

Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities

Anthony Reid*

This article attempts to bring together recent literature about the typology of nationalism, with the ways in which 'Malay' or 'Melayu' have been used as the core of an ethnîe or a nationalist project. Different meanings of 'Melayu' were salient at different times in Sumatra, in the Peninsula and in the eastern Archipelago, and the Dutch and British used their respective translations of it very differently. Modern ethno-nationalist projects in Malaysia and Brunei made 'Melayu' a contested and often divisive concept, whereas its translation into the hitherto empty term 'Indonesia' might have provided an easier basis for territorial, or even ultimately civic, nationalism in that country.

As the world stumbles hesitantly towards post-nationalist ways of understanding identity, it has at last become possible to discern what nationalism is, and the roles it has played in dominating the last century of our common history.¹ It no longer seems as 'natural' and uncontroversial as it did at its height before 1945. Yet the plethora of fine analyses which began to appear in the 1980s² has barely begun to be integrated into the study of Southeast or indeed East Asia, where nationalism is still new enough to arouse more excitement and sympathy than concern or serious analysis.

The work of Benedict Anderson, global in reach but drawing more heavily than most on anti-colonial examples in the New World, is much the most influential of these theoretical models among writers on Southeast Asia. I wish to draw attention here however to a different strain of analysis well established in the European-focused writing – the distinction between *civic* and *ethnic* nationalisms.

Hans Kohn, writing at the depth of Germany's disastrous experiment with extreme nationalism, was the first to point out how differently nationalism developed east of the Rhine. 'French nationalism was born (as English and American had [been] before it) in a wave of generous enthusiasm for the cause of mankind; the opposing nationalisms ... were directed to laudable but narrower goals, self-centred but antagonistic.'³ He showed how territorial nationalism developed earlier, gradually admitting more and more groups within the borders in question into citizenship in the nation, which was always territorially defined. Anthony Smith makes this distinction crucial

* Anthony Reid is a Professor of History and Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. E-mail correspondence can be directed to: areid@history.ucla.edu.

1 The first version of this paper was presented at the 15th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, held in Jakarta in August 1998. It is an evolving think-piece, and the author would welcome comments.

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso 1983; new edn 1991); John A. Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

3 Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origin and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), pp. 572-3.

to his discussion in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.⁴ Where in the older territorial model the geographically bounded state eventually created the culturally coherent nation, the ethnic model was the other way around: an ethnic group with unclear borders attempted to acquire appropriate borders and political status.

Liah Greenfeld's *Nationalism* is so far the most careful historical analysis of the relationship between these two models in the context of European history. She sees the concept of nation developing in sixteenth-century England in the sense of a sovereign people, entitled to representation in the body politic. It was thus a concept closely wedded to the emergence of democracy in early modern Europe. As it spread eastwards through Europe in the eighteenth century, however, the unique quality of the nation became more marked than its sovereign or democratic character. The sovereignty of this type of nation was held to lie in its distinctiveness, not its participatory civic character. While in the civic variant 'nationality is at least in principle open and voluntaristic', in the ethnic variant 'it is believed to be inherent – one can neither acquire it if one does not have it, nor change it if one does'.⁵ Although the distinction on the ground cannot be as sharp as the one in abstract analysis, her study of 'five roads' shows Germany and Russia more influenced by this ethnic path, while England and the United States (in common with most anti-colonial New World nationalisms) can be characterised more by the civic path, and France by an ambivalent path eventually veering towards the civic.

Southeast Asian nationalisms sit interestingly within this dichotomy. Since all the anti-colonial nationalisms espoused a territorial definition of the nation – in every case accepting the arbitrary colonial boundaries rather than some ethno-cultural unit – they must lean towards the civic idea that all within their borders are equally members of the nation. Island states like Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore are particularly congenial to this type of territorial nationalism by reason of having boundaries seemingly demarcated by nature, not by the ambivalent destiny of a people. It is significant that the strongest challenge to colonial boundaries (before Indonesia's 1975 annexation of East Timor) came from Thai nationalism, the only one for which anti-colonial sentiment was not the driving force, when Japanese hegemony provided the opportunity in 1941–43. But anti-colonial movements in Southeast Asia tended to gain more popular support in opposing foreign control than in seeking broader democratic rights, and always contained a populist edge that was opposed to the ethnic 'outsider', whether that target was European, Chinese, Vietnamese (in Cambodia and Laos) or Indian (in Burma).

Crucial also are the ways these movements have dealt with the set of central symbols (name, language, historical myths, 'national' dress and style) around which they seek to mobilise the population. Anthony Smith argues, with a certainty that seems no longer justified in a new century, 'Nations require ethnic cores if they are to survive. If they lack one, they must "re-invent" one'.⁶ Looking at the Southeast Asian evidence in particular, I prefer to speak of a core culture. There must be some way of defining what constitutes the nation-state. The question is whether that definition is explicitly ethnic, thereby encouraging ethno-nationalism and marginalising those outside the core ethnies, or whether it is defined in relation to shared, neutral symbols (territory, biota, constitution, shared history). All the nationalisms of mainland Southeast Asia experience this dilemma, in that they have tried to build from a core ethnies and culture to a civic one, with much ambivalence. Malaysia expresses the dilemma most acutely, for example in Dr Mahathir's expressed desire to negotiate the shoals between *Bangsa Melayu* (Malay Race/nation) and *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian

4 Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pp. 134–40.

5 Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 11.

6 Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 212.

Race/nation) by 2020.

If Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei today each have a 'core culture', as I think they do, its historical basis in all three cases seems to be Malayness, a cultural complex centred in the language called *Melayu*. This at least is the language all chose as their national language (though developed in different standards, with different patterns of modern borrowings from English, Dutch, Javanese, Sanskrit and Arabic). Eventually the three modern states have made their respective versions of Malay almost the sole medium of education, and thereby the social cement intended to hold their respective societies together.

It may be helpful therefore to trace the term and content of Malayness historically, to attempt to establish what this core culture represents.

Origins of Malayness

The term *Melayu* is very ancient, in a sense which appears to apply to a place in Sumatra or possibly the Straits of Melaka region more generally.⁷ Ptolemy, the second-century (CE) Egyptian geographer, inserted the toponym 'Melayu Kulon' (west Melayu, in Javanese) on the west coast of his Golden Khersonese, thus somewhere near the southern border of Burma today. The twelfth-century Arab geographer Edrisi also reported 'Malai' as a large island off southern Asia full of gold, spices, elephants and rhinoceros.⁸ In Chinese records, beginning with Yijing in the seventh century, 'Malayu' appears as a more specific kingdom to the north of Srivijaya, absorbed into the latter in the 680s. The Tanjore inscription of 1030 and Marco Polo around 1290 also identify 'Malayur' as one of Sumatra's ancient kingdoms. Most specific are the references of the fourteenth-century Javanese texts, *Pararaton* and *Nagarakertagama*, to the *Pamalayu*, or the expedition to conquer the great Sumatran kingdom of Malayu decreed in 1275 by King Kertanegara of Singasari, though perhaps not undertaken until some decades later.⁹ By this time Malayu, probably centred primarily in the Jambi area, had definitely taken over the mantle of Srivijaya, even if Chinese imperial records in their conservative way went on using the term Srivijaya after it had disappeared on the ground.

Malayu thus appears to be an old toponym associated with Srivijaya, and indeed better represented in the non-Chinese sources than Srivijaya itself. While the scholarly reconstructions usually identify Malayu with Jambi and Srivijaya with Palembang, the reality is much less clear cut, with Malayu frequently representing the larger area. Nevertheless, Malayu did not establish itself as the name for a people at that time. The commonest term used by foreigners to designate the Archipelago or its people was 'Jawa' or 'Yava'. Ancient Indian sources used terms such as 'Yava-dvipa', and Arabs and Europeans followed by using 'Jawa' as an island or collections of islands, and 'Jawi' as a people. For Chinese of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as for Vietnamese and Cambodian sources of this period, the most general term for seafaring people of the Archipelago was 'Jawa'. Thus Chinese junk captains reporting to the Japanese harbourmaster in Nagasaki around 1700 declared that both Melaka and Patani 'belonged to Jawa'.¹⁰ The first Chinese source to use 'Melayu' (*wu-lai-yu*) rather than 'Jawa' to refer to the same broad culture area (including the Philippines), as Wang Gungwu has pointed out, was a text of 1730.¹¹

7 For more information on the origins of *Melayu*, see Leonard Andaya's article in this issue.

8 Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1979), pp. 545-6.

