



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE FRAGMENTED MALAY SELF :A CRITICAL STUDY OF
SELECTED WORKS BY DINA ZAMAN, KARIM RASLAN AND HUZIR
SULAIMAN**

DZEELFA ZAINAL ABIDIN.

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This thesis seeks to analyse the portrayal of the characters in the works of three Malaysian writers- Dina Zaman, Karim Raslan and Huzir Sulaiman. The characters of the selected works are of the Malay ethnicity and this study aims to look at their sense of self and ethnic identity of being Malay. The self is not whole and united. It is fragmented and conflicting in nature. A Malay-self is generally defined as “a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs” by the Federal Constitution in Article 160. This is the basis for the Malay ethnic identity in the country. The characters in the selected works used in this research may or may not conform to the aforementioned definition and bear with them fragmentalised identities of their selves. Therefore, in light of the fragmented self and ethnic identity, the portrayal of the Malay-selves in the selected writings will be examined.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**PECAHAN DIRI MELAYU: SEBUAH KAJIAN KRITIS KE ATAS
KARYA TERPILIH OLEH DINA ZAMAN, KARIM RASLAN DAN
HUZIR SULAIMAN**

Oleh

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December 2004

Pengerusi : Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, Ph.D.

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Tesis in dihasilkan untuk mengkaji watak-watak yang dipaparkan di dalam karya tiga orang penulis tempatan-Dina Zaman, Karim Raslan dan Huzir Sulaiman. Watak-watak dari karya terpilih ini adalah orang Melayu dan kajian ini bertujuan untuk melihat konsep sendiri dan identiti etnik Melayu yang wujud dalam diri watak-watak tersebut. Sesuatu diri itu bukan wujud dalam kesatuan, sebaliknya ia wujud dalam pecahan. Definisi yang terkandung dalam Perlembagaan Negara Malaysia (ceraian 160) menyatakan bahawa seorang Melayu adalah warga negara Malaysia yang beragama Islam, lazim bertutur dalam bahasa Melayu dan mengamalkan adat resam dan adat istiadat Melayu. Ini adalah asas untuk identiti etnik Melayu di negara Malaysia. Watak-watak dari karya terpilih yang digunakan untuk kajian ini mungkin menepati sebahagian sahaja dari ciri-ciri yang disebutkan di atas. Oleh itu, berdasarkan konsep sendiri pecahan dan identiti etnik, kajian ke atas diri Melayu dari karya-karya terpilih akan dijalankan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KCAL	(1997)	<i>The Kacang Puteh and Assam Lady</i>
GE	(1996)	<i>Go East!</i>
NOLLP	(2002)	<i>Notes on Life & Love & Painting</i>



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines selected writings of three Malaysian writers- Dina Zaman, Karim Raslan and Huzir Sulaiman- in relation to the concept of ethnic identity and self. A Malay is generally defined as “a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs” by the Federal Constitution in Article 160. This is the basis for the Malay identity in the country. This study aims to analyse protagonists from the chosen texts and link their portrayal to the elements of self and ethnic identity.

Background of Study

It is highly important to look into the background of Malaysian literature in English when discussing the works of the three writers mentioned. All three writers express themselves well in the language and interestingly for this study, the Malay characters which are central to their writings are portrayed through the medium of the English language.

According to Quayum and Faridah (2003), in the introduction of their book, Anglophone writings in Malaysia have gone through various stages of uncertainties as well as positive growth (1). In the 1960s and 70s, the area of novel writing were coloured by the works of Johnny Ong, Llyod Fernando, Tan

Kok Seng and Lee Kok Liang. The first short story published was written by S. Rajaratnam in the 1940s. Poetry writing thrived in the 1950s with the works of Johnny Ong, Ee Tiang Hong, Edwin Thumboo and Wong Phui Nam.

Quayum and Faridah went on to note that since independence in 1957, the government took several measures to replace English with the Malay language as being the language of colonial administration (2). But despite this move, writings in English continued to grow even if it only plays the role of the dominant language of “the ruling and privileged circles”.

