

The Evolving Identities of the Malays as the Result of Neo Colonisation.

(An Action Research in progress)

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Abstract

Recently, the emergence of the *keris* to symbolise the Malay psyche and spirit during the UMNO assemblies on several occasions had caused a major uproar from the other ethnic races in Malaysia. There are some who viewed that the *keris* symbolises violence. Statements had to be made in assurance on the concerns about the *keris*, which had been a bone of contention among many non-Malays. Recent development of unease regarding the unsheathing of the wavy dagger, that was kissed to symbolise Malay sovereignty during the UMNO assembly ceremonies was misconstrued and the symbolism and significance of the *keris* had been misinterpreted by several quarters.

In not understanding the Malay psyche and culture, the sceptics view the *keris* as a symbol of hostility and combat. Other than the *keris*, other issues such as the evolving forms of the Malays, their culture and language that has undergone drastic changes due to the globalisation process is discussed. The result of a new form of 'New World Order' through 'Neo-Colonialism' has also changed the make-up of many ethnic races and nations, unifying them in a uniformity that makes nation states more friendly to the West (Zeenath Kausar. 2007:35) and the adoption of western ideologies (Frantz Fanon: 1967, 1974), framework and trappings. The study will discuss these issues through the works of selected Malaysian writers and thoughts of renowned Malaysian individuals.

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Introduction

The world has now become borderless and is a global village that sees many revolutionary changes. The prevalent new media and latest technological advancements have great significance and impact on the lives of the earth's inhabitants. Great distances in travel are now possible physically through advancement in logistics and aviation, and travelling via the mind are made possible through the vast world of cyber space travel. In addition to this, the proliferations of boundless information that are easily available through the new media and multi media have great impact in the lives and formation of opinion of many. With these bombardments of sources and resources, many identities have changed and evolved through direct and indirect contact with the world citizens, *netizens* and multitudinous communities.

Malaysia is no exception to this phenomenon. This paper discusses the evolving identities of the Malays in today's globalised world as the result of neo colonisation through aspects such as language and culture. According to Zeenath Kausar (2007) in '*Colonization to Globalization: 'Might Is Right' Continues (earthly City Versus Civilised City, Madinah)*' asserts the importance of the awareness of western economic and political hegemony. She called for a stop towards the promotion of western cultural imperialism and put forward her stance for a non hegemonic form of globalisation. Zeenath Kausar advocates that the world should collaborate to realise a non-hegemonic form of globalisation and that nations of the world should enjoy peace, justice, technology and prosperity via mutual cooperation without sacrificing their own cultural and religious identities...

Unfortunately, what she worries most and what I observe are indeed dismal. If the present states of affairs are to be taken into account, the cultural identities of world citizens and in this context the Malays (besides the other ethnic groups) in Malaysia are fast eroding. This could be seen in their evolving cultural makeup, through their language, clothing, food, song, taste and attitudes etc.

Who are the Malays? According to the Federal Constitution of Malaysia as at 15th January 2007 (Legal Research Board. 2007: 141- 142), under article 160 of the Interpretation, ‘Malay’ means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and -

(a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or

(b) is the issue of such a person

In this context, ‘Merdeka Day’ means the thirty first day of August, nineteen hundred and fifty- seven.

In this study, I will first examine the present day language of the Malays (Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia). In terms of the Malay language, it could be seen that many English words are borrowed and adopted into the Malay corpus. Upon examination of the *Kamus Dewan*, edisi keempat (Dictionary) fourth edition 2007, it could be seen that there are numerous words borrowed and derived from the English language with Malay equivalence already in existence. I am greatly puzzled at the rationale of this happening and could only come to a conclusion that perhaps the English word borrowed and adopted are more economical, sounds more sophisticated or have no existing equivalence in the Malay Language.