9 Pigeaud translates 'Malayu' of Canto 13 of the *Nagarakertagama* as 'country of Malayu' or Sumatra; and Robson as 'the Malay Lands'; Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *Java in the Fourteenth Century* (The Hague: 1960-62), III: 16; Stuart Robson, trans., *Desawarnana (Nagarakertagama)* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995), p. 33.

10 *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia: Translations from the Tosen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723*, ed. Yoneo Ishii (Singapore: ISEAS/ECHOSEA, 1998), e.g. pp. 63, 103, 118, 119, 121, 123, 124, 133, 146, 255, 259-61.

11 Wang Gungwu, 'The Melayu in *Hai-kuo wen-chien lu*', in *Community and Nation*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Heinemann for ASAA), pp. 108-17.

Malay-language sources themselves are surprisingly obscure about the heritage of Srivijaya or Malayu. They do not use these terms, but cite Bukit Siguntang as the place of origin of their kings. There is a small sacred hill by this name in the modern city of Palembang. Although today graced only with Islamic graves of much later date (and some bizarre contemporary fantasy structures), this is presumed to be the sacred site of Srivijaya/Malayu. The *Sejarah Melayu* gives Malayu only as the name of a small river said to originate near this hill and flowing into the Musi (though it is in Jambi, not Palembang, that modern maps show a Sungei Malayu flowing into the Batang Hari at precisely the point of the ancient ruins). Other than this the *Sejarah Melayu* uses the term Malayu sparingly, in most cases as an adjective for kings (*raja-raja Melayu*) or for custom (*adat Melayu*), or to indicate the line of royal descent from Bukit Siguntang.¹²

When Melaka is shown in conflict with Siam, Majapahit and other states, their opponents are *orang Siam* (Siam people) and *orang Jawa*, but the home team is usually *orang Melaka*. Once Melaka is firmly established as a Muslim kingdom, however, the term *orang Melayu* begins to appear as interchangeable with Melakans, especially in describing the cultural preferences of the Melakans as against these foreigners.¹³

When describing the defence of Melaka, the *Sejarah Melayu* refers as usual to the struggle of the *orang Melaka*, but when the king is wounded in the hand he strikingly holds up his wound and says, '*Hai, anak Melayu, lihat-lah*' (Hey, Malays, look at this).¹⁴ This seems to reinforce the idea that what Brown translates as 'Malays' are seen in the text as the clients (*anak*) of the *raja Melayu*. By the end of the Melaka sultanate, it appears, Melayu had become a way of referring to the minority of the Melaka population who had lived there long enough to speak Malay as a first language and to identify with the sultan as his loyal people. This group traced its origins, or the origins of its ruling dynasty, to Srivijaya, which they recognized through their literature as Malayu or Bukit Siguntang.

The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is still more emotive about Melayu as a people supporting a line of Malay kings, but the long period over which it was compiled (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries) makes it hard to specify when this characteristic came to be central. The great Malay folk-hero Hang Tuah was pre-eminently a man of the sea, a naval commander always going on long sea voyages for the sultan of (fifteenth-century) Melaka, to distant places like India, Java, Turkey and China. As an exemplar of modern-style 'Malayness' he is, however, at best ambivalent. When the people of Kampar seem ashamed of their poor dancing because they were not real Malays from the Melaka metropolis, he reassured them that he was no better—'the Melaka people seem to be bastardised Malays [*Melayu kacokan*], mixed with Javanese from Majapahit'.¹⁵ This passage seems among those likely to have been written in the sixteenth century, evoking as it does the world of the *Sejarah Melayu*, whose readers were presumed to understand Javanese, and of the earliest European reports, which suggest Javanese as the most numerous inhabitants of Melaka.¹⁶

When the Portuguese arrived in the region after 1500 they initially adopted the same view, that *Malayos* were essentially the pro-sultan ruling people of Melaka, one kind of people among many in

12 Virginia Matheson, 'Concepts of Malay Ethos in Indigenous Writing', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 10, 2 (1979): 351-71.

13 R. O. Winstedt, 'The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 16, 3 (1938): 108, 117-18.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 192.

15 *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, ed. Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1971), p. 175.

16 *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, A.D. 1503 to 1508*, trans. J. W. Jones (London: Hakluyt Society, 1863), p. 226. Also Anthony Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999), pp. 73-6.

the city. Tomé Pires explained how the Melaka sultanate itself classified visitors to Melaka in four groups, according to which *syahbandar* (the harbourmaster) they reported to:

1. Gujeratis
2. South Indians, Pegu, Pasai
3. Javanese, Malukans, Banda, Palembang, Tanjungpura (W. Borneo), Luzon
4. Chinese, Ryukyu, Chancho and Champa¹⁷

Malayos do not appear in this list, suggesting they were not then regarded as a category outside Melaka itself. The city appears to have categorised traders in terms of the direction they came from and the intermediate ports they visited rather than any sense of common ethnicity or language. Far from being regarded as a coherent group, Austronesian-speakers are spread among all the *syahbandar* except the first and most explicitly Muslim one. The Portuguese did, however, describe *Malayos* as traders in other places such as China and Maluku, and it appears that initially they meant traders from the ruling group in Melaka.

João Barros, somewhat inclined to attribute Chinese ancestry to all the maritime elites of the Archipelago whom the Portuguese encountered, has an interesting description of the coastal people of Sumatra – generally described as Malay in recent times. For Barros they were not Malay but Jawi (*Iauijs*), the same term used by Arabic-speakers and by Hamzah Fansuri in describing himself.¹⁸ Barros says that these Jawi ‘are not natives of the land which they inhabit, but people who come from areas of China, because they imitate the Chinese in their appearance, their political system and their ingenuity in all mechanical work’.¹⁹

Although this seems a strange claim, there are other indications of a strong Chinese presence on Sumatra's east coast, notably at the only well-excavated eleventh- to fourteenth-century site of the area – Kota Cina near Medan.²⁰ There are also Chinese connections at Palembang or Bukit Siguntang around the time its heritage was being claimed by the dynasty that founded Melaka. Some upheaval occurred in Palembang between 1377, when the last king of Srivijaya sanctioned by the Chinese court was reported to have died and his son asked for Chinese approval in his turn, and 1397, when Palembang appears in Chinese sources to be in rebellion. A few years later, in 1405, the Zheng He missions visiting the region reported that Palembang was dominated by a Cantonese defector named Liang Dao-ming, who had been there for many years along with ‘several thousand

17 *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, trans. Armando Cortesão (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944), p. 265.

18 ‘Hamzah Sharnawi *zahirnya* Jawi; *Batinnya* cahaya Ahmad yang safi’, – ‘Hamzah of Shahrnawi [Ayutthaya], outwardly Jawi [or perhaps, of Jawi birth]; inwardly the pure light of Ahmad’, in *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri*, ed. G. W. J. Drewes and L. F. Brakel (Dordrecht: Foris, 1986), p. 7.

19 João de Barros, *Da Asia* (Lisbon: Regia Officina, 1777; reprinted Lisbon, 1973), II,9, p. 352. Though Raffles appeared unaware of Barros’ interpretation of *Jawi*, he also understood it as ‘the Malay term for anything mixed or crossed; as when the language of one country is written in the character of another, it is termed b’hasa jahui [*bahasa jawi*] , or mixed language; or when a child is born of a Kiling father and Malay mother, it is called anah jahui [*anak jawi*], a child of mixed race’. Raffles’ view at this early stage (1809) was that the Malays emerged from the encounter with Islam, like the Mapillas of Malabar or the Chulias of Coromandel. Like them the Malays were ‘gradually formed as nations, and separated from their original stock by the admixture of Arabian blood, and the introduction of the Arabic language and Moslem religion’ (Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: Particularly in the Government of Java, 1811-1816, Bencoolen and its Dependencies, 1817-1824* [London: Duncan, 1835], I, pp. 40-1). George Henrik Werndly described *bahasa jawi* in the eighteenth century as the high literary Malay written in Arabic script, and R. Roolvink, *Bahasa Jawi: De Taal van Sumatra* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1975), as the common name for Sumatra-derived Malay. On Werndly see Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 50-9.