In 1971, the government made it illegal to dispute or question the status of the national language as stated in Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution. Although it is stated that “ *no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language..*” (Article 152, Federal Constitution) , the move to push the English language in favour of the national language has taken its toll in the following years. The impact of the decline in the English language is severe. Quayum and Faridah quoted Asmah Omar as saying that English was fast becoming a **foreign** language instead of a **second** language (3). This problem is fast becoming a major issue especially when local graduates fail to get employed because they are handicapped by their inability to master the useful language of world communication. The language, despite being a compulsory subject in schools and national examinations, suffers negative and “jaundiced” (3) views from parties

and individuals who have never tried to be good in the English language to begin with.

Steps, albeit drastic ones, are now taken to rectify this situation. The introduction of English literature to all secondary school students and the teaching of mathematics and science in the English language starting from year 2003 are two of the measures taken as a promising start to a long term outcome, which we hope will be a fruitful one.

In the recent years, many young writers continue to publish works in the English language through writing workshops organised by private bodies usually linked to the English theatrical scene in Kuala Lumpur. Compilations of short stories by local, and sometimes unknown writers published by Silverfish Books, a local publishing house, has numbered to four up to year 2003. More compilations are in progress. Silverfish books also published “Eight Plays” by Huzir Sulaiman, where his play “Note on Life & Love & Painting” will be discussed in depth for this study.

In 1997, two women writers set-up Rhino Press and published the Black and White series- a series of short stories by Malaysian writers which come in pocket sized books. Dina Zaman is one of the writers in the series and has her own booklet of short stories named “Night and Day” which is also the title of a

short story from the compilation. The researcher has chosen the short story “The Kacang Puteh and Assam Lady” from the compilation.

As time passes, the issues dealt with in writings of the newer breed of writers represent a different set of ideas and concerns when compared to their predecessors of the post-independence period. Writers in English of that era deal with themes of identity and challenges of their new surroundings, away from the homeland they have left behind in search of a better life in their adopted country.

Llyod Fernando in his novels *Scorpion Orchid* and *Green is the Colour*, uses characters of the major races in Malaysia to explore interracial relationships in the newly independent Malaysia. “He sees himself as an integral part of Malaysian society” (Vethamani 78). He believes Malaysian writers should be sensitive to the place they have chosen to call home and rely less and less on their ancestral homeland (79). K.S. Maniam (*In a Far Country*) explores the Malaysian identity by going beyond ethnicity (80). In *The Return*, the sense of displacement of identity is discussed through Ravi, the protagonist.

Of the new generation of writers, Quayum and Faridah observe that “The younger generation is more optimistic and hopeful of an integrated society in the future than the older generation” (187). The three selected writers for this study represent the concerns and ideas of their generation and the period in which they

grew up and lived in. The subject matter in their writings has a global appeal to it and at the same time exudes the local essence.

Problem Statement

“Hey, Karim! My fellow diner said, irritatedly, “how can you call yourself a Malay? Firstly, you hardly ever go to the mosque. Secondly, your Malay is so bad you sound like a Bangladeshi. Thirdly, you look like a bloody *Mat Salleh*.” – Karim Raslan “Ceritalah-Malaysia in Transition” pg14.

The quote above is an example of the questions faced by a Malay who is a product of an interracial marriage. As it is, his Malayness is in question due to his physical appearance and his lack of participation in practices associated to being Malay.