Some examples of lexical items taken from the English Language are:

- Penyediaan Manuskrip (B.M) on page ix. Kamus Dewan (2007), from the word ‘manuscript’
- Penelitian Pruf (B.M) from page ix. Mamus Dewas (2007) from the English word ‘proof’
- Operasi (B.M) (page 1009, Kamus Dewan. 2007) from the word ‘operation’, while the Malay equivalence ‘bedah’ has already been in existence (Kamus Dewan : 148)

- Kanser (B.M.) on page 671 (Kamus Dewan. 2007), derived from the English word ‘cancer’, while there is a Malay equivalence ‘barah’ (Kamus Dewan: 128)

Besides that, the borrowing of English words into the Bahasa Melayu vocabulary and corpus is so rampant in the popular media and magazines that,....not only are the words borrowed and adopted with slight spelling adjustments...in some instances, English and other Foreign languages are taken wholesale and used besides Bahasa Melayu words, stringed in the same sentence. A lot of code-mixing and code-switching occurs. This phenomenon should worry the Bahasa Melayu champions and Nationalists as the sovereignty and sacredness of the Bahasa Melayu language is tainted and brutalised.

In my recent study of four Bahasa Melayu magazines, I discovered that there was rampant and indiscriminate use of English language. The four magazines were *Nona*, *Al Islam*, *rapi* and *Remix*...all were March 2009 issues. Firstly, on studying the names of the magazines, I find that the magazine ‘Remix’ being a magazine written in Bahasa Melayu uses an English word for its name.

On further scrutiny on the front covers and content of all the four magazines...it was found that there were many English words borrowed or English words used alongside Bahasa Melayu words contained in:

1. Nona Mac 2009:

Front cover:

- *EDISI* (Edition. Eng)
- *Realiti Impian Wanita* [Realiti (B.M.) - Reality . (Eng)]
- *DEKO + GAYA* [*Deko* (B.M) - Deco. (Eng)]
(could have used the B.M. word *hiasan* instead of DEKO)
- 60 TIP *BELI RUMAH + PILIH LOKASI + PINJAMAN+ GUAMAN* [Tip (B.M.-Tip(Eng)] , [Lokasi (B.M) –Location (Eng)]
(could have used the B.M. word *panduan* for the word ‘tip’ and the B.M. word *tempat* for *lokasi*)

- 30 *FESYEN KOLOBARASI GAYA @ DEKO* [Kolobarasi (B.M.)- Collaboration (Eng)], [Deko (B.M.) – Deco (Eng)]
(Could have used the word B.M. *kerjasama* for *kolobarasi*, and the B.M. word *hiasan* for *deko*)
- BONUS: *MILIKI PRODUK KECANTIKAN POISSE & NUVAFEMME*
[*Produk* (B.M.) – Product (Eng)]
(there is an existing B.M. word *barangan* for *produk*)
- 10 *BAUCAR MAKAN DI RESTORAN BERTARAF LIMA BINTANG*
[*Baucar* (B.M.) – Voucher (Eng)], [*Restoran* (B.M.) –Restaurant (Eng)]

Page 50:

- Your New Wardrobe – Simplicity @ Office (entirely English words)
- *Relaks dari pagi* (Could have used the B.M. equivalence already in existence...*relaks-bersantai*)

Page 51:

- *DRESS SINGKAT ALWAYS THE BEST DI HARI-HARI MALAS BERPADANAN* (A mixture of B.M. and English words)
[Dress (Eng) – Baju (B.M.)], [Always the best (Eng)]

Page 52:

- *BE IN STYLE DENGAN KARDIGAN BIRU GELAP....*(a mixture of English and Bahasa Melayu words in the same sentence..)

2. Remix Mac 2009:

Front cover:

- *Memey: Suami Orang Caring!* (Caring could have been replaced by existing B.M. words *prihatin* or *penyayang*)
- *WHATEVER. OH SCANDAL* (Usage of English words entirely)
- *I SPY* (Entirely English words)
- *DESIGN YOUR OWN SHOES* (Use of English words entirely)

- Crash diet in 7 days. Diet *ikut jenis darah* (A mixture of English and B.M. words)
- ABOUT HIM –*Kenali Karakter Kekasih Anda* (A mixture of English and B.M. words.....the word *karakter* (character)could have been replaced by the B.M. word *watak*)

3. *Al Islam Mac 2009/rabiulawal 1430H:*

Front cover:

- *Badan korporat takut taja program islamik* [*korporat*(B.M)- corporate (English)] , [*islamik* (B.M.) – Islamic (English)]
- *Eksklusif: Al Islam menjejak KOMUNITI YAHUDI di Pulau Pinang* [*Eksklusif* (B.M.) – Exclusive (English)], [*Komuniti* (B.M.) – Community (English)]
(*Eksklusif* could be replaced by *istimewa* and *komuniti* by *masyarakat*)

4. *rapi 1 Mac 2009*

Front cover:

- *Ekstra 4 m/s* (Extra)
- *Cantas Risiko* (Risk) *Kanser* (Cancer)
(*risiko* could be replaced by *bahaya ancaman* and *kanser* could be replaced by *barah* in B.M.)
- *MOTIVASI* (Motivation)
(*Motivasi* could be replaced by *perangsang* another B.M. equivalent)

This situation is aptly discussed by Salleh Ben Joned (1994) in his book *As I Please*, in his article ‘The *Transformasi* of a Language. In his writing, Salleh had commented that:

All languages borrow from others, but borrowing should be dictated by necessity, not fashion, laziness, pretentiousness, or any other self indulgent motive. Bahasa Malaysia writers in general are prone to this habit of indiscriminate borrowing from English. This is not a recent phenomenon; it has been with us ever since

Merdeka (Independence). The ironical thing is that the worst culprits are not the English-educated whose Malay vocabulary is poor and are too lazy or too uninterested to do anything about it. No, the worst culprits are the Malay-educated, especially those who make a lot of noise about the sanctity of the National Language. These writers, especially the literary critics, borrow, in some cases kidnap, English words not because they are desperately poor in BM vocabulary, but because they are desperately in need of ego-boosting, or something with which to dress up the poverty of their ideas. When you have nothing to say, big foreign words, the more abstract the better, can be quite handy. I think it is the Indonesians who taught them, or encouraged them in this pernicious habit, Indonesian writers have always been thoroughly indiscriminate in their borrowing of European words. Malay writers who have always looked up to their cousins across the Straits cannot resist copying them.

I concur with Salleh with regards to rampant, indiscriminate and escalating borrowing of English into Bahasa Melayu. The present phenomenon shows that the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia) with the recent increase of English words into the vocabulary shows a leaning and the decrease in the language distance towards the English Language.

This is in accordance to Terence Odlin's argument on language transfer that stresses on the mostly overlooked cumulative effects of cross-linguistics similarities and differences on the acquisition process (Terence Odlin 1989:38). This implies a more positive language acquisition of the Malays towards the English Language since the prevalent situation witness numerous inclusion of English words into the Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia vocabulary. This should then dispel the worries of certain quarters (Malay nationalist and Malay nationalist writers) who are against the use of English Language as a medium of instruction in the teaching of Mathematics and Science in Malaysia.

The Bahasa Melayu vocabulary are infused with a lot of borrowed English words nowadays , where code-mixing and code-switching with the heavy borrowing of English words are widely practiced in all mode of Malaysian life....in the various media, multimedia, new media, academia, business and trade communication and everyday communication. I find this state worrying as the Bahasa Melayu will lose its identity in years to come and this finding is strengthened by arguments made by Hassan Ahmad in his article '*Cabaran Global: Bahasa Melayu sebagai Pengungkap Tamadun Bangsa*' as compiled in a book edited by Mohamed Anwar Omar Din (2004) in '*Dinamika Bangsa Melayu: Menongkah Arus Globalisasi*'. In this particular article, Hassan Ahmad observed that,

Oleh kerana itu, saya kira perlu sekali bangsa Melayu melepaskan dirinya daripada kemelut atau krisis pemingiran bahasa Melayu daripada kemajuan dunia hari ini. Sekiranya tidak, dalam beberapa dekad akan datang bangsa kita akan dibahasa-Inggeriskan dan seterusnya akan 'diglobalisasikan' sehingga keupayaannya untuk menjadi bangsa yang bertamadun sendiri, untuk mengekalkan jati dirinya, budayanya, agamanya, system nilainya akan menjadi lemah.

