

Malay male migrants: Negotiating contested identities in Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Ethnic identity has dominated the political and social landscape of Malaysia throughout most of the 20th century. Recent changes, including government development policies, feminization of the industrial workforce, and rural to urban migration, have transformed the underlying political economy of the country. In relationship to these changes, official discourse has sought to engender a "New Malay" subjectivity, dissociating the Malay-peasant complex of the early 20th century and associating Malayness, instead, with urbanism and entrepreneurship. Malay male migrants figure centrally in this articulation of identity and political economy. Focusing on the articulation of multiple fields of identity, I argue that social and cultural forces are shaping and reshaping the lives of Malay men, although their effects are felt differentially by subjects who must negotiate intersecting fields of ethnicity, gender, migrancy, religion, and class. [*identity, ethnicity, class, migrants, masculinity, Malaysia*]

In 1992, the journalist Rehman Rashid returned to Malaysia after four years of self-imposed exile and embarked on a journey of rediscovery through the country of his birth. Toward the end of his journey, on a train pulling into Kuala Lumpur, he observed of his fellow passengers:

These were the Real Malaysians, these people around me . . . each sealed into the private cocoon of self, into which might be admitted only those of their own kind. What had been the most frequent question asked of me on this journey? "Are you Malay or Indian? Are you Eurasian? Are you Muslim? What ARE you?" Everything that emerged subsequently—every comment, opinion and answer—would depend on my response to that question. [Rehman 1993:267]

Rehman's experience reflects the intense sense of ethnic and ethnic-cum-religious identity integral to the everyday experience of Malaysians. Perhaps no other citizenry has a more deeply ingrained self-consciousness of ethnic identity, represented in naturalized categories of "Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Others." These categories are woven into everyday discourse and the fabric of government in Malaysia and they are found in nearly every introduction to every text written about the country. As I am obliged to reiterate here, Malays (and other indigenous groups) make up 58 percent of the population, Chinese 24 percent, Indians 7 percent, and Others 11 percent (Pejabat Perdana Menteri 2000).¹

But as dominant an issue as ethnic identity is in Malaysia, I argue that ethnic experience plays out in relationships not only to interethnic "groups and boundaries" (Barth 1969; Nagata 1981) but also to the association and dissociation of other articulated fields of identity—of gender, geography, religion, and class. The focal point of this analysis is the dissociation in late-20th-century Malaysia of what I call the "Malay-peasant" complex.² Working around this focal point, I examine the problematic intersection of subjective experience and the social, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape such experience. I employ narratives of life histories culled from formal interviews and numerous informal encounters to examine the experiences of two individuals, named Idris and Nizam (both pseudonyms), in relationship to fields of Malayness, masculinity, migrancy, and class in Malaysia. Drawing on and

pairing Raymond Williams's (1973, 1977) attention to historicity with Ernesto Laclau's (1990) analysis of the relationship of structure and subjectivity, I seek to demonstrate how the experiences and understandings of individual subjects are, by turns, shaped by and deploy the discourse of these fields of identity.

Recent deployment of topographical metaphors to write about ethnic experience, such as Arjun Appadurai's (1991, 1996) "ethnoscapes" and Keith Taylor's (1998) "surface orientations," suggests an understanding of ethnic identity far removed from a deep attachment to "primordial sentiments" (Geertz 1973; Keyes 1976). Similar theoretical moves have detached gender and geographic identities from their moorings in biological sex and naturalized places (e.g., Butler 1990; Kahn 2000; Massey 1994; Riley 1988; Soja 1996). In place of persistent cultural systems (cf. Spicer 1971) of ethnicity, gender, and place, scholars now imagine ethnic and otherwise marked subjects at play in a vast landscape of signs that they variously consume, display, reproduce, or resist. Reacting to earlier scholarship that sought to uncover and interpret the essential nature of "cultures" (in the plural), work of the last two decades has sought to liberate both scholarship and ethnic (or racialized) and gendered subjects from the constraints of essentialized identities and relocate them in the realm of existential possibilities.³ While attending to the social and cultural, poststructuralists (postmodernists, high modernists, or whatever name one wishes to use) have also sought to deconstruct an anthropological projection of hegemonic, essentialized "cultures."⁴ In its place, scholarly attention has turned to what Appadurai calls "fundamentally fractal" cultural forms, "possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities" (1996:46).

This attention to possibilities as opposed to essences, however, is too frequently misread or overstated to imply a state of affairs in which anything goes; that any sense of structure or pattern is a meaningless fiction (in the postmodernist tradition of Baudrillard 1983; Jameson 1991; and Lyotard 1984), a state in which "an indefinite range of potential courses of action . . . is at any given moment open to individuals and collectivities" (Giddens 1991:29).⁵ I argue here, however, that a survey of the dynamic, shifting surfaces of ethnic (and other social) experience must take into account not only the topography but also, following Laclau (1990:35), the metaphorical geology—the multiple layers and strata—of that experience as well.⁶ In the case of Malays in Malaysia, the immediate, contested terrain of Malay identity is the fertile topsoil resting on layers of social sediment deposited over centuries and shaped by actions and ideas of Malays and their interlocutors. Some of these actions and ideas are long forgotten or vaguely remembered through inscriptions, annals, colonial records, and oral traditions. Others are commandingly present, reiterated, remembered, and reinterpreted in newspapers, schoolbooks, television shows, and everyday conversation. Out of that sediment of

historical experience and discourse emerge fields of identity around ethnicity and other aspects of human experience that subjective agents (be they institutions or individuals) draw on to be and to act in the world. In turn, through their actions, subjects rework the terrain, tilling the fields as it were, shifting the topsoil and sometimes effecting seismic events in the deeper strata as well.⁷