20 J. N. Miksic, ‘Archeology, Trade and Society in Northeast Sumatra’ (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1979).

military personnel and civilians from Guangdong who followed him there.²¹ The Chinese intervened to impose an imperial commissioner, but this did not work and Palembang remained for the next 20 years out of imperial favour but active in trade and seemingly still dominated by the Cantonese renegade group. Since this is about the period when Palembang appears to have played a role in the founding of Melaka on the one hand, and the Islamic dynasties of Java, through Raden Patah, on the other, we can only surmise that people of part-Chinese descent played some part in creating new mercantile elites, including those known to Barros as *Jawi* but to later observers as *Melayu*.

The heritage of Melaka went in two directions after the city fell to the Portuguese in 1511. A number of lines of kingship sought to continue the royal lineage and court style of Melaka, of which the most successful for two centuries was the Riau–Johor line centred in the region of modern Singapore. On the other hand, the merchants who had given Melaka its life spread almost throughout Southeast Asia in their quest for entrepôts sympathetic to their trade. Their diaspora helped give new life to a range of port-states like Aceh, Patani, Palembang, Banten, Brunei, Makasar and Banjarmasin, and even Cambodia and Siam. This was a community of wonderfully mixed ethnic origins: Many of the numerous Javanese of Melaka, as well as the ‘Luzons’ who were also prominent traders there, appear themselves to have been partly descended from the Chinese who came *en masse* to Southeast Asian ports at the time of the Zheng He fleets.²² In addition, there were large Gujerati, South Indian, Chinese and Ryukyuan communities in Melaka, many of whom were assimilating to the extent of speaking Malay and practising Islam. When dispersed around the Archipelago this diaspora (or at least its Muslim majority) became simply Malays. A decade after the fall of Melaka the Magellan expedition, which visited only the eastern part of the Archipelago – Brunei, Maluku and Central Philippines – produced a Malay word-list which defined *cara Melayu* (lit. ‘Malay ways’) as ‘the ways of Melaka’.²³

The farther away from the heartland of Sumatra and the Peninsula one travelled, the more likely it was that the trading community of Muslims would be known collectively as *Melayu*, whatever their ethnic or geographical origin. The Malay entrepreneurs recorded in Makassar chronicles as entitled to the kind of autonomy and guarantees of property that traders everywhere require, were reported to originate from ‘Johor, Patani, Pahang, Minangkabau and Champa’, while Indian Muslims later also played a prominent role in the community.²⁴ As if prophetically aware of the stereotype into which British colonialism would caste Malays two centuries later, the *Melayu* community who had helped spread Islam in the island of Sumbawa refused to be rewarded with rice-fields, for ‘we are sailors and traders, not peasants’, and asked instead for exemption from port duties.²⁵

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Malayness in maritime Southeast Asia retained these two associations – a line of kingship acknowledging descent from Srivijaya and Melaka or Pagarruyung (Minangkabau), and a commercial diaspora that retained some of the customs,

21 *Ming Shi-lu*, as cited in Geoffrey Wade, ‘The *Ming Shi-lu* (Veritable Record of the Ming Dynasty) as a Source for Southeast Asian History: Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Hong Kong, 1994), vol. II, pp. 247–8.

22 Anthony Reid, ‘Introduction’, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, ed. Anthony Reid (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), pp. 21–37; Reid, *Charting the Shape*, pp. 72–6.

23 *First Voyage Round the World*, trans. J. A. Robertson (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1969), p. 88.

24 Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, c. 1450–1680, II: Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 128.

25 Bima chronicle cited in Helius Syamsuddin, ‘The Coming of Islam and the Role of Malays as Middlemen on Bima’, in *Papers of the Dutch-Indonesian Historical Conference*, ed. G. J. Schutte and Heather Sutherland (Leiden: Bureau of Indonesian Studies, 1982), pp. 296–7.

language and trade practices developed in the emporium of Melaka. The kingship role was more prominent in the Straits of Melaka area, the diaspora one elsewhere. Although this second sense was exceptionally open to new recruits from any ethnic background, it can be seen to have evolved towards the idea of *orang Melayu* as a distinct ethnies. Ence Amin, for example, writer for the Makassar court and author of the *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, declared himself to be 'a Malay of Makassar descent' (*nisab Mengkasar anak Melayu*) and took pride in his fellow Malays' heroism in defending Makassar against the Dutch.²⁶

Beyond these two uses of Malayness there was a broader community of Muslims of a variety of ethnic backgrounds who wrote in Malay (whatever their mother tongue), dressed in a similar Jawi style (distinguishing themselves thereby from the less orthodox Bugis or Javanese) and took part in the widespread Malay-language 'civilisation' of Islam. Such people might be referred to as 'Malays' by Europeans, but there seems little evidence that they saw themselves in this light.

The Malay category in seventeenth/eighteenth-century Dutch records

In the Dutch ports there were almost from the beginning a variety of ethnic labels for the seafaring population who settled for shorter or longer periods. Apart from the Europeans, the key ones were Chinese, Malay, Bugis, Javanese, and in early days *mardika*, or freed and Christianised slaves. In both Batavia (from 1644) and Makassar (from the Dutch conquest, c. 1670) the leaders of the Malay maritime community were large traders from Patani – thus the second-generation of those who participated in the diaspora after the initial dispersal from Melaka. These were highly valued merchants and intermediaries. The first *Kapitan Melayu* of Batavia, Encik Amat, was sent as a Dutch envoy to Mataram four times, and often arranged the protocol for the reception of Asian dignitaries in Batavia. When the fourth generation of this distinguished family to be *Kapitan Melayu* was caught swindling his fellow-Malays in 1732, and exiled to Ceylon, he was found to have 329,000 *rixdaalders* in property and hundreds of slaves.²⁷ He must have been one of the richest men in not only Batavia but all Southeast Asia.

This Malay community of Batavia was wealthy but not particularly large – between 2,000 and 4,000 in the period 1680-1730, dropping to below 2,000 in the mid-1700s (mainly due to malaria) but rising sharply to 12,000 at the end of the eighteenth century.²⁸ By then the category had expanded in meaning to embrace all the Malay-speaking Muslims who came to Batavia from Sumatra, Borneo and the Peninsula. This group of traders expanded as trade itself expanded in the late eighteenth century.²⁹ The Chinese and South Sulawesi communities were always more numerous in Batavia and Semarang.

Dutch harbourmasters were required to record numerous things about the vessels which called at their ports, and recent work by Heather Sutherland, Lee Kam Hing, Raden Fernando and Gerrit Knaap on their shipping registers enables us to see more clearly what Malay and other categories may have meant at this time. In Java they appear to have declined as a category in the eighteenth century, representing 24 per cent of the captains among the hundreds of vessels that took east Java salt to Dutch Melaka in the 1680s, but only 7 per cent in 1735.³⁰ The reason may have been a

26 C. Skinner, *Sja'ir Perang Mengkasar (The Rhymed Chronicle of the Macassar War) by Entji' Amin* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 19-20.

27 Remco Raben, 'Batavia and Colombo. The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities, 1600-1800' (Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 1996), pp. 207-10.

28 Ibid., Appendix.

29 Ibid., p. 97.

30 Gerrit Knaap and Luc Nagtegaal, 'A Forgotten Trade: Salt in Southeast Asia, 1670-1813', in *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c.1400-1750*, ed. Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991), p. 140.

more careful set of distinctions by Dutch harbourmasters in the later period, but these figures may also suggest that ethnic labelling was changing in other ways, with shippers resident in the salt-exporting east Java ports more likely to consider themselves as 'Javanese' and 'Chinese' (the two main maritime categories at that stage) who belonged there, rather than first-generation 'Malays' and 'Bugis', who didn't.