Thus, I firmly believe that nationalist and Bahasa Melayu champions should focus on this phenomena and address this serious issue of the impact of 'globalisation' and the erosion of the Malay identity due to the inclination and westernisation of the Malay language towards the western world, especially America and Britain (our ex-colonisers). This is due to the worldview (*Weltanschauung*) effect of language on the people that practice and use it as termed by Sapir-Whorf in their 'linguistic determinism' and 'linguistic relativity' hypothesis.

Furthermore, the translation efforts of matters and body of knowledge in the English language and other languages into Bahasa Melayu are slow when compared with colossal body of scientific and technological materials out there. Thus, there is a constant tug-of-war situation and dichotomy between 'nationism' and 'nationalism' sentiments.

According to Fishman (1968:9) as quoted by Alis Puteh (2006) in his 'Language & Nation Building: A Study of The Language Medium Policy in Malaysia, to which I agree, stated that – *For the nationalist, language represents the continuity of a great tradition with all of its symbolic elaborations in terms of ideologised value and goals.....Thus nationalists pursue language reinforcement and maintenance rather than selection per se.*

For nationalists however, language choice is a matter of calculated effectiveness, of communicational ease, and of operational efficiency (Alis Putih. 2006:45).

However after my recent study on the available Malay literature as discussed in parts in this paper, I perceive that Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia language maintenance is at its lowest ebb, with rampant abuse of the language. Which leads me to question as to what areas of the Malay language and its role are the nationalists and gatekeepers of the Malay language championing?

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, in an 'Occasional Paper' No.10, 2000 by Marlyna Maros entitled '*Bahasa Melayu Dalam Pembentukan Negara-Bangsa: Antara Hasrat dan Hakikat*', her paper supports my findings. In the introduction of her paper, she stated that:

Proses pembentukan sebuah Negara-bangsa sering mengambil kira faktor bahasa sebagai faktor utama di dalam perpaduan masyarakat majmuk. Di Malaysia bahasa yang dipilih sebagai bahasa perpaduan adalah bahasa Melayu.....pandangan umum cendekiawan khususnya berpendapat bahawa bahasa Melayu tidak digunakan secara meluas sebagaimana yang diharapkan untuk pembentukan Negara-bangsa (Ahmat Adam, 1994).....

.....ramai yang berpendapat bahawa bahasa lain lebih berkemampuan untuk memajukan bangsa, khususnya dalam bidang sains dan teknologi.

Her findings revealed that academics view that the Malay language (bahasa Melayu) is not being used widely as hoped in nation building development (Ahmat Adam, 1994), and that many are of the opinion that other languages are more capable of developing the nation, especially in the fields of science and technology.

However, certain Bahasa Melayu champions in Malaysia are too involved and hyped up with the issue of the ‘Teaching of Mathematics and Sciences in English’. The Learning and Teaching of Mathematics and Sciences in English (PPSMI- *Pembelajaran dan Pengajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris*) has become a contentious national issue that recently, a protest march was held in Kuala Lumpur. The government was urged to expedite the decision of the language medium in teaching the two subjects with certain adamant group championing the use of Bahasa Melayu (New Sunday times, March 8, 2009).

On the question of the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia), the terminology and swings in the naming of the language itself is very confusing. At some points in Malaysia’s history, the Malay language was termed as Bahasa Melayu, and at some points it was termed as Bahasa Malaysia. This naming of the language itself has a political nature to it, as Ministers and language gatekeepers attempt to reconcile the makeup of the plural society by referring to the general whole (as Bahasa Malaysia) and not to the ethnic group, the Malays. (Bahasa Melayu). Salleh ben Joned had referred to this situation in his article ‘*Budaya Jiwa Bangsa*’ from his book ‘Nothing Is Sacred’ (Salleh,2003: 219). In this particular article, Salleh had written, “*Given the slogan Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa (Language is the Soul of the nation), awarding the Seniman Negara to someone who writes as much in English as in Bahasa Malaysia (sorry, I should have said Bahasa Melayu), certainly signifies a change.*

I anticipate that this situation will arise again in the future as the naming of the National language will be named so as to reconcile all ethnic groups in Malaysia so that it will represent the collective Malaysian society and not just to belonging a specific Malay (*Melayu*) ethnic group. However, the original language is Bahasa Melayu belonging to the Malays (Melayu), and this should not be forgotten and put aside, with the richness of its culture and identity intact.