By "fields of identity" I mean the structures of feeling (Williams 1973, 1977) surrounding ethnicity, gender, class, and place within which subjects such as Idris and Nizam operate. In this regard, I find a synthesis of ideas from Raymond Williams and Ernesto Laclau to be productive. Although Williams is primarily concerned with literature and Laclau with social agency, I find a certain synergy in their theoretical formulations. In his provocative essay "New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time," Laclau (1990:61) employs a variety of terms to denote partial, dislocated structures of "objectivity" (e.g., *the social, structural objectivity, the field of objectivity*) on the uneven edges of which individual subjectivity is constituted. I prefer Williams's term *structures of feeling*, which he defines as "a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives us the sense of a generation or of a period" (1977:131).⁸ The analysis in this article examines such qualities—of ethnicity, religion, gender, and place—constituting fields of identity in the particular time and place of late-20th-century Malaysia.

Reflecting on the experience of two Malay male migrants, I examine the process whereby multiple fields of identity are articulated and transformed in relationship to each other and to a changing political economy. My focus here is on the way in which multiple, and often contested, fields of identity intersect in the experiences of particular individuals. My approach analyzes both the broader fields of identity and the ways in which individual subjects negotiate and reconcile these identities. I have chosen to discuss two subjects among many dozens of Malays whose lives I came to know in some detail during research in Malaysia during the 1990s (see Thompson 2000). Though their experiences reflect similarities with others I encountered in my research, and in the broader literature on Malay society, I am not arguing in this article that the experiences of these two individuals can be generalized to reflect or account for the experiences of all (or even most) Malays, males, or migrants. On the contrary, focusing in detail on two existential (rather than, for example, "composite") cases demonstrates the operation of *diversity* of experience in relationship to *general* social and cultural constructions of ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and place. Idris's and Nizam's experiences illustrate that, although as "Malay male migrants" both inhabit the same objective identities governed by cultural constructions of ethnicity, religion, gender, and geography, their subjective experiences of these identities are very different, mediated especially by their experiences of class.⁹

In the following sections of the article, I outline social and cultural elements of late-20th-century Malaysia that provide context both for the experiences of Idris and Nizam and for this intervention into understanding the fields of identity from which they and others in Malaysia operate. I then describe and analyze Idris's and Nizam's experiences of migrancy, masculinity, and Malayness to show how each man's experience within each of these fields of identity is mediated by the other fields (as well as by class and religion, which are treated *inter alia* throughout the description and analysis). Ultimately, I argue that this analysis indicates the weakness of categorical stereotypes implied by the question "What ARE you?" (asked so frequently, not only in Malaysia but also elsewhere in the world). Rather, we should turn our attention from the identity of individuals and toward a critical understanding of the multiple fields of social identities that shape peoples' lives and through which we, of necessity, express ourselves.

Economics, religion, gender, and geography

Since the 1970s, the New Economic Policy (NEP) has been the principal ideological and practical program guiding government policy in Malaysia.¹⁰ The NEP, initiated in the wake of interethnic violence in 1969, sought to reduce poverty and the association between ethnicity and socioeconomic class—specifically the association of Chinese and the business class, Malays and the peasantry, and to a lesser extent Indians and estate workers. In the early 1990s, two decades into the NEP, the Malay establishment launched a campaign to promote an idealized figure of a cosmopolitan, entrepreneurial, and independent *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) to replace the rural, backward, dependent "old Malay" in the popular imagination. The "dissociation" of ethnic and class identities for Malays has thus been accompanied by an ideological attempt to associate Malay ethnicity with a new, upper-middle-class status.

In what follows, I argue that the experiences of Idris and Nizam indicate the extent to which the shifts in Malayness and dissociation of ethnicity and class in Malaysia have attenuated the hold of Malay ethnic identity over its subjects. Malays, however, do not experience this attenuation in a way that is easily generalizable or evenly distributed. Rather, experiences of religious identity, masculinity, and migrancy are intimately related to this unraveling. Moreover, Nizam's and Idris's responses to the ideology of an entrepreneurial "New Malay" subjectivity demonstrate how their own divergent religious, gendered, and class experiences mediate their relationship to this idealized ethnic subject.

Religious identity has been closely associated with Malay identity since at least the 15th century, with the conversion of Malay sultans, and by extension their subjects, to Islam. In present-day Malaysia, legally and socially, all Malays are Muslim. Although religious identity has the potential to

and sometimes does supercede ethnic Malayness, more often than not among Malay Muslims, it is taken as one aspect of ethnic identity, as evidenced by the marginalization of non-Malay Muslims in Malaysia. Long-standing Indian Muslim communities are generally socially segregated from Malays, and new converts to Islam, especially Chinese, are signified by the term *saudara baru*, or "new brothers." Although it is true that religious identity does not generally supercede Malay ethnic identity (i.e., most of the time most Malays think of themselves as Malays first and Muslims second), Islam has come to play a larger cultural and social role among Malays since the 1970s, in part because of the dissociation of the Malay-peasant complex (Ackerman 1991; Nagata 1981, 1984; Ong 1995; Shamsul 1997b). In politics, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and the Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, or PAS) are the main competitors for Malay votes; each party has struggled to position itself as more Islamic than the other. Likewise, on the social scene, a very visible, urban-based *dakwah* (proselytization) movement has sought to intensify and purify the practice of Islam, primarily among Malays (Jomo and Ahmad 1992; Nagata 1984). Nizam in particular draws on this alternative field of religious identity in counterpoint to elements of the "New" Malay ethnic identity that pervades official discourse.