Gerrit Knaap's more detailed study of shipping records from Java ports in the 1770s shows that Malay skippers had in fact held up very well in the overall trade between Java and the Melaka Straits, still representing 35 per cent of these ship movements. In his total of 20,000 ship movements in and out of Java ports in all directions, Malay captains scored 8.6 per cent, compared with 40 per cent Javanese, 30 per cent Chinese, and a great variety of smaller labels like Bugis-Makassar, Balinese, Madurese, European and Arab. Malay captains were most strongly concentrated in Batavia and on the Java-Malaya and Java-Borneo routes. They had some interesting similarities with Chinese skippers. Both used the title *Encik* and a similar range of boat types, while the average boat size for both was well above the average, at about 26 tons (13.9 *last* for Chinese and 13.2 for Malay). Javanese boats averaged only half this size, while the other Indonesian ethnic labels were somewhere in between. Since ownership of ships is often also given, we know that Javanese aristocrats often employed Malay captains, whereas most other owners used captains of the same ethnicity as themselves.³¹

In Dutch Melaka in the period 1760-85, Malay captains showed an extraordinarily rapid rise, from 54 ship calls in 1761 to 242 in 1785. From having been a category with relatively large ships until 1775, the Malays start to approach a modern stereotype of many small boats on local sectors in the 1780s. The reason may be that Dutch Melaka was becoming more attractive as a local entrepot at that period, especially after the Dutch conquered its busy rival Riau in 1784 and created such enmity with local Bugis that 'Malay' became a more acceptable label for small boats in general.³²

Within Melaka itself the 'Malay' category of resident *nakhoda* (captain) was large and growing. Of all Melaka-based captains, Malays were responsible for 30 per cent of the ship movements (20 arrivals) in 1761, and 43 per cent (86 arrivals) in 1785.³³

English understandings of 'Malay'

There is no doubt that Thomas Stamford Raffles' view of the Malays had a great effect on the imagining of English-speakers. He should probably be regarded as the most important voice in projecting the idea of a 'Malay' race or nation, not limited to the traditional Malay sultans or even their supporters, but embracing a large if unspecified part of the Archipelago. Raffles, like the other influential English writers of the period, William Marsden and John Crawfurd, was imbued with an Enlightenment view that peoples should be scientifically classified, much as Carolus Linnaeus and Charles Darwin classified the natural world. Marsden explicitly set out 'to distinguish the several species or classes' of inhabitants of Sumatra.³⁴ Marsden's scientific method led him to deplore the tendency of his countrymen little experienced in the East 'to call the inhabitants of the islands indiscriminately as Malays'. He attempted to formulate a clear definition based on what he

31 Gerrit Knaap, *Shallow Waters, Rising Tide. Shipping and Trade in Java around 1775* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996), pp. 66-77.

32 Anthony Reid and Radin Fernando, 'Shipping on Melaka and Singapore as an Index of Growth, 1760-1840', *South Asian Studies*, 19 (1996): 64-75.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 70-2.

34 William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1966), p.40. The taxonomy of Marsden and other Enlightenment writers has been well made by Mary Quilty, *Textual Empires: A Reading of Early British Histories of Southeast Asia* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1998).

understood as their own usage: 'every Mussulman speaking the Malayan as his proper language, and either belonging to, or claiming descent from, the ancient kingdom of Minangkabau'.³⁵ Elsewhere he conceded that in the developed Malay-language letter-writing tradition 'the term "malayu" as applied to themselves or other eastern people, very rarely occurs', the phrase 'people below the winds' being preferred as a way to distinguish islanders from Europeans and others.³⁶

Stamford Raffles was at the romantic edge of this Enlightenment quest, seeking in the rustic Javanese or highland Sumatran the noble vestige of once-great civilisations. Soon after arriving in Penang in 1805 as assistant secretary and commencing his study of the Malay language, Raffles became intimate with Dr John Leyden, a learned Scottish surgeon of almost his own youthfulness and romantic disposition, who had been a collaborator of Sir Walter Scott before leaving Edinburgh. Together they formed their vision of the Malays as one of the language-based 'nations' that Johann Gottfried Herder and his counterparts in the English Romantic movement, such as Scott, had seen the world divided into. Influenced by Leyden's slightly earlier essay on 'The Indo-Chinese nations', Raffles' first literary essay, sent to the Asiatic Society in Bengal from Penang in 1809, insisted on a similar vision for Malays: 'I cannot but consider the *Maláyu* nation as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, and preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states lying between the Sulu Seas and the Southern Oceans'.³⁷ Having been forced to abandon his dream of an English vocation to uplift and extend the once-great Javanese people,³⁸ Raffles transferred this romantic vision to the Malays. From his new post at Bengkulu he mounted an expedition to the old Minangkabau capital of Pagarruyung, which he declared 'the source of that power, the origin of that nation, so extensively scattered over the Eastern Archipelago'. Eagerly he explained to his patron how 'Sumatra, under British influence, [would] again rise into great political importance' by reviving the prestige of the ancient kingdom.³⁹

But still more influential for Malays was his renaming of the major Malay text as *Sejarah Melayu* in Malay and *Malay Annals* in English. The Malay concept of this text was as a description of a line of kings and their ceremonial, so that its author explicitly called it 'the rules of all the rajas' (*peraturan segala raja-raja* or, in Arabic, *Sulalat Us-Salatin*).⁴⁰ But when Raffles for the first time had printed, in 1821, the translation of the text by his late friend John Leyden, he inserted these titles as if to show it was the story of a people. In his introduction to the translation Raffles moved the Malays on from a nation to a race, and sought to convey the enthusiasm of Leyden to find in the Malay stories 'a glimmering of light, which might, perhaps, serve to illustrate an earlier period'.⁴¹

The idea that the Peninsula was particularly 'Malay' appears also to have been an English one. In his late eighteenth-century work, *The History of Sumatra*, William Marsden thought that the idea of the Peninsula as 'Malayan' or 'Malay' was of exclusively European origin, which had thereby confused many into thinking of the Peninsula as the place of Malay origins.⁴² In fact this was an

35 Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, pp. 40-1.

36 William Marsden, *A Dictionary and Grammar of the Malayan Language* (London: Longman, 1812), vol. II, p. ix.

37 Thomas Raffles, 'On the Maláyu Nation, with a Translation of its Maritime Institutions', *Asiatic Researches*, 12 (1818): 103. The early version of the introduction to this paper is reproduced in Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the Life*, vol. I, pp. 28-49, where it is placed in its 1809 context, when first submitted to the Asiatic Society by a young man of 27.

38 An extraordinary vision of a British-guided Javanese people spreading out to colonise much of eastern Asia and Australia, is offered in Raffles' *History of Java* (London: John Murray, 1817), vol. I, pp. 71-2.

39 Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the Life*, vol. I, pp. 426, 433.

40 Winstedt, 'The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu', p. 42.

41 *Malay Annals: translated from the Malay Language by the Late Dr John Leyden. with an introduction by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, FRS* (London: Longman, 1821), p. v.

42 Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 326.

almost exclusively English perception since other Europeans usually called the Peninsula ‘Malacca’, after its most famous city. The term ‘Malaya’ goes back at least as far as Alexander Hamilton in the early eighteenth century, especially in the phrase ‘Coast of Malaya’ to indicate the ports of Kedah and Perak.⁴³ English maps, like French and Dutch ones, more often called the Peninsula by the name of Melaka until around 1800, however. As the British became more concerned with the Peninsula after the founding of Georgetown at Pulau Pinang in 1786, they appear to have generally adopted the usages ‘Malay’ or ‘Malayan’ for the Peninsula; Raffles and Crawford frequently did so. Once the London Treaty of 1824 restricted British activity to this Peninsula, they were much more disposed to see it as a coherent unit under one of these labels. The first book explicitly on the subject, that of P. J. Begbie in 1834, used ‘Malayan’ in the title but ‘Malay Peninsula’ in the accompanying map.⁴⁴

