriented exclusion. In some other instances when the non-elite characters are completely silenced, a double-fold marginality based on class and ethnic differences emerges in the text.¹⁷ The former mainly involves the Malays while the latter group that is silenced altogether involves the Chinese and Indians. It is also my argument that colonial education which is used as the empowering tool fragments the Malays' collective identity. In the case of voiceless representation given to the non-colonial educated non-Malays, the divisiveness is deeper. Such a claim is an anti-thesis to Anderson's conceptualisation of a nation that is horizontally and vertically unified, i.e. "deep, horizontal comradeship" (16). By analysing the elements that make a nationalist in Amin's text, I argue that, a nationalist is a *colonial* educated elite Malay and is portrayed apart from the masses.

4. Nationalism: A Western Tradition?

Although post-structuralist theorists opine that nationalism is losing its vigour in "a transnational, migratory and diasporic world culture" (Rivkin and Ryan 853), in a country like Malaysia, it is not only alive but also constantly re-visited by the state to proliferate a sense of unified identity among its people. The top-down national-

ist narrativisation may be understood through Ernest Gellner's conceptualisation where the need for progress drives what he calls an "agrarian society" towards a homogeneous nationalist cultural ideology and the state's apparatus pushes this process towards success. Nationalism is therefore "a political principle" when "the political and the national unit [are] congruent" (1). Similarly Benedict Anderson associates the birth of a nation to the demise of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. He further adds that the convergence of capitalism and print technology may allow the emergence of a *new* imagined community (49). Gellner and Anderson's ideas may be used to understand Malaysian nationalism as a cause that is determined by the need for development and modernity. The question then is, what problematises the attempt to homogenise a diverse group of people in a once-colonised nation like Malaysia?

To address this question, it is useful to return to the roots of nation formation. Nation-states may be categorised as 'old' and 'new', the latter emerging after World War I and II and the slow demise of European colonial empires.¹⁸ Anderson explains that old nations were mostly modelled on a religious homogeneity, while some others, through the use of vernacular languages and bounded geography. In some non-European countries, rather than language, anti-imperialist sentiments cut across class distinctions and resulted in nationalism which brought upon the birth of a nation.¹⁹ In Europe, language played a more fundamental role in developing a national consciousness through the middle-class and intelligentsia who used the rhetoric of democracy which was eventually appropriated by the colonial powers to expand their influence in their dominions; nationalism became the primary tool of imperialism. In the case of new nations as they emerged out of conflicts and war, it may be said that they were based on the European/Western model through the ideas of liberation, progress, and human dignity and therefore are relatable to Western history and intellectuality (Anderson 107–110).

In colonised nations, such identification proved to be problematic and ambivalent. Partha Chatterjee claims rather sarcastically that nationalism will always remain a borrowed idea without the possibility of difference if the colonised subjects' anti-colonialism is also related to Western imperialist notions of liberty, freedom, and dignity (Chatterjee 5). Bhabha critiques nationalist discourses by highlighting that they are bound to fail due to a conceptual failure. Naming the flaw as "double narrative movement," he describes the performative and pedagogic narrative movement of a nationalist text as consisting of differing temporality; while one homogenises in a forward motion towards progress, the other moves backwards to draw from past experiences and unwittingly reveals people's inherent differences (1994, 145). Even Frantz Fanon, the Martinique born Algerian philosopher, who spent most of his life advocating nationalism, dedicated an entire chapter of his book to the "pitfalls of national consciousness." Fanon warns the administrators who fill the leadership vacuum left behind by the colonial administrators not to assume the colonial values by asserting any form of dominance (119; 120–122).