Another worrying issue is the dissolving identity of the Malays. This phenomenon started way back as when the Malays changed their orthographic representation of their language, from the 'Jawi' system to that of modern day 'alphabets. Thus part of their rich heritage and the narratives of the 'Malay World' enfolded in history necessitate the deciphering of an orthographic 'jawi' representation, is only possible to the few that has knowledge of it.

In addition to this, the Malay World has seen the deterioration and the disappearance of a huge chunk of the Malay vocabulary, with its nuances in the form of *pantun*, *peribahasa*, *simpulan bahasa*, *bidalan*, *shair* and the such... along with it narrations of lessons learned and allusions from the past.

In years that had passed and years to come, the world had witnessed and will continue to witness the evolution of a new breed of Malays that do not know their culture, heritage and identity. Who are the Malays? According to the Federal Constitution of Malaysia as at 15th January 2007 (Legal Research Board. 2007: 141- 142), under article 160 of the Interpretation, 'Malay' means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom.

Furthermore, Shamsul A. B. in a *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32 (3), pp 355 – 366 October 2001 article, 'A History of an Identity, an identity of a History: The Idea and Practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia Reconsidered', published by The National University of Singapore has made several proposals. He argues that ethnicity is not innate but is adopted, learned and constructed. He proposed that Malay ethnicity is not innate but rather learned or constructed, as the resultant from intersecting historical, cultural and social factors derived from colonial historiography. He stresses that the major problematics in Malaysia that need to be addressed are the questions on identity contestation and identity formation, in their individual as well as their collective forms.

He reiterated that Islam has been the identity marker by the colonial to identify the Malays. The collocation concepts of Malay identification with the '*kampung*'(villages) has revolved to that of the '*Bangsa*' (nation) and '*Ketuanan Melayu*' (Malay

Domination), '*Jatidiri bangsa*' (national identity'), '*Bangsa Idaman*' (nation of intent' and '*Bangsa Malaysia*' (Malaysian Nation) at the macro level.

In addition to this, I have also taken into consideration the thoughts of Ghazali Shafie (2008) that was compiled and published by Penerbit Univeristi Kebangsaan Malaysia entitled, '*Rumpun Melayu dan Bangsa Malaysia Menjelang Tahun 2020*' in my study.

In his article on '*Rumpun Melayu*' in the compilation, Ghazali stated that the Malays defend justice by conference and consensus, without violence through threats and hard power – '*Itulah keadilan tamadun Melayu iaitu tamadun yang sanggup membuat dan menerima perubahan mengikut kehendak semasa. Memepertahankan keadilan dengan cara muafakat, tanpa ugut dengan kekerasan kuasa.*' (Ghazali Shafie, 2008: 16)

He went on to say that the Malay society has long embraced the concept of 'Consensual Democracy' where the individual person is attached and bonded close to his family. However, Ghazali (2008: 14) stressed that 'Western Democracy' has now influenced the Malay individual that has longed practiced the civilised Malay way of life...and that it was hard for the Malays to have their leader insulted in public such as the common occurrence during election times that aligns with Western democracy and in the parliament – '*Demokrasi Barat yang mementingkan individu itu kini mempengaruhi pemikiran orang bertamaddun Melayu.....,Payah bagi bagi orang Melayu menerima pemimpinya dicela di tengah khalayak,seperti yang selalu berlaku pada pilihanraya cara demokrasi Barat atau di Parlimen.*'

I perceived that what Ghazali Shafie had stated can be seen as a prevalent phenomenon in current day Malay/Malaysian society. The Malays have learned to be insolent towards their leaders, between themselves and towards their own society. This could be attributed partly to 'neo colonisation' and 'globalisation' process. This can be seen from recent spats that migrated from the lives of the people who showed great disrespect to their leaders and rulers into the virtual world of the internet and media, as in reports in newspapers, internet and media as reported in the *Berita Harian*, 16 March

2009 page 7, *Kes Hina Sultan Perak* and in the STAR 14 March 2009 N2 in an article entitled 'lab helper fined for insulting Sultan'.