Dating the Malay term *tanah Melayu* – ‘the land of the Malays’ – for the Peninsula is more difficult, though it seems possible that it was influenced by this English evolution. The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is the only pre-modern Malay text to use this term, sometimes applying it to Melaka and sometimes to a broader area where there are Malay kings.⁴⁵ Marsden’s 1811 edition and Crawford’s first (1820) publication both indicate that this Malay usage had already taken hold.⁴⁶ Both found this appellation puzzling since they wanted to see a single origin-place for ‘the Malay race’, and were equally convinced that it was to be found not in the Peninsula but in Minangkabau. Crawford resolves this conundrum by concluding: ‘It was from the [Peninsula] colony, and not the parent stock, that the Malayan name and nation were so widely disseminated.’⁴⁷

Three nineteenth-century understandings of Malayness

(1) *Melayu* as the vestige of concern with royal lineage

This sense continued in a host of courts around the Straits of Melaka, from Deli and Langkat in northeast Sumatra to Pontianak and Brunei in Borneo by way of the mini-states of the Peninsula and eastern Sumatra. Much of the ‘classical’ Malay court literature that has survived in modern collections was composed or copied in the nineteenth century, preserving the preoccupation of an earlier time to assert the legitimacy and sacred *daulat* (sovereignty) of Malay kings. But by the mid-nineteenth century, especially as represented in the work of the greatest of these court writers, Raja Ali Haji of Riau, there was a growing concern to establish principles of Malayness which were bigger than the frequently unworthy individual king. Malay kings must behave justly; Malay subjects must be loyal; if either rulers or subjects submit to lust and passion (*nafsu*), the judgement of God will bring the kingdom down, as was already happening to one ancient court after another. For the Bugis-descended Raja Ali Haji there was no Malay ethnies in the positive sense, but rather a negative, anti-Bugis, parochial Malay faction (*kaum Melayu*) on the one hand, and a glorious tradition of kingship (*raja Melayu*) on the other, no longer dependent on any one lineage.⁴⁸

43 Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, ed. William Foster (London: Argonaut Press, 1930), vol. II, p. 41. François Valentijn, writing at a similar period, also referred to the west coast of the peninsula as the ‘Malay coast’, and appeared to see this as the heartland of ‘true Malays’ (Sweeney, *A Full Hearing*, p. 59).

44 P. J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula* (Madras: Vepey Mission Press, 1834; reprinted Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967).

45 Matheson, ‘Concepts of Malay Ethos in Indigenous Writing’, p. 361.

46 Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 327; John Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago* (Edinburgh: Archibald, 1820), vol. II, pp. 371-3.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

48 Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift: Tuhfat al-Nafis*, trans. Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press); compare, e.g., pp. 12-17 with pp. 101-3.

(2) Melayu as an emerging notion of modern nationality or race

In the urban world of the nineteenth-century Straits Settlements, which from 1824 comprised Penang, Melaka and Singapore, modern European ideas of nationality (and later race) carried much weight. In the person of Munshi Abdullah, in particular, the prolific Malay writer and teacher for a succession of Europeans in the Straits, it is possible to observe the evolution of a new sense of Malay identity in close proximity to Europeans and Chinese. Despite the mixed descent he shared with many residents of the Straits, Abdullah considered himself a Malay. Malay was his preferred language, and he was accepted as an authority on Malay culture and language. But he had no time for the lineage of Malay rajas that had hitherto been the key definition of Malayness. In his urban perspective, much influenced by the progress and sense of community of other groups in Singapore, the Malay kings were the greatest threat to the well being of what he called *bangsa Melayu* – the Malay race or people. Writing in the 1840s he was perhaps the first Malay writer for whom, as Anthony Milner puts it, ‘the race was the primary community’ – although in the view of many later Malay nationalists he was not properly part of it.⁴⁹

This developing Straits idea of Malayness as an essentially racial category, with its own ethnic origin and genealogy, its own language, its own relatively broad boundaries against other ethnicities, was the newest of the three versions of Malay in the nineteenth century. In the Straits Settlements there were undoubtedly many Abdullahs, for whom Malayness was a new identity acquired in the ethnically competitive world of these port-states. Austronesian Muslims seemed to be outnumbered and outcompeted by Chinese, Europeans and Indians in these ports. Although of various origins, they were too small a minority to carry much weight separately as Bugis, Aceh, Java or Mandailing, and in any case they intermarried with each other in the ports. The English rulers of the Straits used ‘Malay’ as the collective term to refer to them, and to a considerable extent it became internalised. When the first Malay-language daily newspaper appeared in the Straits Settlements, in 1907, it was named not after a place but after a language and potential ethnic – *Utusan Melayu*.⁵⁰

The tenuousness of this concept until the 1930s should be emphasised, however. It had to compete not only against specific diaspora ethnicities (Mandailing, Bugis, Aceh, Banjar, Rawas, Jawi Pekan, etc.), but among Malay-speakers with loyalties to particular rulers, and among English-speakers with the continuing idea that all speakers of Austronesian languages were in some sense ‘Malay’.

(3) Malayness as urban superculture

In the cities of the Netherlands Indies a Malay-speaking urban population of mixed origins took root in the nineteenth century, for whom Malay was predominately a lingua franca and a language for popular written expression. It had little to do with ethnicity, and was less used as a label for a particular commercial diaspora than in the previous century. In fact the majority of those who first turned modern Malay in Romanised script into a vehicle of print journalism were of mixed Chinese-Indonesian descent and generally labelled ‘Chinese’. Dutch had never taken the path of the English, referring to all who spoke Malay as ‘Malays’. Malay had been the lingua franca of the Dutch empire in the Archipelago since the mid-seventeenth century, and it was the principal language of the new Christianised minorities in Ambon and Minahasa. In the western Archipelago ‘masuk

49 Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 51.

50 In this it followed by a half-century the *Selompret Melajoe* of Semarang (1860), which sustained the third of my nineteenth-century meanings of Malayness, below – see Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855-1913)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1995), pp. 23-57.

Melayu meant to become a Muslim, but in parts of eastern Indonesia the phrase meant becoming Christian.⁵¹ As a vague collective term for the inhabitants of the Archipelago, 'Malay' did not recommend itself to the Dutch. They used the term native (*inlander*) in everyday disparagement of the people now known as Indonesians, an option not available to the English in the Straits, who used the loose and pejorative 'native' for all the Asians under their authority. When they sought to be neutral the Dutch called their non-Chinese subjects Indians (*Indiers*), and the Spanish did the same in the Philippines. When in the early years of this century the novel idea began to spread among the people of the Dutch-ruled Archipelago that they were a collective unity, they initially used the Malay version of this term – *orang Hindia* – to describe themselves.

Malay as race – Bangsa Melayu

As Britain took ever greater responsibility for the whole of the southern Peninsula, a plural society was created in which Europeans and Chinese were encouraged to develop Malaya's resources, produce the exports and pay the taxes which made Malaya one of the wealthiest economies in Asia by the 1920s. Malay rulers provided the legitimation of this lucrative development, and a colonial discourse quickly developed about 'protecting' them and their people. Colonial statesmen had a clear idea of what sort of Malay they should protect. Many distrusted the Straits Malays as cultural exemplars, and even dismissed them as *mestizos*. The 'real Malay' of colonial discourse was rural, loyal to his ruler, conservative and relaxed to the point of laziness. One Malayan governor, Sir Hugh Clifford, devoted one of his novels to showing the catastrophic results of Malays becoming infected with Western ideas.⁵²

The most influential Malayan administrators professed great liking for this gentlemanly but non-competitive Malay stereotype. By contrast, the negative elements of a rampant capitalist order tended to be attributed to another stereotype, that of 'the Chinese' inherently dedicated to making money by any means possible. The dominant element of the Malayan Civil Service took the view that its role was to protect the stereotyped Malay identity, not to change it. Clifford, the most sentimentally paternal of the governors, insisted as late as 1927, when effective power was wholly in British hands, that there must be no change in the Islamic monarchies which Britain was sworn to protect. 'No mandate has ever been extended to us by Rajas, Chiefs, or people to vary the system of government which has existed in these territories from time immemorial.'⁵³ In this view Malays should have the kind of education 'to breed a vigorous and self-respecting agricultural peasantry such as must form the backbone of every nation.'⁵⁴ Malay reservations were created in 1913, in which agricultural land could only be alienated to people defined as racially Malay, irrespective of their place of birth. In 1917-18 regulations were passed to oblige rice-growing land to continue to be used for that purpose, in the hope of discouraging Malays from becoming commercially oriented rubber-growers rather than sturdy self-sufficient peasants.⁵⁵

Despite its greater wealth, Malaya spent a smaller proportion of public money on education than did other Southeast Asian colonies. In 1920 only 12 per cent of the Malay population aged 5-15 was in school, and virtually all of these were in the vernacular Malay-language schools the

51 I owe this information to James Fox, who was referring particularly to Roti and other islands of contemporary Nusa Tenggara Tengah (eastern Indonesia).