Feminist scholarship has brought an analysis of gender to the fore in understanding social and cultural relations in Malaysia (e.g., Ackerman 1991; Carsten 1997; Jamilah 1992; Ong 1987, 1990, 1995; Stivens 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000) and, more generally, in the anthropology of Southeast Asia (Atkinson and Errington 1990; Ong and Peletz 1995; Sears 1996; Sen and Stivens 1998; Steedly 1999). Michael Peletz (1995, 1996) and a few others both inside and outside of Southeast Asia (e.g., Allison 1994; Brenner 1995, 1998; Brison 1995; Gutmann 1997a; Hodgson 1999; Margold 1995) have begun to examine the experience of "men as men" (Gutmann 1997b:385). Even so, gender analysis has remained primarily a study of female (and increasingly "transgender"—for want of a better term) experience.¹¹ Mary Steedly's (1999) state of the field review of anthropology in Southeast Asia is indicative of this situation. Steedly notes that "gender" has emerged as a central concern of anthropologists doing work in the region. But her review of the questions that scholars are asking makes clear that their concerns are largely about women's experiences (Steedly 1999:439). There is, of course, very good reason for this focus on women, as a corrective to the historical disregard of women in scholarship and in the important intellectual work of deconstructing systems of oppression, both of which remain incomplete and difficult projects (Stivens 1992).

But, as Peletz (1995) has argued, there is a need to move beyond the "taken-for-granted" and "arelational" constructs of masculinity (or "maleness") in favor of analyses that draw on and complement the rich tradition of feminist scholarship

to present more nuanced accounts of male experience (see also Gutmann 1997b). Likewise, the field of gender identity (specifically, notions of masculinity) shapes the ways in which subjects negotiate and experience ethnicity, place, and migration. My purpose is not to define particular forms of masculinity per se (cf. Brittan 1989; Connell 1995; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Gilmore 1990). Rather, I demonstrate the articulation of masculinity with ethnicity and other fields of identity, highlighting the experience of Malay male migrants *as men*. Gender, as I shall demonstrate, shapes the social experiences of both Idris and Nizam, especially in work and familial relationships.

The experience of rural to urban migrants in Malaysia has gained more attention from scholars than the subject of masculinity. Most of this research has focused on the experience of Malays in adjusting to life in urban areas (e.g., Nagata 1979; Norazit 1993, 1996; Provencher 1971; Yaacob 1993). Work on the experience of migration in Malaysia and Southeast Asia in relationship to fields of identity has, like work on gender, focused mainly on the experience of female migrants (e.g., Mills 1997; Ong 1987; Silvey 1997). A great deal of attention has also been paid to the urban middle class and upper-middle class in Malaysia and elsewhere (Kahn 1996; Robison and Goodman 1996; Sen and Stevens 1998; Sloane 1999). Yet most migrants join the working class rather than the "new rich." This article offers a comparative analysis of working-class and middle-class male migrant experience.

Rural to urban migration among Malays has played an important role since at least the 1970s in transforming the ethnic, gender, and political-economic landscape of the nation (see, for example, Brookfield 1994; Cho 1990; Jamilah 1992; Nagata 1979; Ong 1987; Stevens 2000). Because of the nature of Malay migration, often involving movement back and forth between rural and urban areas, the extent and rates of rural to urban migration are difficult to glean from available demographic data (Cho 1990; Hirschman 1983). An increase in Malay migration to urban areas, however, seems evident from general observations of rural and urban life (e.g., Abdul Samad 1994:62; Chan 1983; De Koninck 1992; Nagata 1979; Rimmer and Cho 1994:244; Rogers 1993:94–99; Sivalingam 1993:1–4; Stevens 1996). In addition, census data tell us that Malaysia has been transformed from a country that was three-fourths rural at mid-century to predominantly urban in 2000 (Government of Malaysia 1973, 1996; Leete 1996).¹² Idris and Nizam, like hundreds of thousands of their contemporaries, have experienced this transformation and movement from rural to urban.

The two young men whose experiences I discuss are both migrants from the small settlement of Sungai Siputeh to the Klang Valley. Sungai Siputeh is located some one hundred kilometers inland from the island of Penang, at the western foot of the spine of mountains that stretches down the center of peninsular Malaysia. It has been tied histori-

cally by waterways and since the mid-20th century by roadways to the west coast of the peninsula, which is generally more urban and industrialized than the east coast. But by west coast standards, both urbanites and inhabitants of Sungai Siputeh itself consider the settlement a very remote *kampung* (village). The Klang Valley, by contrast, is Malaysia's largest urban settlement, with some five million inhabitants, encompassing a corridor that stretches from the capital of Kuala Lumpur to the port of Klang on the west coast of the peninsula. Improvements in transportation have made Kuala Lumpur and other urban centers increasingly accessible to rural Malaysians. The distance between Kuala Lumpur and Sungai Siputeh (nearly three hundred kilometers) can now be covered in as little as four hours via the *lebuhraya*, the north-south interstate highway completed in the 1990s. This development of the transportation infrastructure has seen an accompanying increase in the flow of migrants such as Idris and Nizam.

Idris: Working-class migrancy

I first met Idris in the early 1990s, when he was a young high school student and I was beginning my fieldwork on rural to urban migrant experience in Sungai Siputeh. In high school, Idris had never been at the top of his class academically, but he graduated and hoped to make a successful career. Idris, his mother, and six younger siblings lived in a large wooden house on stilts. Its remarkably bare floors, unadorned walls, and absence of furniture marked it as occupied by one of Sungai Siputeh's poorer families. Idris's father worked as a *tukang urut* (masseur) and at various other odd jobs, living sometimes in Sungai Siputeh and sometimes with relatives in Klang. From Klang, his father sent home remittances to support the family. Although the conditions of rural poverty in which Idris grew up may have limited his ultimate career opportunities, the national educational system shaped his employment and income-generating prospects more significantly.