In returning to Malaysia as a case study, one may also turn to Anthony Smith's chapter on the modernist histories of nationalism that traces three main waves, covering various continents of the world from the 18th century to as recently as the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and draws attention to the beginning of modern nationalist sentiments as a European/Western product (2010, 95–97). This shows that chronologically Malaysia belongs to the category of a modern nation; yet could it have inherited nationalist sentiments from an older tradition that is rooted in pre-colonial days? David Henley's chapter, "The Origins of Southeast Asian Nations: A Question of Timing," concludes that the absence of strong exclusive nationalism in pre-colonial Malaya meant that the nation as we know it emerged from a new tradition thus attributing Malaysia with the European/Western model of nation formation (285). Such lack may be used to argue the on-going claim made by Malays in which Malay hegemony translates as the founding principle of Malaysian nationalism and national identity. It also shows that present-day Malaysia is a result of colonial remapping.

It should not however be construed that nationalism in pre-independent Malaya and its process towards nation formation were purely based on the imperial model; rather, it has to be viewed as an appropriated form where local nationalist movements were powerful enough to mobilise the masses through the distinction they possessed. This is why some theorists like Andreas Eckert calls for the re-situatedness of the concepts through "transnational history of ideas" rather than tracing the roots as western or non-western (70). In Amin's work, the borrowing of the Western ideals *as well as* the difference possessed by the local nationalist thought is traceable through such an appropriated sense of nationalism.

That said, the role of, in Anderson's term, "the native intelligentsia," or "the native intellectuals" as Fanon refers to them, is crucial in the forging of nationalist consciousness as such people have been empowered through the colonial education system. Anderson describes a secondary school in Dakar, West Africa during French colonialism for offering colonial education to the local boys who became nationalist leaders (112–113). Likewise Fanon asserts the importance of colonial education for the creation of "national consciousness" as the intellectuals will be able to represent the local masses and participate in the national agenda to fight against the colonial power. His main idea regarding the colonial educated intellectuals involves three stages of cultural empowerment. The latter two are the most important as the native intellectuals join with the masses to fight against the colonial power (179–182).

Both Anderson and Fanon's thesis corresponds with the idea that colonial education contributed directly to the rise in nationalist sentiments in the colonial dominions. Malaysia's case is not an exception and the examination of Amin's narrative in the succeeding section provides textual support to prove this claim. The fact that the pioneers of UMNO were also colonial educated – as depicted in the text – further affirms this statement. The nationalist agency

given to colonial educated elites in the text may also be used to elucidate the aforementioned deployment of third person narrator as he/she *represents the masses* by supposedly producing verbatim the multi-ethnic characters conversations with Ayu.

A major setback to nationalist representation is that, in the pursuit for homogeneity, it tends to overlook specificities. This becomes even more pronounced in a case like Malaysia where anti-colonial nationalism included members from different ethnic groups and classes, who at the time when the narrative was set, were distinguishable as immigrants and locals, and did not share a long common historical past with one another. Further complicating this situation were the differences that existed between the colonial educated elites and the non-colonial educated non-elite masses. This was the key concern of the Subaltern Studies scholars in the context of Indian nationalism, who having been influenced by the works of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Michel Foucault, analysed the representations of nationalism. These scholars found that such representations were selective because they credited the contributions of certain elite quarters, where, the efforts of the masses were either neglected or insufficiently represented as the consciousness of the less privileged group, whom they called 'subalterns' (a term borrowed from Gramsci), was largely obscured.

One of the main proponents, Ranajit Guha, defines the term subalterns in his essay as those who were not part of the colonial elite such as "the lesser rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle-class peasants" (44). Guha's essay concentrates on how Indian anti-colonial nationalism honoured the elites' consciousness and not the subalterns,' consequently tracing and attributing nationalism in Indian history with the colonial educated native intellectuals. His definition of subalternity which not only uses colonial education but also the Indian community's social strata (gentry, landlords and peasants) as a class category can be used to examine Amin's text because the ethnic diversity present amongst the people of Malaya can act as a divisive criterion in addition to the colonial education. In short, the textualisation given to the colonial educated de-colonising agents as opposed to the silencing of the non-colonial educated masses is observable through the representation given by both the narrator and Ayu. It also has to be mentioned that there are occurrences in the text when a voiced representation is given only to further cast the character to a position of marginality.