52 Hugh Clifford, *Saleh, a Prince of Malaya* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926).

53 Quoted in Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Aspects of Democracy and Community among the Malays* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5.

54 Malayan Federal Council 1920, quoted in William Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), pp. 138-9; see also Shamsul A.B.'s essay in this issue.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 121-5.

government believed best equipped to keep the Malays in their stereotyped place: 'It will not only be a disaster to, but a violation of the whole spirit and tradition of, the Malay race if the result of our vernacular education is to lure the whole of the youth from the kampung to the town.'⁵⁶

The education provided was particularly well designed to rediscover the first of the nineteenth-century meanings of Malayness mentioned above – a tradition of Malay kingship descended from Melaka – and impose it on the varied Muslim immigrants to the Peninsula. R. J. Wilkinson, the learned patron of the Malay school system,⁵⁷ was convinced that the forgotten classics should be introduced to Malay reading to rescue it from the modernising urban literati – 'the Anglomaniac with his piebald diction and the pan-Islamic pundit with his long Arabic words'.⁵⁸ As Henk Maier puts it, this most idealistic of the British scholar-officials still held that 'the gap between East and West should be confirmed rather than bridged. And the seeds of the necessary regeneration of the Malay people should be sought primarily in the past, when everything had been so much better.'⁵⁹ The 'classic' court texts introduced to schools stressed unswerving loyalty to the ruler as the key element of Malay identity. Wilkinson's successor, R. O. Winstedt, also had a large hand in producing the first modern 'Malay history' (*Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*) in 1918 to give Malay schoolchildren a sense of their historical identity. This encouraged the modern Malay nationalist understanding of Malayness. It was no longer the product of an Archipelago diaspora, nor a civilisation into which all could assimilate, but a racial sense of lost grandeur set within the geographic boundaries established in 1909. The greatness of the Melaka sultanate had been succeeded by Portuguese, Dutch and now British rule.⁶⁰

For racially conscious Englishmen sent to administer Malaya in the early years of the twentieth century, the protection of a 'Malay race' was a more attractive justification for colonial rule than the protection of 'Malay rulers' that had been the original pretext. Charles Hirschman points out that while the early colonial censuses, in 1871 and 1881, listed Malays, Boyanese, Achinese, Javanese, Bugis, Manilamen, Siamese, and so on as separate groups, the 1891 Census demarcated the three racial categories of modern Malaysia – Chinese, 'Tamils and other natives of India', and 'Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago', each elaborately sub-divided. The report on the 1901 Census advised 'the word "nationality" should be changed for that of "race" whenever it occurs. It is a wider and more exhaustive expression than "nationality" and gives rise to no such ambiguous questions in classifying people.'⁶¹ Race was of course believed by many Europeans in the early part of this century to be a scientific category, capable of being determined on biological grounds regardless of how

56 High commissioner for FMS in Federal Council 1919, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 138.

57 Wilkinson was mainly responsible for founding in 1900 the Malay College in Melaka to train teachers for the vernacular government primary schools, and was later inspector of Malay Schools (1903-6). He personally encouraged the study of Malay literature by the students. Khoo Kay Kim, 'Local Historians and the Writing of Malaysian History in the Twentieth Century', in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr (Singapore: Heinemann, 1979), p. 302. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, pp. 28n. and 135, notes that teaching in the Malay schools was often done almost entirely from *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Abdullah* and the newspaper *Utusan Melayu*.

58 R.J. Wilkinson, *Malay Literature, Part I: Romance, History, Poetry* (Kuala Lumpur: Government of Federated Malay States, 1907), quoted in Hendrik M.J. Maier, *In the Center of Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1988), p. 119.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

60 R.O. Winstedt and Daing Abdul Hamid bin Tengku Muhammad Salleh, *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (Singapore: 1918). This was followed by a more ambitious three-volume book along similar lines: Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hasan, *Sejarah Alam Melayu* (Singapore: Education Department, 1925-30). This early development of a 'national' history of the ethnic contrasts markedly with Indonesia, where no national history in the national language appeared until 1938. Anthony Reid, 'The Nationalist Quest for an Indonesian Past', in Reid and Marr ed., *Perceptions of the Past*, p. 281.

61 Charles Hirschman, 'The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46, 3 (1987): 561.

people defined themselves. The director of the 1931 census pointed out this was a purely European fantasy. 'The difficulty of achieving anything like a scientific or logically consistent classification is enhanced by the fact that most Oriental peoples have themselves no clear conception of race, and commonly regard religion as the most important, if not the determinant, element.'⁶²

Two generations of being referred to and educated as if they were a distinct race, however, had a predictable impact. Identity took shape around *bangsa Melayu*, a term which goes back at least to Munshi Abdullah but was more widely internalised from the 1920s as the equivalent of 'Malay race' in English. Like 'race', *bangsa* derived from common descent, but its Sanskrit origins refer to lineage or even caste. In the old texts someone who has no *bangsa* is of low birth. For the young graduates of the Malay teachers' colleges who wrote in the growing Malay press of the 1930s, *bangsa Melayu* became the primary locus of political passion. It was defined by what they perceived as two overwhelming facts – they were the 'natives' with primary claim on the country, and they were the weakest group in it. They concluded that the *bangsa* required unity and solidarity to make stronger demands of the British.

Malay nationalism developed explicitly as an ethnic or racial variant of nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s, responding to a similar kind of ethnic nationalism among English and Chinese. Ibrahim Yaacob complained in 1941 that there were still too many who thought of themselves as Minangkabau or Boyanese, or as subjects of a particular raja instead of as members of the Malay *bangsa* pure and simple.⁶³ One of the new Malay newspapers responded to the demands of Malayan-born Chinese for political rights in Malaya with the words: 'The Malays have rights not because they were born here but because they belong to the Malay *bangsa* and are the first *bangsa* that owns the land.'⁶⁴ As with all such definitions, of course, the problem of how to measure racial identity became the greatest irritant. Like earlier British administrators, the Malay radicals wanted to find the 'real Malay' – *Melayu jati* – excluding both Anglophile aristocrats and the part-Indian or part-Arab Muslims of Singapore and Penang.⁶⁵

During the Malayan Union controversy of 1945-6 what had been a minority view became politically dominant as the voice of UMNO, the Malay party formed around the ethno-nationalist idea. Malay loyalties should be given to the *bangsa Melayu* rather than to the separate Malay rulers or to the British. *Hidup Melayu* ('Long live the Malays') replaced the deferential *Daulat Tuanku* of salutation to royalty as the slogan of the *bangsa*.⁶⁶

The British were obliged to back down from their Malayan Union project and replace it with a Federation of Malaya in which the centrality of Malayness was explicitly expressed. In effect the 'Malayan' civic nationalism the British belatedly sought to encourage after 1945 was rejected in favour of an almost equally recent ethnic nationalism. The Malay press throughout the controversy denounced *bangsa Malayan* as foreigners. Federation of Malaya might be acceptable in English, but only so long as it was understood as a translation from the real (Malay) name of the country, *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu* – Federation of the Malay Lands. The Anglo-Malay committee that recommended the name noted that 'the Malays took the strongest exception to being called or

62 C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census and Certain Problems of Vital Statistics* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 565.

63 Milner, *Invention of Politics*, p. 269.

64 Ariffin, *Bangsa Melayu*, p. 18.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18; Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, pp. 244-5; Judith Nagata, 'In Defence of Ethnic Boundaries: The Changing Myths and Charters of Malay Identity' in *Ethnic Change*, ed. Charles Keyes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), pp. 87-116.