Though he would have liked to attend university, Idris's prospects for doing so seemed unlikely given his academic record. Inspired by a recruiter who had visited Idris's rural school during his last year, Idris began to think of entering the state department of forestry. Notions of gender clearly shaped this desire. Idris imagined that forestry would be a good fit for him, as a "kampung" boy. Working outdoors free from the confines of an office or factory suited Idris's image of masculine identity (cf. Willis 1977).

But his test scores did not meet the standards of the forestry school, let alone earn him a scholarship to a four-year university. Instead, he was accepted at a government-run Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) technical-vocational school.¹³ MARA schools throughout Malaysia target young Malays such as Idris, providing them with practical technical training (rather than intellectual or managerial skills)

and thereby, not coincidentally, providing national and international labor markets with skilled industrial employees. At the MARA vocational school, during the first six months of 1997, Idris completed a course in automobile maintenance and repair.

Idris then moved to Klang, not far outside the capital of Kuala Lumpur, where he lived with an aunt (his mother's sister) and her family (with whom Idris's father occasionally resides). He first worked for a small-scale merchant (*tokay*) selling chicken at outdoor markets around the Klang Valley. Then, shortly after arriving in Klang, Idris found a job with Edaran Otomobil Nasional (EON), the government-backed corporation that produces the Proton, Malaysia's national automobile. At EON, he worked on the production line assembling the left-hand doors of passenger cars.

When I talked with Idris during 1998, a year into the increasingly severe Asian economic crisis, he was not concerned about losing his job, in part because the factory he worked in was tied to one of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's pet projects. As with his education, ethnicity worked in his favor. He could not imagine that the factory would let any ethnically Malay workers go, because of the potential political backlash such an event might have for the prime minister and his government. But production had slowed down, taking away overtime work, which had previously been a major source of income for factory workers.¹⁴

To supplement his income, Idris continued to work part-time at night markets. In 1998, from Idris's point of view, the severe reduction in his income was not a large problem. He continued to live with his aunt and did not have to pay for room and board. Nevertheless, he said that he had become thrifter in his spending habits and that the reduction in his income deprived him of some consumer goods that he desired. Like workers and consumers in Malaysia and elsewhere, Idris expressed and negotiated various aspects of his identity through consumption (cf. Mills 1997). At the time we spoke, he was not yet able to afford a motorcycle, the first major purchase for most young Malay men. He had also switched to buying cheaper jeans at the night market rather than more expensive, "authentic" Levis available at shopping malls. Giving this an ideological twist, he joked that this was his contribution to the government's "Buy Malaysian" campaign. Almost immediately, though, he pulled out of his pocket a U.S.-manufactured Zippo lighter to show off to me, a sign that he was still in touch with trendy global brands and that the economic slowdown had not completely stymied his ability to acquire such products.

Nizam: Middle-class migrancy

I first met Nizam in 1995 when he returned to Sungai Siputeh with his wife during a long weekend holiday over Chinese New Year. During that weekend we had several conversations, including a lengthy interview, conducted on

the veranda of his father's house, about his experiences migrating between Sungai Siputeh and Kuala Lumpur. Nizam was closely related to some of the more well-off individuals in Sungai Siputeh. But Nizam's father Pak Su and his nuclear family were not especially well off. Although his family was not quite as poor as Idris's, Nizam did not benefit greatly from his family's standing in the kampung. As in Idris's case, the national educational system played a significant role in shaping Nizam's relationship to the means of production and consumption in Malaysia, that is, his experience of class (cf. De Koninck 1992:173-186). Although Idris and Nizam came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, their maturation and migration saw them take divergent directions within an emergent urban-centered Malay class system. Idris's lack of academic success (coupled with an imperative of urban-bound migration) saw him move from a poor rural family to work on a factory floor and live in a squatter settlement. By contrast, Nizam gained a position in industrial management and a house in a suburban housing estate.¹⁵

Nizam attended primary school and the first three years of high school locally. Then, based on his marks on the Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (SRP), an exam taken by all Malaysian high school students during their third year, he obtained a full scholarship to attend boarding school for the last two years of high school. In 1985, he entered the University of Technology-Malaysia (UTM) at Kuala Lumpur on a full scholarship. Both of these scholarships were specifically set aside for Malays under the same general government policies that guided the NEP.

The day after Nizam graduated from UTM in 1990 with a degree in chemical engineering, he interviewed for an entry-level management job at a rubber glove factory in the Klang Valley. Nizam had gone to this interview mainly for the experience. To his surprise, he was hired on the spot and started working two weeks later. At the glove factory, he met his wife, who was his supervisor in the factory management hierarchy. She was from a rural kampung in the east-coast state of Pahang and she had received a bachelor's degree in engineering from Mississippi State University.¹⁶

Nizam worked at the glove factory for only a little over a year because he felt the working conditions were poor and the pay too low for a university graduate. He then found a new position at a Japanese multinational corporation, which he had seen advertising for employees in a major English-language newspaper. Again, his finding the position was very easy. He sent out only one resume and was hired straight away as a junior executive.¹⁷ Shortly after Nizam left the glove factory, his wife quit as well. She took a position at a bank, where she continued to earn more than Nizam until quitting shortly after the birth of their second child.