Article 160 of the Federal Constitution states that:

“ ‘Malay’ means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs and-

- a. was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or
- b. is the issue of such a person

(Federal Constitution, 113)

According to Amat Juhari Moain, Article 160 does not state blood-line as a prerequisite. Whoever fits into the descriptions above is Malay and is entitled to the privileges given to the Malays. For example, people like the late Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard who is of Irish descent; and Yang Amat Berbahagia Tun Patinggi Abdul Rahman Yaakub who is a Melanau; an indigenous tribe in Sarawak are not Malays by birth but according to Article 160 of the Federal Constitution, they are Malays. He added that:

- i. From the perspective of *indigenous tribal races* (found in the South East Asia, Sri Lanka and South Africa), the emphasis is given on the Malay heredity. If the language spoken is Malay or a variety of the Malay dialect and they practice traditions and beliefs of the Malays, these people can be considered Malay, although they may not necessarily be Muslims.
- ii. The Federal Constitution defines a Malay in the context of being a Malaysian citizen. But for the Malays who belong to other countries, being Malay means being Muslim. Being Muslim is a factor of paramount importance to a Malay due to the fact that Islam is basis of Malay culture. If a Malay renounces the religion of Islam, then he is no longer a Malay. Therefore it is a habit for locals to describe a Muslim convert as a Malay convert (*masuk Melayu*) as it quite aptly gives one an idea of what constitutes a Malay ethnic identity.

(Manusia Melayu: Asal-usul Bangsa, Bahasa dan Sasteranya)

The characters in the selected texts, in one way or another, conform to the definitions given of being Malay. Like the quote at the start, the characters are deemed not to be Malay enough. This study is aimed to explore the degree of ethnic identity in the fragmented Malay selves as portrayed in the works of the chosen writers.

Scope of study and limitation

The scope of study is restricted to the selected works of the three Malaysian writers as mentioned in the earlier chapter. Dina Zaman writes poems and prose, Karim Raslan writes prose and economic related articles and Huzir Sulaiman is a playwright. Selected texts are from the genre of short story with the exception of Huzir's monologue (which could very well be a prose written in the first point of view) as the issues concerned are in relation with the discussion of the thesis.

The three writers are Malaysian, whose works of various genres were published starting from the mid-90's. The trio of writers are made up of a female and two males, of which one is a Malay, and the other two are half English and of Malayalee descent respectively. All of them are Muslims and were born in this country.

Dina Zaman

Dina Zaman spent most of her childhood and early education abroad and lived in Japan and Russia until she was eleven. She later attended the Western Michigan University to study Mass Communication. Dina Zaman has published poems and short-stories. She has written a play entitled 'Harakiri' which was staged this year at the Actor's Studio, Bangsar. She is also working on her novel. Her works are being discussed in literature classes at the university level. Quayum and Faridah have included her in their book *Colonial to Global-Malaysian Women's Writing in English 1940s-1990s* discussing on the themes and issues in Dina Zaman's poems and short-stories. But other than that, not much research has been done on her work.

Karim Raslan

Karim Raslan is a Cambridge University-educated lawyer who writes short-stories and articles on society. The discussion of the Malay-self is apparent in his writing. Born to a Malay father and an English mother, Karim Raslan's partial Englishness is obvious in his facial features but the issues dealt in his writings reflect the strong sense of Malayness within him. He spent most of his childhood in England after the passing of his father when he was ten. Karim is the author of *Ceritalah: Malaysia in Transition* which has been described by Nobel Laureate, Sir V.S. Naipaul as "educated and elegant", *Heroes and Other Stories*

and *Journeys Through Southeast Asia: Ceritalah 2*. Karim Raslan's short-stories from *Heroes and Other Stories* are used for the discussion of themes and issues in Malaysian Literature and also to illustrate points in Post-colonial literature at the university level. There are hardly any serious literary critique on his work to date.

Huzir Sulaiman

Huzir Sulaiman majored in English Literature at Princeton University, America. Prior to this, he had his education at the International School of Kuala Lumpur. His parents are both lawyers. It is said that his play entitled *Those Four Sisters Fernandez* (2000) represents his exploration of his own Malayalee roots. Huzir Sulaiman is arguably the most prolific Malaysian playwright around. His book, *Eight Plays*, published by Silverfish Books Kuala Lumpur, is a compilation of his plays from 1998 to 2002. His plays are studied in universities and in schools at the 'A' and 'O' levels.