66 Ariffin, *Bangsa Melayu*, pp. 198-9.

referred to as Malaysians.⁶⁷ Citizenship, the British stipulated, was to be extended to those who regarded Malaya as their real home and had lived there for 15 years, but this was distinguished sharply from nationality (*bangsa*). The constitutional report insisted that citizenship:

was not a nationality, nor could it be developed into a nationality... It is an addition to, and not a subtraction from, nationality, and could be a qualification for electoral rights ... and for employment in government service... [But] oaths of allegiance would be out of place.⁶⁸

The Federation of Malaya was emphatically designed to be a state constructed around not simply a core culture, but a core ethnies. The defining identity, or nationality, was to be *bangsa Melayu*. On the eve of Malayan independence in 1957 the conflict between ethnic and civic nationalisms had to be skirted around again, in a formula which finally granted a single Malayan nationality, but only after hard bargaining for concessions which would acknowledge the definitive position of *bangsa Melayu* at the core – chiefly in symbolic forms and the ‘Malay privileges’ in education and government service.

One of the most important effects of the formation of Malaysia in 1963 was that it created a neutral name for the country distinct from that of its core ethnies – a major advance on Thailand and Vietnam, or for that matter Russia, Japan, and most other countries of the old, Eurasian world. But there were still profound tensions between the concepts of core ethnies and of neutral citizenship. Lee Kuan Yew’s Singapore was expelled from the new country after less than two years because his vigorous campaign for a civic or territorial nationalism – ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ and the assertion that ‘We are here as of right’ – was considered by Alliance leaders as certain to lead to violent conflict with Malay ethno-nationalism.⁶⁹

The most forceful case for a core ethnies within Malaysia is that of Malaysia’s present and longest-serving prime minister. Dr Mahathir’s 1970 book, *The Malay Dilemma*, written in the aftermath of the traumatic 1969 riots, argues the ethno-nationalist case in terms of both the need for protection and prior rights to the land. Leaning heavily on the example of Australia and the USA, he argues that every country has a ‘definitive people’ who were the first to set up states in the territory in question. Since the aborigines did not do this, it was the Malays in Malaya, and the English-speaking Christians in Australia, who defined the core culture and set the conditions by which subsequent migrants were admitted.⁷⁰

Because Dr Mahathir had strong credentials with ethno-nationalists, he was well-placed as prime minister to move Malaysia towards some long-term resolution of the tensions between ethnic and civic nationalism. In opening up UMNO to non-Malay *bumiputra* in 1994 (a particularly important issue for the peoples of Borneo), and still more by declaring the future goal of a *bangsa Malaysia* as part of his Vision 2020, he raised the possibility in the mid-1990s of movement towards a genuinely civic nationalism.

Malayness as inclusive culture – Bangsa Indonesia

The relationship between state and ethnies was profoundly different in Indonesia. The colonial cities of Netherlands India, like those of Malaya, represented a sort of melting-pot where people from diverse origins came to see a common adherence to Islam as the most important thing that separated them from Europeans, Chinese and stateless unbelievers like the Balinese, Bataks and so on. Unless quickly assimilated into the Chinese or European communities through marriage (an

67 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 107.

68 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 109.

69 Mahathir bin Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1970), p. 122.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 122-6.

option only available to women), the people brought to Batavia, Makassar, Palembang or Medan by slavery (before 1800), or by the attraction of commerce, quickly became Muslim as an indication that they were civilised and urban. This new identity was generally called 'Islam', though in some of the cities and coastal areas of Sumatra, Borneo and the Peninsula it might also be called 'Malay', while in Semarang and other cities of Java, the loose ethnic marker associated with Islam was 'Javanese', even if Malay was the principal language spoken in the city. Thus a Chinese writer of the 1780s complained that Chinese who stayed too long in the cities of Java forgot 'the instruction of the sages' and 'do not scruple to become Javanese, when they call themselves Islam'.⁷¹ In the early twentieth century Javanese became a self-conscious label for those who spoke the Javanese language as their mother tongue, and the Malay-speaking people of Batavia, of very mixed Balinese, Chinese, Makassarese and other origins, adopted the name 'Betawi', and were so recorded in colonial censuses.

Though Islam remained the key marker of common identity, and served as such in the first modern mass movement, Sarekat Islam, this religious affiliation did not present itself as a nationalism in the sense of defining the boundary of the core ethnies. Among the first to feel the stirring of an Indies-wide anti-colonial secular nationalism expressed in the Malay language were Indonesia-born non-Muslims classified as *peranakan* Chinese and Indo-Europeans. As this nationalism became more popular in the 1920s these pioneering figures were marginalised, but educated Christian Ambonese, Minahasans and Bataks continued to play prominent roles in defining the nation. After 1914 Marxism made a heavy emphasis on race and religion seem old-fashioned.

The first newspapers serving the polyglot majority population of the colonial cities were Malay-language publications set up by Eurasians and Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century. The literary standard of printed Malay that began to form the basis of creating a new urbanised ethnies during this period was in Roman script and characterised by straightforward expression, somewhat influenced by Dutch and Chinese.⁷² It became in the 1920s the only serious candidate for the language of anti-colonial nationalism, Dutch and Javanese both having fatal flaws for that role.

The name for this national language and cultural identity was more problematic. Neither *Melayu* nor *Jawa*, the two indigenous labels with claims to both antiquity and comprehensiveness, was ever seriously considered. Both had been clearly established in Dutch and later in educated Indonesian discourse as particular ethnies, separate 'races and tribes', according to the English rendering of the *landaarden* of the colonial census. Until the 1920s the only way to describe the new pan-colony identity was 'Indian' (Dutch *Indier*, Malay *orang Hindia*). The esoteric term 'Indonesian', used in some European linguistic and anthropological circles since the nineteenth century and popularised to some degree in the weighty *Encyclopaedia van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1918) as the term for Malayo-Polynesian, was therefore readily embraced by students in Holland as a new all-encompassing identity. In 1924 they changed the name of their students' association to 'Perhimpunan Indonesia', and its journal to the rousing *Indonesia Merdeka*. Young Minangkabau intellectuals such as Muhammad Yamin and Dr Mohammad Amir, who had championed a unified Sumatran identity with the Malay language as its special glory, quickly became champions of a broader Indonesian identity. Yamin had published a patriotic poem extolling his Sumatran identity in 1920 (*Tanah Airku*), but in 1928 he was keynote speaker at the Indonesian Youth Congress,

71 Raben, 'Batavia and Colombo', pp. 242-3.

72 Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press*.

making a strong case that Malay had already become the national language – Bahasa Indonesia.⁷³ Within four years of being launched in Holland, the concepts of an Indonesian nation and language spread through the political organisations in the colony.

The privileged students at colleges and senior high schools in the main colonial cities, very far removed from their birthplaces and mother tongues, had begun in the 1920s to form youth associations deriving from their ethnies or their islands – Jong Java, Jong Minahassa, Jong Sumatra (primarily Minangkabau, and therefore challenged by Jong Batak). In 1928, guided by the growing enthusiasm for broader solidarities, most of these groups came together for an Indonesian Youth Congress. They subscribed to a stirring oath of imagined unity – ‘one fatherland, Indonesia; one *bangsa*, *bangsa Indonesia*; one language, *bahasa Indonesia*’. The larger language groups had already been in process of reimagining themselves as mobilised ethnies – *bangsa Jawa*, *bangsa Bugis*, and so on. But here, earlier than in Malaysia, the social Darwinian idea of competition between races, and the logic of being educated together in Dutch schools, had worked towards a broader definition. Its core was an agreed compromise, a lingua franca dissociated from any particular group. There was a core culture, in the sense that Minangkabaus and coastal Sumatrans spoke Malay as their mother tongue, and for decades they would dominate the nascent literature in Modern Indonesian. But because Ambonese, Minahasan and Kupang Christians, *peranakan* Chinese and various other urban minorities had spoken the same language for centuries, it was not perceived as belonging to any ethnies. The nationalists proposed, in effect, the radical and difficult path of building a bounded state without a core ethnies.