Migrant dissociation: Nizam and Idris compared

Nizam's success—in joining the managerial middle class, marrying well, and starting a family—is predicated on dissociation from his kin and rural origins not only in a material sense but culturally as well. When I mentioned meeting Nizam, his uncle remarked that when young people get a higher education they are reluctant and embarrassed (*malu*) to work in the kampung. Nizam's own comments mirror those of his uncle but reflect more longing than embarrassment or reluctance. Nizam echoed a broadly held, contradictory, and deeply ambivalent attitude among urban Malay elites and middle classes, who at once idealize a rural idyll while distancing themselves from a perceived "backwardness" of rural dwellers, especially with regard to political and economic attitudes (cf. Kahn 1992; Sloane 1999). "Deep in my heart, I want to return to the kampung," Nizam told me while we were sitting on the veranda of his father's house. He confessed that he didn't really like Kuala Lumpur but felt compelled to live there because of work and because prospects for doing any kind of business in the kampung were limited. Because of his commitment to his wife and children, he said, as the provider for his family, "I can't rely on my parents like when I was a kid."

At this juncture, Nizam's commentary on the difference between the kampung and Kuala Lumpur turned to notions of the socioeconomic relationships surrounding feasts (*kenduri*) staged for weddings and other important ceremonial events and to his position as a parent, protecting his children from unhealthy social influences. Repeating a common theme in discussions of the rural-urban divide, Nizam pointed out that in the kampung everyone works together to stage *kenduri*, whereas in Kuala Lumpur such affairs are catered—an indicator of the loss of community in the city. Moreover, in Kuala Lumpur "kids are exposed to all kinds of culture! It's not original Malaysian culture anymore. . . . It's a tough challenge for us when we become parents."

Nizam continued by outlining a vague plan to buy land in Sungai Siputeh and one day return to live in the kampung. Maybe, he speculated, he could get someone in the kampung to work the land first and then teach him how to do it, reemphasizing that he did not have the knowledge or skills for kampung work. But this course of action remained at best a vague daydream. It is not at all uncommon for migrants from Sungai Siputeh to return to settle in the kampung after living for an extended period in Kuala Lumpur or other cities. So it would not be surprising if Nizam did in fact return someday. All of his activities, however, seemed to indicate that he was unlikely to return to Sungai Siputeh anytime in the near future. Among other things, Nizam and his wife had already invested in land and a home, but in the Klang Valley, not the kampung.

Although Nizam's longing for and physical dissociation from the kampung were quite important to him, in 1998,

when I visited him at his home in suburban Shah Alam, he talked more openly about another aspect of his sense of dissociation from the kampung—one located at the intersection of religious and political identity. When I arrived, Nizam greeted me in a turban and long, flowing white robes, attire commonly associated with Malaysia's *dakwah* movement. Since the 1970s, *dakwah* has come to signify a loose collection of social and political groups that have sought to revitalize and purify the practice of Islam, particularly among Malays. Most of these groups draw their membership from the Malay professional middle class (Jomo and Ahmad 1992; Nagata 1984; Shamsul 1997b). Nizam had just come back from the local prayer house (*surau*) where he had recently been promoted from the position of *bilal* (one who recites the call to prayer) to that of *imam* (one who leads prayers and recites sermons). In addition to his increasing involvement in the religious services, Nizam had become an active member of PAS, the longtime rival for Malay votes of the ruling UMNO. Whereas UMNO relies on the unifying principle of ethnicity, PAS promotes an explicitly Islamic politics, though because of the preoccupation with ethnicity above all else in Malaysian discourse, PAS is identified as a predominantly Malay political party.

In the summer of 1998, at the height of the economic crisis and in the wake of Suharto's fall in Indonesia, the country was abuzz with political discussions.¹⁸ Nizam was quite interested in talking to me about the political situation in the country and what it meant for PAS. But he also registered his political Islamic identity as a measure of alienation from his kampung of origin (cf. Nagata 1984). People in the kampung, he said, have a different mentality from people in the city. Nizam was of the opinion that in the kampung people rely on information from television and newspapers, which are controlled by the government. He felt that they are also less concerned about the country as a whole and focus mainly on their immediate surroundings. By contrast, he argued, city people are in close contact with social problems, embodied for Nizam in discos and snooker halls, and thus, urbanites are concerned with the well-being of the wider society. City people also are more interested in talking about national political issues and have a deeper understanding of Islam than kampung folk, he told me.

When Nizam goes back to the kampung, he changes the way he talks. The change is registered to some degree in his switching from standard Malay or a Malay-English patois to the Patani-Malay dialect spoken in Sungai Siputeh. But mainly, the content and vocabulary of kampung discourse is different. As an example, Nizam said that in Shah Alam, he frequently discussed issues of *nepotism* and *cronyism*, loanwords in Malay for subjects high on the political agenda in the late 1990s. The meaning and implication of these terms were common knowledge among his social circle in the Klang Valley but would have required lengthy explanations in the kampung, Nizam believed. By contrast, kampung folk

could talk endlessly about different types of durian or the current market price of various fruits, subjects that held little interest for Nizam.

Compared with Nizam, Idris expressed much less sense of dissociation from the kampung where both men grew up. He moved much more fluidly between the kampung and the city. In conversations I had with Idris, he never explicitly expressed any alienation from the kampung. He did make reference, however, to certain distinctions between the kampung and the city. In contrast to the kampung, his relative freedom to associate with young women in the Klang Valley, especially in the context of outdoor markets, was something he clearly valued. He also noted that he often adjusted his speech in the city, to suppress his Patani accent. But traveling in working-class circles, he did not switch between Malay and English or mix Malay and English to the same extent or with the same fluency as Nizam. And whereas Nizam felt incapable of working in the kampung when he returned to Sungai Siputeh for a break from city life, Idris regularly engaged in kampung work on his return trips, for example, harvesting fruit to earn extra income (a common practice among working-class migrants). Similarly, Idris expressed no dissociation between his religious practice and identity from that of kampung residents. His adherence to Islamic practice largely followed the social situation or group in which he found himself. He attended the mosque on Fridays when he was in the kampung, though somewhat less regularly when in the city. Idris's unreflective religious practice in many ways illustrated Nizam's critique of kampung dwellers who practiced Islam but did not have a "deep understanding" of it.

