



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***MALAYSIAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AS A
MULTIETHNIC LEGACY OF GENERATIVITY***

HASLINA BINTI OMAR

FBMK 2013 7



UPM
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA
BERILMU BERAKTI

**MALAYSIAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AS A
MULTIETHNIC LEGACY OF GENERATIVITY**

By

HASLINA BINTI OMAR

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

January 2013

DEDICATION

To my family



© COPYRIGHT UPM

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**MALAYSIAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AS A
MULTIETHNIC LEGACY OF GENERATIVITY**

By

HASLINA BINTI OMAR

January 2013

Chair: Associate Prof. Noritah Omar, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

In light of autobiography scholars like Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson working towards redressing inattentiveness towards women's life writing, and as scholars on women's autobiography beyond the Western world begin to closely examine collections of works from their own countries, this study merges contemporary studies on women's autobiographical writings and the literary studies of Shirley Lim, as well as Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf and Muhammad A. Quayum in the area of Malaysian women's writings. The special focus on the representation of ethnicity in autobiography explains this study's exploration of a collection of autobiographies of Malaysian women belonging to four different ethnicities—Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian. This study attempts to carefully explore the life stories of Sybil Kathigasu in *No Dram of Mercy* (1954), Khatijah Sidek in *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* (2001), Angela Yong in *One Thing Good but Not Both* (1998), and Muthammal Palanisamy in *From Shore to Shore* (2002). Women's autobiographies such as these evidence the assertion that their lives are of interest and value to the

wider society (Borelli, “Telling It Slant” 356). The preponderance of men’s autobiographies in major Malaysian bookstores, however, seems to perpetuate a kind of indifference towards women’s autobiographies. Still, it is the stories of our mothers that we first listen to as children, as mothers around the world assume the biological role of nurturers and caregivers—teaching values and moral codes, as well as telling stories of their ancestors and cultural origins. These women perform an act that is “fundamental to what it is to be human” (Bosak, “What is Legacy?” n.p.), namely, passing on their legacy to their children. Any study that aims to bring attention to Malaysian women’s autobiographies requires a reformulation of thinking and interpretation; as such, this study takes the perspective of a psycho-literary approach to the interpretation of autobiographies by multiethnic Malaysian women. This approach centres on an instinctual drive that Erik Erikson terms generativity, which is an important virtue of adulthood (McAdams *The Redemptive Self*, 5), and which inclines highly generative adults towards narrating their life stories sequenced in redemptive themes, and towards the desire to leave something positive behind to the community and future generations. This study carefully explores the interaction of multiethnic women’s lives and their writings, their use of literature as a tool to extend their legacy even further, and generate outcomes that can instil wisdom, understanding and a sense of national belonging in a multiethnic community through the fostering of solidarity spurred by the willingness to blur the barriers that may exist between gender, race, class, culture and ethnicity.

Abstrak tesis dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia untuk memenuhi keperluan ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**AUTOBIOGRAFI WANITA MALAYSIA SEBAGAI LEGASI MAJMUK
GENERATIVITI**

Oleh

HASLINA BINTI OMAR

Januari 2013

Pengerusi: Associate Prof. Noritah Omar, PhD

Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Bertitik-tolak daripada kerja-kerja sarjana autobiografi seperti Sidonie Smith dan Julia Watson yang gigih menangani ketidakprihatinan umum kepada penulisan kehidupan wanita, dan juga kebangkitan penelitian sarjana autobiografi wanita dari luar dunia barat ke atas koleksi karya negara sendiri, kajian ini menggabungkan kajian kontemporari yang dijalankan ke atas penulisan autobiografi wanita dan kajian sastera Shirley Lim, serta kajian Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf dan Muhammad A. Quayum dalam bidang penulisan wanita. Dengan fokus khusus kepada representasi etnik dalam autobiografi, kajian ini meneroka koleksi autobiografi wanita Malaysia dari empat kumpulan etnik yang berbeza—Melayu, Cina, India dan Serani (*Eurasian*). Kajian ini cuba meneroka secara teliti kisah kehidupan Sybil Kathigasu dalam *No Dram of Mercy* (1954), Khatijah Sidek dalam *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* (2001), Angela Yong dalam *One Thing Good but Not Both* (1998), dan Muthammal Palanisami dalam *From Shore to Shore* (2002). Autobiografi wanita seperti ini menjadi bukti bahawa kehidupan mereka mempunyai daya tarik dan nilai kepada