5. Collectivity versus Subalternity in *This End of the Rainbow*

In the narrative nationalism is both borrowed and different as it mainly depicts how through the empowerment provided by the colonial education, the founding figures of the nation were able to negotiate the terms for independence with the colonial government. The defining attributes of such founding figures are

mainly incorporated through the protagonist. In the following dialogue the main characteristic of a nationalist is made apparent:

Ayu asked her parents to teach her “white people’s language” so that she could tell the “white people” to stop taking other people’s lands. “How come you never speak that language to me?”

“We want you to be very good at our own language first,” her mother said. “After that, you’ll learn white people’s language and know it very well.” [...] “Then you’ll be strong. They’ll listen when you tell them to give us back our land.” (Amin 88)

The contextualisation of nationalism against the “white people” depicts the importance of being proficient in English and draws attention to colonial education. In other words, as the young Ayu naively constructs her otherness against the British colonisers, her parents assert that her identity will take its full form only when she assumes the strength that comes with colonial education. To gain her agency as the nationalist Ayu has to cross the borders of *both* English and Malay which is a crucial position of empowerment in the text. This is also the point when the appropriation of nationalism is narrativised as the values of the two linguistic identities are highlighted. Since the third person narrator is the one that is giving voiced representation to Ayu and her parents, it may be said that a point of convergence between these characters and the narrator emerges where the principal definition of the nationalist as a colonial educated Malay elite surfaces in the text. Such convergence between the personas of Ayu and the narrator occur throughout the story.

Nationalism can also be seen through the colonial educated Malay elites in the depiction of UMNO which from the helm of its founder, Dato Onn Jaafar, was passed to Tunku Abdul Rahman, a member of the Kedah royal family. Other than being an issue of class by birth (Onn Jaafar was a commoner as opposed to Tunku who was of royal blood), the role of UMNO towards anti-colonial movements, the readers are told, is one that is most inspiring. Amongst all of its efforts, to Ayu, the resistance UMNO showed against the formation of Malayan Union – introduced by the British government upon its return – was most noteworthy. She in fact describes these men as possessing “gentlemanly qualities” (Amin 94) attributing their civilised nature to the English education they had acquired. Yet as they have taken up the stride to negotiate the terms for self-government, these men still possessed the cultures and values of the colonised land. The representation given to UMNO and its members from Ayu’s perspective displays another form of appropriation where a group solidarity based on nationalism is ascertained among the Malay elites.

Crucially, the fragmentation of the collective Malay nationalist identity occurs when the non-colonial educated non-elites are silenced in the narrative, calling into question how far did nationalist representation represent the masses? It is from this point onwards that exclusions are normalised in the text. The two ways in which the non-elites grace the pages of the narrative is through Husna’s freedom fight

and Han's multiracial youth gathering in Johor Bahru. Husna's village folks are not given 'voice' in the text, however, the Malay men who gathered with suspicion towards Han are given emphasis as these lines show:

A Malay man of about thirty said, "I remember him as a little boy. Same face. *Naughty*, just like my little brothers." Another young Malay man said, "The way he speaks, he has to be from here." A third added, "Sure it's him, *no need to look for birthmarks*." (Amin 126; emphasis mine)

The 'voices' of the nameless men who were trying to evaluate Han through his appearance can be interpreted as lacking in decorum as they expressed their feelings outwardly towards a stranger in a crowd consisting of unknown men and women. This may be described as an occurrence of subalternity as the nationalist representation by the narrator highlights the aggressiveness of the non-elites, and bring to mind the importance of Western culture and education as measures of civilising the uncivilised. To a large extent, such positioning of marginality demonstrates that class identity is far more crucial than the shared ethnic identity. Although these men are given voiced representations, they still lack individualisation as the narrator does not name them. Such representation displays narratorial divergence from the personas of the supplementary characters as the occurrence of fragmentation in the unified Malay identity is made visible.