Age and marital status played into Nizam's and Idris's different relationships to the kampung as well. Marriage and starting a family curtailed the frequency of Nizam's return trips to Sungai Siputeh. After he and his wife married, they divided their trips between his kampung in Perak and hers in Pahang. Then, as they had more children (on top of work obligations), returning to the kampung became an increasingly complex undertaking. Between 1995 and 1998, Nizam noted, his trips to Sungai Siputeh dropped from once every month or every other month to once or twice a year.¹⁹ By comparison, as a young bachelor, Idris had fewer attachments to keep him in the city on weekends or holidays and had no alternative destination to return to. Idris also related to the example of his father, who had frequently moved back and forth between the Klang Valley and Sungai Siputeh over many years.

Although age and marital status are important factors affecting the relationship that rural to urban migrants maintain with their kampung of origin, even working-class men who are married and older than Idris tend to maintain a stronger identification with and practical ties to their kampung than men like Nizam, who enter the professional or managerial class. Although many working-class men marry

women from cities or (like Nizam) distant kampung, they are more likely to marry women from their own or from another nearby kampung. They are also more likely to associate with other working-class migrants from their own area. For example, several young men from Sungai Siputeh (and the surrounding area) who worked at a particular factory in the Klang Valley told me that, in the warehouse where they worked, those who did not speak Patani dialect were picking it up because it was used so frequently in that setting.

Even though working-class men generally maintain a stronger relationship to the kampung, they do register a degree of dissociation from it. In part, this has to do with a pervasive cultural urbanism in rural kampung (Thompson 2000). From a very early age, Kampung children take for granted an urban-oriented trajectory in the "proposed world" (Keyes 1991) mediated by schooling, television, and other institutions. As discussed in greater length below, geographical identification with the kampung is generally negatively valued in this urban-centric discourse. An extreme—though not altogether unique—example of this involves Nizam's younger brother. According to Nizam's father, the younger brother had never been happy living in the kampung and from a very young age, he wanted to leave for the city. He quit school after sixth grade and left Sungai Siputeh to live in Kuala Lumpur while still in his mid-teens. He worked odd jobs, mainly as a hawker at night markets, and rarely came home.

Both Nizam and Idris (as well as other migrants, such as Nizam's brother) experienced a dissociation from their geographic identity as *orang kampung* (lit. people of the village). But their experience of migrancy took place on a terrain intersected by fields of class and other identities. For Idris, the experience was one of broad horizons limited by his moderate accomplishments in primary and high school. In the end, he seized on the path of highest status and possibility of financial reward, though not the one he had hoped for. His ideas of a "successful" career necessarily entailed a movement away from the kampung. But he moves fluidly between the city and the kampung. Returning to the kampung does not necessarily take Idris, as a working-class Malay, away from work or register a severe change in his daily social interactions (such as the people he associates with or the topics they discuss). Nizam, on the other hand, was able to pick and choose among a variety of possibilities. But identification with an upwardly mobile Malay middle class, as well as his affiliation with a self-consciously urban political Islam, socially and culturally distances him from the kampung. Returning to the kampung registers as nostalgia, locating the kampung in the past, despite its physical presence. In the next section, I show that these sorts of differential dissociations appear and are reinforced on the terrain of masculinity as well.

Masculinity in the workforce and family

In his work on masculinity in rural Negeri Sembilan, Peletz (1995, 1996) demonstrated a disjuncture in which the "official" discourse on men's rationality and responsibility creates a standard for behavior that in practice is difficult or impossible for most men and, especially, for poorer men to achieve. A similar situation is evident in the experience of Malay male migrants. Gender ideals in the context of family and sexuality, on the one hand, and the gendered structure of Malaysia's industrial workforce, on the other, place demands on male rural to urban migrants that are particularly difficult for working-class men to meet and that shape the lives of both working-class and middle-class Malay men.

Under the NEP, from the late 1970s onward, the Malaysian government encouraged an urban-centered industrialization driven by foreign capital investments. As a key component of its strategy to encourage foreign investment, the government endorsed a feminization of the industrial workforce. It promoted a relatively cheap, docile, female workforce as an enticement to foreign capital, especially in electronics and similar "light" industries (Ong 1987:151-153, 1990). The growth and social effects of a largely female workforce concentrated in industrial development zones have been central to social and cultural change in late-20th-century Malaysia (Ackerman 1991; Guinness 1992; Jamilah 1992; Ong 1987, 1990, 1995; Taylor and Ward 1994). An industrial workforce had been developed that was stratified by gender and ethnicity, with mainly female, mainly Malay workers on the factory floor supervised by a mainly male, mainly non-Malay (often non-Malaysian) management (Ong 1987).

Nizam's observations of the conditions at the Japanese multinational electronic components factory where he worked mirrored this larger phenomenon. He estimated that 90 percent of the "operators" (i.e., those working on the factory floor) were women. Echoing the official discourse aimed at attracting foreign investment, Nizam said that women were better operators because they were more "patient, exacting, and loyal," whereas (working-class) men were more hot-tempered. Men, he said, think that most factory jobs are "not a job for a man." They want something that gives them more freedom. In addition, Nizam thought that men made better executives. Women, he said, were more likely to *tawar-menawar* (bargain or negotiate) than to give directions and orders, as he felt managers should.