masyarakat (Borelli, *“Telling It Slant”* 356). Dominasi autobiografi lelaki di kedai-kedai buku utama Malaysia seolah-olah meneruskan ketidakprihatinan kepada autobiografi wanita. Namun, cerita itulah yang kita dengar dahulu sewaktu kanak-kanak, kerana ibu seluruh dunia memainkan peranan biologikal sebagai pengasuh dan penjaga—mengajar nilai dan kod moral, serta menceritakan kisah nenek-moyang dan asal usul budaya. Wanita-wanita ini melaksanakan sesuatu yang “fundamental kepada erti menjadi manusia” (Bosak, *“What is Legacy?”* n.p.), iaitu, menyampaikan legasi mereka kepada anak-anak mereka. Mana-mana kajian yang bertujuan menarik perhatian kepada autobiografi wanita Malaysia memerlukan reformulasi pemikiran dan interpretasi; oleh itu, kajian ini mengambil perspektif dari pendekatan psiko-sastera dalam menginterpretasi autobiografi oleh wanita dari pelbagai kumpulan etnik di Malaysia. Pendekatan ini berpusat kepada pemacu naluri yang diberi istilah ‘generativiti’ oleh Erik Erikson, yang merupakan satu nilai penting kedewasaan (McAdams *The Redemptive Self*, 5), dan yang membuatkan orang dewasa yang tinggi sifat generatifnya cenderung untuk menceritakan kisah hidup mereka mengikut urutan tema penebusan, dan juga cenderung meninggalkan sesuatu yang positif untuk masyarakat dan generasi akan datang. Kajian ini dengan teliti meneroka interaksi kehidupan wanita pelbagai etnik dan penulisan mereka, penggunaan sastera sebagai alat untuk melanjutkan lagi legasi mereka dan menjana hasil yang boleh menyemai kebijaksanaan, kefahaman serta rasa kepunyaan nasional dalam sebuah masyarakat majmuk melalui memupuk perpaduan yang didorong oleh kesediaan untuk mengaburkan halangan yang mungkin wujud antara jantina, bangsa, kelas, budaya dan kaum etnik.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the start, I was concerned as to whether I would be as passionate about researching on women's life narratives at the end of my PhD studies as I was at the beginning. I am pleased to say that not only was I able to sustain my interest throughout, but I can now see the potential that lies ahead in my chosen area of study, thanks to the expert guidance of three women scholars I hold in high esteem, at the helm of which is my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr Noritah Omar.

As my strongest critic, Assoc. Prof. Dr Noritah Omar was and still is my strongest motivator in the way she understands and nurtures her students towards their highest potential in line with her level of expectation. Her focus in placing importance in the strength and the presence of refreshing ideas in a research has helped me develop a keen interest in researching women's life narratives. I would also like to thank the two other members of my committee: Assoc. Prof. Dr Washima Che Dan for her invaluable comments during the initial drafting of the thesis and support throughout the length of my studies; and Dr Arbaayah Ali Termizi for her succinct suggestions and encouragement in the course of my research.

Lastly, I would like to sincerely thank my friends and lecturers at UPM, particularly in the literature department of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, for the illuminating ideas they so generously shared, their lively intellectual discussions, their moral support and willingness to lend their ears.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 17 January 2013 to conduct the final examination of Haslina Binti Omar on her thesis entitled “Malaysian Women’s Autobiographies as a Multiethnic Legacy of Generativity” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106], 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

Shamala a/p Paramasivam, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairperson)

Rosli b Talif, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal examiner)

Mardziah Hayati bt Abdullah, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal examiner)

John McLaren, PhD

Emeritus Professor
School of Communication, Culture and Language
Footscray Park Campus
Victoria University
Victoria 8001 Melbourne
Australia
(External examiner)

SEOW HENG FANG, PhD

Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 16 May 2013

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Noritah Omar, PhD

Associate Professor
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Washima Che Dan, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Arbaayah Ali Termizi, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Bujang Kim Huat, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

HASLINA BINTI OMAR

Date: 17 January 2013





TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
APPROVAL	viii
DECLARATION	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Background of the Study	4
1.2.1 The authors and their autobiographies	4
1.2.2 Autobiography	8
1.2.2.1 The gender of autobiography	11
1.2.2.2 Representing ethnicity in autobiography	13
1.2.3 Generativity	15
1.2.4 Malaysia's Multiethnic Community	16
1.3 Rationale of the Study	19
1.4 Scope of the Study	25
1.5 Conceptual Framework	27
1.5.1 The generative adult: At the intersection between humanities and science	27
1.5.2 Generativity – Its Multidimensional Features	27
1.5.3 Personality Psychology	30
1.5.4 Generative Outcomes	31
1.5.5 The role of the life story as a generative legacy	32
1.5.6 Psycho-literary themes sequenced in the life stories of highly generative adults	35
1.6 Research Objectives	37
1.7 Significance of the Study	38
1.8 Methodology	40
1.9 Organisation of the Thesis	43
1.10 Conclusion	44
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	46
2.1 Overview	46
2.2 Tracing the Development of Women's Autobiographies	47
2.2.1 United States, North America and Europe	47
2.2.2 Reformulating and rethinking reading approaches to women's autobiography in Malaysia	52
2.3 Developing a Conceptual Framework	54
2.3.1 Generativity: an instinctual drive	54
2.3.2 Generativity and life stories	55
2.3.3 Women with different personalities guiding the next generation	58