The Indonesian federalists of 1946-8, who sought with the poisoned chalice of Dutch help to build space in Indonesia for the autonomy of various ethnies and regions, fought a losing battle against the emotional pull of *bangsa Indonesia*. Several of the federal states, notably the one in East Sumatra that had contained the wealthiest Malay rajas, attempted to build an enthusiasm for *bangsa Melayu* or even for the hybrid *bangsa Sumatra Timur*. But when Sukarno passed through the capital of this doomed state in 1949 he proclaimed to cheering crowds at the airport:

There is no *bangsa* Kalimantan, there is no *bangsa* Minangkabau, there is no *bangsa* Java, Bali, Lombok, Sulawesi or any such. We are all *bangsa* Indonesia. There is no *bangsa* Sumatera Timur. We are part of a single *bangsa* with a single fate.⁷⁴

The destiny of every ethnies within the former colony was to be no more than a *suku*, a tribe.

Indonesia's anti-colonial nationalism, then, has been more territorial than ethnies. To this extent it may seem to have a stronger basis for developing in a civic direction, like some of those in Western Europe and the New World. At moments, in 1945-54 and again in 1998-2000, there did indeed appear to be strong forces trying to push it in that direction. On the positive side, the core culture defined by nationalism seemed to be inherently plural in religion, culture and ethnicity, in a way analogous to that of India, if not Western Europe. As one lays out these broad comparative options, however, the need seems inescapable for a third type which we might call revolutionary or post-revolutionary nationalism, inviting comparisons with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and China rather than India. Like the revolutions in those systems, Indonesia's revolution of 1945-50 sought to consolidate its national project through a mixture of force, a heroic revolutionary myth which invalidated the distinct pre-revolutionary histories of ethnies and regions, and a heavy central direction of education.

73 Deliar Noer, 'Yamin and Hamka: Two routes to an Indonesian Identity', in Reid and Marr ed., *Perceptions of the Past*, pp. 249-53; Reid, 'Nationalist Quest for an Indonesian Past', pp. 286-7.

74 Quoted in Ariffin, *Bangsa Melayu*, p. 209.

This type of revolutionary nationalism seems at least as likely to develop or unravel in the direction of ethnic, as of civic, nationalism. Although some of the founding fathers of Indonesia did talk as if the collectivity was about citizenship, democracy and a constitution, the emphasis on uniqueness was more popular, notably with Sukarno. Many Indonesians, in practice, had difficulty acknowledging that the *bangsa Indonesia* could include the Chinese, and still more those of European descent (though citizenship was widely offered to such people in the 1950s). A half-century after its revolution, Indonesia offers a bewildering variety of both ethnic and civic forces which have surfaced since the demise of Suharto's imposed post-revolutionary order.

Melayu as ideology

Since Brunei's declaration of independence in 1984 as 'forever a Malay Islamic monarchy', Malayness has been a more prominent feature of that country than is true for either of its neighbours, despite appearing to have relatively shallow roots there. In the literature of the sixteenth century, Brunei people were described by their place of origin or as Luzons, because of their reputed closeness to the people with whom they traded in Manila Bay. With Islam, Brunei undoubtedly became part of the high culture of Malay letters, though not playing as large a part in it as Aceh, Palembang, Johor, Patani or Makassar. Although the tradition of Brunei rulers includes early contact with Johor, sometimes involving marriage to a Johor princess, Brunei did not seek to play a role in the conflicts among rulers who claimed descent from Melaka. Brunei seemed distinctive enough to be the centre of its own world, through its pluralistic Borneo populations, its unique and in some respects archaic form of spoken Malay, and its links with China and the Philippines as well as the Malay world.

It is not clear when the Islamic elite of Brunei began to see themselves as 'Melayu', but the nineteenth-century English habit of wanting to classify peoples by race or nation rather than place seems likely to have had something to do with it. English writers such as Hugh Low, Henry Keppel and James Brooke use the phrase 'Brunei Malays', to distinguish the Muslim population of the capital and the court from other peoples of the interior. Once the British Residency was established in 1906, British habits of counting and classifying enjoyed greater influence. 'Malays' were counted as 54 per cent of the population at the 1921 Census, 49 per cent in 1931, 41 per cent in 1947, 54 per cent in 1960 and 66 per cent in 1971.⁷⁵ The reasons for this variation were in part the rapid rise in the Chinese population by immigration in the period 1921-60, and some immigration of Malay population thereafter. The biggest factor, however, seems to have been changes in classification.

While the early censuses under British control found ever more ethnic groups distinct from Malays in the strict sense, the 1959 Constitution that returned self-government to the sultan insisted that the major groups held to be indigenous (Malay, Kedayan, Bisayah, Dusun, and so on) were all 'Malay' in a legal sense. Subsequent censuses took this declaration literally. The report of the 1971 Census appears to have had different authors for its English and Malay sections, at least as regards ethnic divisions. In English the report states that the Malay group in the census 'consisted of the Malays, Kedayans Bisayah, Dusuns and Muruts. Also included were those who called themselves orang Brunei, Belait, Tutong.' It goes on to explain that this was 'to standardise the term "Malay" as applied here with the term "of the Malay race" as applied in the Brunei nationality Enactment 1961'. The former ease of classifying people according to their place of origin, the English report noted, had tended to break down with urbanisation, population movement and intermarriage, so that

75 Negeri Brunei, *Laporan Banchi Penduduk Brunei 1971* (Bandar Seri Begawan: Star Press, 1972), p. 82.

'there are now little differences between the various groups.'⁷⁶ The Malay text, while briefer on these matters, added that:

Melayu means the grouping of indigenous groups of the Melayu race. It contains Malays, Bruneis, Totong, Belait, Kedayan, Dusun, Bisayah and Murut. This division of communities is to avoid the mistakes found in the 1960 census, since many indigenous communities acknowledged themselves Malay because they follow the Islamic religion.⁷⁷

A *titah* (order) of His Majesty in 1984 already referred to the concept of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB: Malay, Muslim, Royal Subject), and it has been particularly emphasised since 1990. In that year the Academy of Brunei Studies (Akademi Pengajian Brunei) was established at the University, and undertook responsibility for teaching the obligatory undergraduate course in MIB. MIB has subsequently been repeatedly enunciated as part of the official philosophy of the state, around which a national identity in the fashion of Anderson's 'official nationalism' might be built.

Of the three elements in this trinity, 'Melayu' is the most interesting, since it emphasises not Brunei's national uniqueness or its Bornean heritage, but its membership in a supranational culture whose centre might appear to be elsewhere. In practice, the limited formulations of Malayness suggest that it is seen as consolidating existing traditions rather than seeking some external standard. 'Melayu in MIB means the consolidation of inherited Malay values, customs and culture as the dominant cultural heritage in national culture.'⁷⁸ It does however establish as normative a standard Malay essentially the same as that in Malaysia, and some aspects of Malay high culture at the expense of local tradition. More notably it seeks either to marginalise or incorporate minorities. 'Clearly, this state is not a multi-racial or multi-religious state. This fact does not arise from any spirit of anti-non-Malay or anti-non-Muslim, but what has to be stressed is that this state is the property of Malay Muslims.'⁷⁹

Brunei's experiment with Malayness as a core identity is the youngest of the three examples discussed, and it is much too early to assess what effects this move may have on popular consciousness and the sense of identity in the state in the long term. Despite some of the rhetoric of its apologists, MIB seems not intended as the basis of a future ethnic nationalism. It is not sufficiently distinctive from its neighbours for that purpose. As long as the monarchy remains the central political fact of Brunei, nationalism of any but a contrived 'official' sort will be viewed with suspicion.

76 Ibid., p. 34.

77 Ibid., p. 5.

78 Pehin Orang Kaya Laila Wijaya Dato Haji Abdul Aziz Umar, 'Melayu Islam Beraja Sebagai Falsafah Negara Brunei Darussalam', in *Sumbangsih*, ed. Dato Seri Laila Jasa Awang Haji Abu Bakar bin Haji Apong (Gadong: Akademi Pengajian Brunei, 1992), p. 10 (my translation).

79 Haji Hashim Abd. Hamid, 'Konsep Melayu Islam Beraja: Antar Ideologi dan Pembinaan Bangsa', in *ibid.*, p. 27 (my translation).