Other than these men, another non-elite member that the narrator introduces is Ayu's uncle, Norhadi, who is Malay educated. The only conversation between him and Ayu takes place in the subsequent lines:

"Are you happy to be going to university?" [Norhadi] asked Ayu.
 "Mixed feelings, uncle," Ayu confessed. "Sometimes I wonder, do I need to go to university to get an education?" [...]
 "That's interesting," her uncle said. "Why do you ask yourself that question?"
 "The people I admire most didn't go to university. My parents, Nimmi's parents, Surmeet's parents. Writers like Kris Mas and Tongkat Warrant. Thinkers like you."
 "I would hardly call myself a thinker, Ayu," he said, smiling. "Often I feel the lack of thinking tools. Maybe that's one reason for going to university."
 "Uncle, I don't think you lack anything, except maybe self-confidence."
 "See? That's what a university degree can give," her uncle said, laughing. (Amin 108)

There are two paradoxical points to be noted here. First, though Ayu confesses that she admires her uncle who is not a university graduate, she does not outwardly express her admiration for the competency he had in the Malay language. The readers are informed in passing that Norhadi was involved with Amri, Ayu's father, in writing the English-Malay dictionary which completely stalled upon Amri's death. Second, contrary to the statement that she admired the people in her life who never

received a university education, she acknowledges the confidence it gives one echoing segregation based on colonial education and language. In doing so, Ayu excludes herself from the non-elite members such as her parents and uncle hence casting the latter three to the position of subalternity. By giving a voiced representation to Norhadi, the personas of Ayu and the narrator diverge. This point in the text shows that Ayu is the archetype of a nationalist and she has to be portrayed apart in order to demonstrate her individualised agency.

In looking at the non-colonial educated non-elite Chinese and Indians, Mr Lim (Ayu's childhood friend, Lin's father), as well as her friend, Nimmi's mother, Amma emerge for discussion. The question is, how does Ayu who is also a member of the colonial educated elite, represent these characters? Does Ayu's representation cast them to subalternity and more importantly, where does she place herself in relation to representing the two characters? Does the place from where Ayu represents them give her the legitimization of authority as the elite anti-colonial nationalist?

Mr Lim, we are told through Ayu's recollection, was a teacher at a Chinese school and the communication between Ayu's family and the Lims was limited due to the language barrier (the Lims mainly spoke in Chinese whereas Ayu's family spoke Malay). Nonetheless they managed to maintain a friendship until the Lims fled when the Japanese army arrived, resulting in the families losing contact altogether. Although the bonding between the two families is described through respective cultural celebrations like *Aidilfitri* and Chinese New Year, the silencing of Mr Lim's character makes one wonder if he was as important to Ayu's childhood as described by the narrator: "In the afternoon, Lin's father was home and spent the time with her" (Amin 36). During a crucial moment in the narrative, when the Japanese army had arrived in Malaya, Mr Lim's concern is presented through a reported (indirect) speech: "He thanked them [Ayu's parents for warning the Lims regarding the Japanese] but explained that his family's presence would only endanger them further" (Amin 39). The continuous silencing of Mr Lim and the representation of his 'voice' through the reported speech by Ayu shows that as a Chinese educated non-elite, Mr Lim has been placed as the subaltern. In addition, the place from which Ayu and the narrator represented Mr Lim, gave the two personas the authority as the legitimate members of the anti-colonial nationalist movement, a position that the Lims did not qualify for, as these lines describe:

Lin and her parents never returned to their house. Like all the other houses, it had been cleaned out by looters, and the doors were wide open. The Chinese school on the hill, and the other schools too, had met with the same fate. [...] The empty Chinese school building was taken over by the Japanese army. Even after the war, none of the students or teachers was seen anywhere. (Amin 40)

By portraying the Lims as those who *left* their home and the school, Ayu and the narrator take the position of those who *stayed*, thus making them the representa-

tives who had the legitimate power to cast the Lims as subalterns due to the latter's act of *leaving*. Mr Lim fled with his family and never returned to participate in the national struggle against colonialism. Furthermore, in a metaphoric sense, the emptiness of the Lims' house and the Chinese schools can be regarded as the Chinese-educated people's self-imposed exclusion from the bigger picture of nationalism as Ayu's remark asserts: "*Even after the war*, none of the students or teachers was seen anywhere" (emphasis mine). The Chinese educated people in the narrative presented through Mr Lim and his family, showed no traces of resistance, thus making them subalterns not only based on their Chinese language education, but also through their self-interested act of moving away from the national picture of Malaya against colonialism.