2.3.4 Tapping women's wisdom autobiographically	61
2.3.5 Culture and personality in narrative themes	62
2.3.6 Generative outcomes from positive legacies	65
2.3.7 Highly generative adults and the kind of stories they tell	67
2.4 Conclusion	68
3 TIME AND SPACE	69
3.1 Overview	69
3.2 World War II: Occupation of Malaya by the Japanese Imperial Army (1941-1945)	70
3.2.1 Indonesia under Dutch rule (1800-1942) and Japanese occupation	73
3.2.2 North Borneo under Brooke rule (1841-1941) and Japanese occupation	76
3.2.3 The Indians: Under British rule during World War II	78
3.3 The Little Village of Papan, Ipoh: Mrs K and the Guerrillas	81
3.4 Women's Political Activism in Asia	82
3.5 Life in Sarawak: The Brookes and Chinese Migration into Sarawak	83
3.6 Life in India: Indian Migration into British Malaya	86
3.7 Multiethnic Women of Southeast Asia and Patriarchy	88
3.8 The Rise of Female Leadership in Colonial Malaya	91
3.9 Conclusion	93
4 NO DRAM OF MERCY, MEMOIRS OF KHATIJAH SIDEK, ONE THING GOOD BUT NOT BOTH AND FROM SHORE TO SHORE	96
4.0 Overview	96
4.1 Related Themes in the Redemptive Life Stories of Highly Generative Adults	100
4.1.1 The Early Advantage	100
4.1.2 The Suffering of Others	101
4.1.3 Moral Clarity	102
4.1.4 Power versus Love	102
4.1.5 Redemption	103
4.1.6 Future Growth	104
4.2 <i>No Dram of Mercy</i> by Sybil Kathigasu: A Discussion	104
4.2.1 General Background	104
4.2.2 Sybil Kathigasu, the autobiographer (Sybil Medan Daly 1899-1948)	106
4.2.3 <i>No Dram of Mercy</i> , the Memoir	109
4.2.3.1 Kathigasu's Spiritual Encounter	109
4.2.3.2 Kathigasu's report: Speaking out for human rights	110
4.2.3.3 Committed to improving the world	113
4.2.3.4 The ultimate sacrifice	119
4.2.3.5 Duty, Sacrifice and Faith	120
4.2.3.6 Conclusion	119

4.3 <i>Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek</i> by Khatijah Sidek: A Discussion	124
4.3.1 General Background	124
4.3.2 Khatijah Sidek, the autobiographer (1918-1982)	127
4.3.3 <i>Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek</i> , the Life Narrative	130
4.3.3.1 Khatijah's Blessed Birth	130
4.3.3.2 Khatijah's strong empathy for the suffering of rural Malay Muslim women	132
4.3.3.3 Patriarchal bargaining	136
4.3.3.4 Making a positive impact	139
4.3.3.5 Perseverance embedded in belief	140
4.3.3.6 Conclusion	143
4.4 <i>One Thing Good but Not Both</i> by Angela Yong: A Discussion	144
4.4.1 General Background	144
4.4.2 Angela Yong, the autobiographer (b.1926)	145
4.4.3 <i>One Thing Good but Not Both</i> , the Autobiography	146
4.4.3.1 Letting her live	146
4.4.3.2 Yong and the plight of young girls	148
4.4.3.3 Instinctive resistance	149
4.4.3.4 The power of redemption	152
4.4.3.5 Projecting the past into the future	154
4.4.3.6 Conclusion	156
4.5 <i>From Shore to Shore</i>	156
4.5.1 General Background	156
4.5.2 Muthammal Palanisamy, the autobiographer (b.1933)	157
4.5.3 <i>From Shore to Shore</i> , the Life Story	153
4.5.3.1 Muthammal's role models: Amma and Apparayan	158
4.5.3.2 Resisting oppression	162
4.5.3.3 Celebrating a Heritage	165
4.5.3.4 Sharing with the world	166
4.5.3.5 Lessons from Malaysian cultural history	167
4.5.3.6 Conclusion	169
4.6 Positive (Generative) Outcomes	169
4.6.1 Forms of Life that Outlive the Self	169
4.6.1.1 How are Positive Outcomes Generated	170
4.6.2 Positive Outcomes from Life Stories of Malaysian Women	172
4.7 Conclusion	177
5 CONCLUSION	178
5.0 Overview	178
5.1 Summary of Main Findings	179
5.2 Recommendations for Future Research	186
5.3 Concluding Remarks	187

WORKS CITED	188
-------------	-----

APPENDICES	202
------------	-----

A1 Online Interview with Philip Hii (Angela Yong's son and editor of her autobiography)	203
---	-----

A2 Email correspondence with Gertrude Hii (Angela Yong's daughter)	208
A3 Interview with Angela Yong	213
B Interview with Muthammal Palanisamy	221
C1 Email correspondence with Professor K.S.Jomo	227
C2 K.S.Jomo interviews Khatijah Sidek for <i>Nadi Insan</i> March 1980 – "Ibu Khatijah Sidek: Pejuang Nasionalis Wanita."	229
D Email correspondence with Dr Siobhan Lambert-Hurley - Interest in Autobiographies from Southeast Asia	236