The brief mention of their life background should aid in seeing the influence in their writing and justify the reason for the texts and the writers chosen.

This study will focus on the ethnic identity apparent in the characters and elements contributing to the fragmentation of the Malay selves in the chosen works.

Objective of the Study

Based on the definitions of the Malay ethnicity stated in the Problem of Statement, the aims of this research are:

1. To see how the fragmentation is depicted in the characters
2. To explore the aspects of Malayness shown by the different writers
3. To find out if the fragmentation in the self affects the ethnic identity

Significance of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the research of local work in English looking at the self and ethnic identity of the Malays and the fragmentation in the Malay self which are prevalent in the works of the three chosen writers.

This study is carried out based on the fact that writings and critiques on the works of the three mentioned writers are scarce. As of today, not much writing that is academic in nature has been done on these three writers. The scarcity of this has prompted the researcher to do a study on their selected works from the concept of the Malay self and ethnic identity.

Methodology

This research makes use of the concept of self and ethnic identity in analysing literature. The texts chosen are analysed to look at the concept of self and ethnic identity in the depicted characters. Therefore this requires reading on the subject of self and ethnic identity which will be linked to the selected texts. Material concerning Malayness and ethnicity are also an important part of this study as the core issues here is to look at the Malay self and ethnic identity through the characters in the texts mentioned.

The texts chosen are from the genre of short story. A monologue is included because of its suitability in terms of the protagonist portrayed and the issues discussed. All the texts were published between years 1996 to 2002 and are part of compilations of short stories and plays. Each compilation is the only edition of the publication, to date.

KPAL and FW (1997) are published in the Black & White Series by the now defunct Rhino Press based in Petaling Jaya. GE (1996) is published in Heroes and Other Stories by Times Book International, Singapore and NOLLP (2002) is published in Eight Plays by Silverfishbooks, Kuala Lumpur. There are no introduction chapters or prefaces in any of the compilations.

As for secondary materials, references are made to books and articles by critics on the mentioned texts and on related subjects. Information found on the internet is also helpful to compensate the lack of secondary material on the writers and their writings. Long citations from limited sources are extensively used in this thesis, as mentioned earlier the scarcity of writings on these writers being the reason.

The study will analyse the characters from the works of:

A. Dina Zaman

1. Kacang Puteh and Assam Lady -
"Night and Day" Black and White Series (1997)

B. Karim Raslan

1. Go East!
2. Neighbours-
Heroes and Other Stories (1996)

C. Huzir Sulaiman

1. Notes on Life & Love & Painting-
Eight Plays (2002)

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter One is made up of the following parts: the background of the study which touches on the development of the Malaysian literature in English, the problem statement, the scope of study and limitation, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study and the methodology used in this research.

Chapter II which is the literature review, gives an overview of the three important areas related to the study. The first part explains the concept of ethnicity as defined by anthropologists. The second section of the chapter looks into the definition of the Malay ethnicity from the socio-cultural and legal point of view. The final part deals with the aspects of self and identity which are the core elements of the research. The postmodern thought is crucial in explaining the fragmentation taking place in the self and identity. A brief explanation on the related aspect of postmodern is given.

The selected works for this study will be explicated in Chapters III and IV. Chapter III is devoted to exploring the aspects of Malayness portrayed in the works of the three writers. Ethnic markers found will be examined in relation to the three crucial elements that defines a Malay in Article 160 of the Federal Constitution.

In Chapter IV, the researcher will further discuss the selected texts from the aspect of a self that is fragmented. Here, the researcher will see how the fragmentation of the self is portayed in the different characters. The fragmentation of the self in each protagonist will be discussed.

In the concluding chapter, the researcher will conclude the findings of the two earlier chapters in reference to the objectives of the study. This final chapter will show whether the fragmentation in one self will affect the ethnic identity. The

researcher will also give recommendation on areas that could be looked into as an extension to the study of the Malay self.