In the case of Malayalam and Tamil educated Amma, the narrator's observation through Ayu's lens can be analysed from the perspectives of class, language, race, and gender, all of which cast Amma to the position of a subaltern:

[Nimmi's father] had a no-nonsense, impatient look about him. When he engaged Ayu in conversation about school and career, she was tongue-tied first, but after a while she felt the kindness in him and relaxed. [...] In his home he was a king who felt fortunate in his queen; for besides being a wonderful wife and mother, she was a Malayalam scholar and had taught herself Tamil so well that he consulted her on points of language [...]. Amma [who] had been reading Kalidas, her favourite in Malayalam literature, [...] with Ayu's coming [...] switched instantly to "earth mother." (Amin 26–27)

Firstly, in the context of class, the Malayalam and Tamil language educated woman can be seen as someone lacking the emancipatory values of progress and civilisation that come as a result of colonial education. These values are essential for the participation in the national resistance against the colonisers. Secondly, with reference to language, Amma's proficiency in Malayalam and Tamil kept her at a domestic level where the exercise of reading was kept at home, disallowing her from gaining agency as a nationalist. Amma moreover practised her migrant roots by learning Tamil and keeping in contact with her nativity through Indian literature; in doing so, she distances herself from the new land because it resonates with the motherland language and culture. Also, a gendered representation surfaces when Amma's character is made audible only in retrospect to Ayu's recollection of her husband. Such multiple levels of subalternity permanently silence Amma, the non-colonial educated non-elite.

The last character analysed in this paper is Ayu's mother, Husna. Unlike the others examined thus far Husna is not silenced or cast to subalternity; instead it is through her that Ayu's agency as nationalist reaches its full circle. This is because through Husna one may understand how the double personas (narrator and protagonist) trace a Malay woman's nationalist agency in discourses

like *This End of the Rainbow* through aspects such as appearance and articulation. Readers are told from the very beginning that Husna who worked as the supervisor of the Malay girls' school did not get her contract extended by the colonial government due to her involvement in the freedom movement. Husna's resistance makes her a powerful character especially when she continues to strive after her husband's death. In the description of Husna one can observe how she has been epitomised as representing the Malay identity in pre-independent Malaya:

[L]ooking smart in her batik sarong with white *baju*, head-scarf and shoes and carrying a batik hold-all [...]. A slim girl in blue *kurung* suit with matching scarf and shoes jumped out of the driver's seat, hugged Husna and opened the front passenger door for her. At the back of the car sat a big woman with a low bun, a plump one with short permed hair and a third, slightly thinner, who had the Johorean 'twelve o'clock bun' perched at the top of her head. They were going on a tour of villages all over the state to talk to the women there about independence: and, in Husna's case to sing. [...] [Husna] had been the first woman to be seen driving a car in Johor Bahru. People in the streets had stared and pointed, shouting, "Betina gohed!" ("A female driving!"). (Amin 122)

Husna maintained her Malay culture through the batik sarong and white *baju* attire when she left the house, choosing culture over comfort as she set off to travel around the state of Johor to sing about independence. Additionally she had her head-scarf on symbolising her Muslim identity. The young girl in blue who wore the *kurung* suit with a scarf can be seen as Husna's protégé; she opened the front passenger door and followed in Husna's footsteps in retaining the Malay-Muslim identity when visiting people in the state.