Thus, the advancement in IT and the speed of dissemination of information through the onslaught of information, data and materials in the media, new media and the internet has very much influenced the mindset, attitude and culture of the Malays in particular and Malaysians in general. Ghazali Shafie (2008:13) espoused that the Malays and Malaysians should prepare themselves towards the advancement of IT and globalisation process, without compromising the Malay Civilisations with its good values entrenched in it.

Recent and current developments have seen that the Malays and other ethnic groups have indeed compromised their values, culture and mindset for the Western ideologies and way of life. Most of the network channels on the television, media and new media, films on the silver-screen, music, and other areas of life such as fashion, food, music and others are infiltrated with western culture and way of life.

Zeenath Kausar (2007:35-39) explicated the new form of colonisation and world order by her account of the promotion of development ideology and modernisation theories through projects by western scholars and political leaders. Underdeveloped, developing and post colonial states readily embrace the modernisation process advocated by the west, thus making these nation-states including Malaysia, friendly and inclined to the West. In fact, Zeenath Kausar(2007) pointed to the 'Homogenization' and "Hegemonization' global effect of western and American power in all dimensions of life, may they be social, cultural, economic, political and other dimensions of life. Many nations are mesmerised by the 'capitalists' economy, consumerism and western commodities and commodification. Zeenath Kausar (2007: 95) in the same book stresses that globalisation promotes the western Weltanschauung.

Hence, this study that focuses on the evolving identities of the Malays are the results of Neo Colonisation and globalisation process, finds that the Malay language, culture, worldview and lifestyle have evolved towards western Weltanschauung. It may not be surprising that the Malays will soon lose their identity in parts or whole. They will no

longer be able to decipher meaning-making codes and symbolisms that narrate their story, culture and their Malay World and Civilisation if no intervention measures are taken.

The recent emergence of the *keris* to symbolise the Malay psyche and spirit during the UMNO assemblies on several occasions had caused a major uproar from the other ethnic races in Malaysia. There are some who viewed the *keris* as symbolising violence. Statements had to be made in assurance on the concerns about the *keris*, which had been a bone of contention among many non-Malays.

Recent development of unease regarding the unsheathing of the wavy dagger, which was followed by the kissing of it to symbolise Malay sovereignty during the UMNO assembly ceremonies were misconstrued, and the symbolism and significance of the *keris* had been misinterpreted by several quarters. In not understanding the Malay psyche and culture, the sceptics view the *keris* as a symbol of hostility and combat. It is interesting to note that the symbol of *keris* is entrenched in the UMNO logo, thus it is befitting that the *keris* should emerge time and time again during UMNO ceremonies since it is the symbol of the party.

However, there will be a time in the future that the Malays who are not in the know might be ignorant of the manifestation of the symbolisms and the inherent meanings in their art and culture, in their songs and their language. It might not be fashionable to use full Malay words, or full Malay sentences without interspersing with a smattering of English or foreign words, or English/foreign words borrowed into the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia).

These entrapments of western ideology, framework and trappings have been pointed out by Frantz Fanon (1967, 1974). In his book 'The Wretched of the Earth', Fanon(1974:38), he recounts the enchantment of the colonised for the coloniser's world: *'In order to assimilate and to experience the oppressor's culture, the native has had to leave certain of his intellectual possessions in pawn. These pledges include his adoption of the forms of thoughts of the colonialist bourgeoisie.'*

Although it appears that most nations appear to be independent, their minds are still colonised, and this is the new form of colonisation. The Malays in Malaysia are no exception to this phenomenon, and unless maintenance, preservation and intervention measures are taken, the present day Malay Civilisation, Malay World and Malay identity will undergo a tangential evolution and transformation.

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