Idris, in his younger days, had also reflected this gendered discourse in his desire for the "freedom" of working outdoors for the forestry service. Instead, obtaining a job at the Proton factory, he had found himself in the heavy industrial sector. Male labor is prevalent in factories that produce items such as automobiles and air conditioners, though this sector is relatively small compared with "lighter" industries. Men who look for jobs in the latter sort of factories are fre-

quently turned away, told that it is "women's work" for which they are not suited. Alternatively, they find jobs on the periphery of such factories, as support staff in warehousing and transportation and as mechanics. Or, like Nizam's younger brother and Idris, when he first moved to the Klang Valley, they find jobs in the informal sector of the economy.

For women, the feminization of factory work has meant, among other things, facing negative, sexualized images of factory women (Ackerman 1991; Ong 1987, 1990, 1995) and a middle-class consumer culture rife with conflicts between materialism and "Asian family values" (Stivens 1998). More often than not, discourse on masculinity in contemporary Malaysia operates as an implicit, unmarked category in relationship to an elaborate discourse on femininity. Although it may not be explicitly or elaborately constructed, masculinity, as it is construed in relationship to the feminized workforce, shapes male experience not only at work (and in finding work), as discussed above, but also in family and sexual relationships.²⁰ The expectation of men to be providers, in particular, noted by Nizam in discussing his dissociation from the kampung, works to link class and family concerns in Malay men's experience.

An important component of men's migratory experience from rural to urban areas is the desire and imperative to acquire the wealth and social standing required for them to transform themselves from dependent children into responsible adults.²¹ Men aspire to the status of *abang*, a term used not only for eldest son or older brother but also for husband.²² Idris's status as *abang*, as the eldest brother in his family, weighed on him; he said that while still in secondary school he felt a special responsibility to "succeed," as a model for his younger siblings. But even young men who are not among the firstborn or older brothers are expected to assume the role of *abang vis-à-vis* wives, fiancées, or even girlfriends (all of whom use the term *abang* to refer to their male partners).²³ For Nizam, assuming the role of husband has involved the shaping of his and his wife's work and familial activities to conform to this cultural-cum-socioeconomic ideal, relying on the relative position of economic security afforded by his professional career. Working-class men like Idris, by contrast, do not always have the resources to conform to these ideals.

In 1995, Nizam portrayed his relationship with his wife as unusual in several respects.²⁴ She was older than he, she was his "boss" at the factory where he first worked, and she earned more than he did. In addition, the couple had married without a long engagement and without him paying a large *hantaran* (money and gifts given to the bride by the groom in Malay weddings). Both partners' parents were "modern," according to Nizam; they did not require the couple to set a price for the *hantaran*, and the wedding was a relatively inexpensive affair. After marrying, Nizam also regularly helped with cooking, washing dishes, and other

housework. But he portrayed this work as "a sort of gift" to his wife—in other words, not really his responsibility.²⁵

By 1998, Nizam's wife was a full-time homemaker. When she first quit her job shortly after the birth of their second child, the couple had to make a lot of adjustments financially, because their household income dropped by more than half. But for Nizam, it was more important that his wife stay home with the children, an opinion he framed in terms of Islamic and "family" values. Though they could have employed a domestic servant, as many middle-class couples did (Stivens 1998), Nizam emphasized that it was important in Islam for women to be mothers to their children and, correspondingly, it was the duty of husbands to be the primary providers for their families. Nizam's position in management and income allowed him to meet this expectation.

The Islamic requirement (*kewajiban*) that husbands provide for their families was often repeated by men I spoke to throughout the course of my fieldwork in the 1990s. This was undoubtedly related to "official" discourse on Islam, family, and gender roles found in newspapers, on television, and in sermons at the mosque, among other places (cf. Ong 1995; Peletz 1995, 1996; Stivens 1998). At a practical level, middle-class men and families were able to fulfill these ideals more easily than those in the working class (Ong 1995), even though, as in Nizam's case, material sacrifices (i.e., the loss of his wife's salary) were necessary to conform to this Islamic ideal.

In 1998, Idris said he was too young to have any plans or even thoughts of marriage, though he expected to marry some day. For Idris, like most other young men, thoughts of marriage would revolve not only around meeting the right mate but also around saving enough money to get married. Because Idris did not expect to get married anytime soon, he was more concerned with saving money for a motorcycle. Both concerns, for motorcycles and mates, drive the desires of many young Malay men to make money. When the time came, Idris expected that he would have to raise a substantial sum of money to pay for a wedding (cf. Jones 1994: 316–320). In the late 20th century, this financial burden shifted from parents to sons, especially among rural to urban migrants and among poorer and working-class families (Thompson 2000).

Many young men in positions similar to Idris, but slightly older, relate stories of extended engagements due to a lack of funds necessary to host a wedding or of "borrowing" money from their intended bride to pay her *hantaran*. Similar subterfuge often continues after marriage, to validate the husband's responsibility in providing for the family, with many couples dividing their expenditures in such a way that the husband's income pays for "necessities" and the wife's for "extras." This conflict between a feminization of working-class jobs and expectation that working-class men act as providers for their families is further exacerbated

in contemporary discourses on Malay ethnicity that are repositioning the idealized (male) Malay as an entrepreneur rather than a peasant. Shifts in the political economy and ideology of all-important ethnic categories over the past half-century make demands on the Malay population, in particular Malay men, under the rubric of development, or *pembangunan*.