Conversely, in the representation of the three women who were already seated in the car, a contrast in appearance can be observed: "At the back of the car sat a big woman with a *low bun*, a plump one with *short permed hair* and a third, slightly thinner, [...] had the *Johorean 'twelve o'clock bun'*" (emphasis mine). These three women who shared a similar cause with Husna in trying to instil a nationalistic spirit among the peoples of Malaya failed to identify themselves with the Malay-Muslim identity as their fashionable hairdo, to an extent, represented western influence, or to say the least, singled them out from women like Husna and the girl in blue. Through Husna it can be said that racial and religious identities are important for the female agent who has taken it upon her to fight for the nationalistic cause. By describing Husna and her social appearance in detail the narrator forwards the notion that the female nationalist follow in the footsteps of pioneer women like Husna by wearing identifiable Malay attire and covering their hair. More importantly, in maintaining cultural and religious identities through appearance, Husna openly shows her position as a Malay nationalist thus symbolising to the younger generation like her daughter that it is better to display one's identity in one's

appearance than to hide it in order to fit in with the rest of the crowd. Similarly at the university in Singapore, where multi-ethnic students received education from the colonial education centre, Ayu insists on wearing her Malay attire, the *kurung* suit. So it can be said that the Malay-Muslim identity in the form of the female's attire is crucial in order to give her agency as the nationalist.

In addition to this, Husna's resistance can also be seen through her action in choosing to drive at a time when the womenfolk in Malaya were expected to stay home. Her choice to drive did not earn her popularity among the locals as can be seen in the phrase, "*Betina* gohed!," as the word "betina" implies a derogatory Malay term equivalent to the English word "bitch." Such remarks did not stop Husna from exercising her freedom to the fullest by driving around for her nationalistic cause until later in the narrative we are told that she stopped driving altogether due to an accident. A similar trend of independence can be seen in Ayu, albeit on a small scale, as she visits her friends in Johor using her own transport, the bicycle. This form of independence and emancipation that Husna embodied can be perceived as the Malay female's self-defined trait in order to fit into the mould of nationalism.

Conclusion

By forwarding a relational reading through the narrator, protagonist, and supplementary characters, this paper traces the de-limiting tendencies of a nationalist text that attempts to give a neutral representation of the masses. In *This End of the Rainbow* the nationalist is a colonial educated Malay elite who abides by the Islamic religious identity, highlighting the occurrence of ethno-nationalism. It also has to be noted that Malaysia's top-down pro-Malay identity as nationalist identity is supported through the narrativisation of a similar bottom-up hegemonic Malay agency in Amin's text. This proves the claim that Malays occupy the centre of the nation – insiders/*bumiputeras* – which accords them a sense of ownership and sovereignty. Malay group solidarity is not without problem as intra-ethnic divisions may exist to further complicate the norms of the national imagination.

It can also be said through the examination of the text that nationalism is an ambivalent and complex subject matter. This is why post-colonial theorists like Bhabha have based their arguments on the conceptual failure of nationalist discourses. The strength of such discourses nevertheless depends on the dynamics they possess when portraying nationalism as both borrowed and distinctive so that the influence of colonial education in the rise of nationalism is not superficially understood. The normalisation of exclusions in nationalist discourses may also be construed as a call for more inclusive writing strategy that addresses themes of de-territorialisation to befit the current wave of globalisation.

Notes

- 1 *Merdeka* is the Malay language equivalent for freedom. “*Merdeka* generation” refers to the group of people during the 1940s and 1950s in pre-independent Malaya involved in the nationalist movement against the British colonisers and are coincidentally the main characters of Amin’s work. Malaya gained its independence in 1957. In 1963, Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore joined Malaya to become Malaysia; nevertheless, in 1965, Singapore left the federation and became a sovereign nation. Present-day Malaysia consists of West (Peninsula) Malaysia and East (Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo) Malaysia. Identity contestation is more widespread in West Malaysia as the early settlement of Chinese and Indian immigrants was concentrated within this region, hence creating an ethnically segregated society in comparison to the two eastern states in Borneo.
- 2 Amin is well known among the local literary circles in Malaysia as she was one of the pioneer writers who was bilingual but chose to write mainly in Malay to mark her anti-colonialist fervour. Amin however returned to writing in English in the 1970s through her newspaper columns and *This End Of The Rainbow* is her only fictional biography in English. For details, see Ganesan, “Constructions of national identity in contemporary Malaysian state narratives and life-writings in English,” unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2014.
- 3 The term “Melayu” (Malay) has undergone various conceptual changes. For more information on the term and Malays as a group of people see Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 2001; Kessler, “Archaism and modernity: Contemporary Malay political culture” *Fragmented vision: Culture and politics in contemporary Malaysia*, 1992, 133–157. Also, in Malaysia all Malays are Muslims as the Federal Constitution, Article 160, defines a Malay as a person who habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to the Malay customs, and professes Islam as his/her religion, see *Malaysian Federal Constitution*, 2010.
- 4 MCA and MIC were formed to safeguard the political, economic, and social interests of the Chinese and Indians in the country.
- 5 UMNO is still the major political party in the ruling coalition now known as *Barisan Nasional*.
- 6 The term has been used by pro-Malay nationalists with reference to theorists like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. See Das, “An Interview with Datuk Abdullah” *Malay Dominance*, 1986, 63.
- 7 MLE is a small body of writings in Malaysia as there is a far greater corpus in the Malay language. MLE has suffered from slow growth as depicted by limited critical work done in the area. See *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*, 2001.

- 8 For details, see “Exploring English Language Learning and Teaching in Malaysia” *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 2012, 35–51.
- 9 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, SPM, which was used to be known as Malaysian Certificate of Education, MCE, is equivalent to O-Levels.
- 10 The Home Ministry’s official website lists a total of 1,532 “prohibited publications” ranging from Charles Darwin’s translated Malay version of *The Origin of Species* to Karen Armstrong’s Malay edition of *Islam: A Short History*. The English editions of both books are available in the bookstores. See the Home Ministry’s website at <http://www.kdn.gov.my/index.php/en/2012-08-08-00-54-58/penerbitan-larangan>.
- 11 Some of the colonial writers were Hugh Clifford, Richard Winstedt, and Frank Swettenham. For a good account of writings in colonial Malaya that includes works by expatriates, see Yap, *A Brief Critical Survey of Prose Writings*, 1971.
- 12 In his article, “A Man and an Island: Gender and Nation in Lee Kuan Yew’s the Singapore Story,” Holden explains the terms “political biography” and “national autobiographies” and situates the two with the making of the nation by drawing reference to Prime Minister Lee’s biography. See *Biography*, Vol. 24. 2 (2001): 401–424.
- 13 See *Reading Autobiography* (2001) that includes varying terminologies to examine the dynamics of life-writing and also provides a good explanation on the development of the genre.
- 14 Amin’s interview following the book’s publication evidences that the story is based on her life. See Yaakub, “Dunia Kreatif Khalidah Adibah Amin” (16 November 2006) *Berita Harian*.
- 15 Postcolonial complexity refers to the temporal and spatial mix and blend in literary texts that is different from the clear, linear structure of life-writing that has western roots. See Moore-Gilbert “A Concern Peculiar to Western Man? Postcolonial Reconsiderations of Autobiography as Genre” *Postcolonial Poetics* (2011): 91–108.
- 16 Moore-Gilbert’s monograph, *Postcolonial Life-Writing* (2009), forwards three ways in which a female writer’s work can be read: relational, embodied, and de-centred. A relational reading may unlock the complexity of the postcolonial female writer such as Amin and her authorial intention as it examines the existence of numerous personas in the text.
- 17 Voiced representation here refers to the presence of speech/dialogue. Voiceless representation or silencing is absence of speech. At times voiced representation is given to silence the characters altogether.
- 18 Although this paper mainly discusses the roots of nation-state through a brief summary of Anderson’s work, many works have been done to trace the models on which nations are based, see for example Seton-Watson’s *Nations and States: An Inquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*

(1977); Breuilly's "Introduction: Concepts, Approaches, Theories" *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Nationalism* (2013): 1–14.

- 19 Anderson makes this claim with reference to Spanish-speaking South and Central American creole communities.

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