The making and unmaking of the Malay-peasant complex

The institutions of government in Malaysia require transparent knowledge of ethnic subjects. By law, all citizens of Malaysia must carry an identity card inscribed with their ethnicity. The constitution defines one who is Muslim, speaks Malay, and follows Malay custom as belonging to the ethnic category Malay. Who counts and does not count as Malay has been central to the postcolonial economic programs of Malaysia.²⁶ In practical terms, the political power of the Malay community, through the UMNO-led government, has been parlayed into an extensive array of laws beneficial to Malays, such as: quotas for university admissions, scholarships overseas, positions in the civil service, business loans, and licenses, to name only a few.²⁷ As I have indicated, Idris and Nizam have both been beneficiaries of these affirmative action programs. Within this legal framework of ethnicity, every citizen of Malaysia knows to which ethnic group he or she belongs. In this sense, Idris and Nizam are unquestionably Malay.²⁸ The more complex issue is what it means to be Malay. A historically constructed field of Malay identity with roots in the British colonial period complements the legal, constitutional framework of Malayness in contemporary Malaysia. Moreover, class, religion, place, and gender affect how individuals such as Idris and Nizam experience and think about their Malay identity.

The assemblage of Malay identity during the colonial period neither invented Malayness out of whole cloth nor drew a stable, traditional Malay identity into colonial modernity. The history of Malay identity demonstrates a series of associations and dissociations in the constitution of the meaning of "Malay." The structures of feeling of Malay identity underwent historical transformations before as well as after British rule on the peninsula (Andaya 2001; Barnard 2001; Reid 2001). Prior to British intervention, a strong association had developed between the term *Malay* (or *Melayu*), being Muslim, and living under the rule of a sultan, or *kerajaan* (Andaya and Andaya 1982; Milner 1982; Shamsul 1997a; but see also Collins 2001). But the colonial period was pivotal in producing Malaysia's ethnic mosaic of "Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Others" (Anderson 1991; Hirschman 1986, 1987; Shamsul 1997a). The designation "Malay" developed in relationship and contrast to these other categories. Through various modes of governmentality (Miller and Rose 1990), especially the census (Hirschman 1985, 1986),

the British as well as their interlocutors enumerated, differentiated, and consolidated a variety of indigenous and migrant identities under the rubric of "race" and subsequently disseminated and instilled a racialized knowledge of ethnicity in the people living in the peninsula through schools, newspapers, and other means (Harper 1999; Loh Fook Seng 1975; Milner 1995; Roff 1994; Shamsul 2001; Stevenson 1975). Although "the British" took it as their project and obligation to establish an order of ethnicity in the colonies, "Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Others" were not simply passive subjects of colonial rule.

The British model of ethnicity or race, with each group in its own place, did not translate itself transparently into the consciousness of colonial subjects. Malays were vitally involved in a process of conceptualizing and reworking new forms of identity and community (Amoroso 1998; Ariffin 1993; Harper 1999; Milner 1995; Roff 1994; Shamsul 1998), a process that took place at the intersection of ideology and political economy. In terms of the latter, from the early colonial period in Southeast Asia, trade and administrative policies of the European powers had undermined a long-standing indigenous trading class (Alatas 1977:184–201). Between the sharp division separating *raja* (the Malay aristocracy) and *rakya'at* (commoners), which the British reinforced legally and conceptually, a highly attenuated Malay "middle class" continually reinvented itself. In the late colonial period, Malay teachers and others working within the British civil service increasingly occupied this middle ground.

This nascent Malay middle class formed the vanguard of early Malay nationalism (Milner 1995; Roff 1994). Its members reconceptualized Malay identity through their access to the intellectual means of production and particular historically situated anxieties. The editors of and contributors to early-20th-century Malay-language newspapers established the groundwork and vocabulary of nationalist discourse. Focusing on the newspaper *Utusan Melayu*, which first appeared in 1907, and its chief editor Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, Anthony Milner's (1995) close reading of the Malay press reconstructs the significant discursive position given to the concept of "*bangsa*" in the early 20th century (see also Milner 1998). Although the term *bangsa* (which could be translated as "community," or, in light of its contemporary usage, as "ethnicity" or "race") was not new in the 20th century, writers such as Eunos and those who followed him made the fate of the *bangsa Melayu*, or Malay race, a central concern of their journalism. Through his writings, Eunos cultivated affective bonds to the *bangsa Melayu* and a love of the "Malay race" (Milner 1995:98–99) and an anxiety over the fate of the *bangsa Melayu* animated his writing. In light of rapid immigration to the peninsula, especially by Chinese, Eunos and others feared the disappearance of the *bangsa Melayu* (Milner 1995:98–99; see also Shamsul 1998).

The formulation of "*bangsa*" as ethnicity or race was at once empowering and troubling. It laid the foundation for

the Malay nationalist movement that secured a favorable position for Malays in the transition from colonialism to independence (Amoroso 1998; Ariffin 1993; Shamsul 1998). At the same time, it reinforced an association between Malay and peasant. Even though it did not reflect their own socioeconomic position, those in the Malay middle class could see their fate as tied to that of the Malay peasantry through the concept of *bangsa*. Moreover, well into the century, the great majority of Malays remained peasants, on the margins of the colonial capitalist economy. The stream of Malay rural to urban migrants during the second half of the 20th century, including Idris and Nizam, emerged out of this socioeconomic background.

By independence in 1957, two dimensions of Malay ethnic identity were firmly entrenched in the social fabric of the new nation. Malays had learned to think of themselves within the domestic sphere as a group, a *bangsa*, in relationship to other *bangsa*, especially Chinese and Indians. Closely associated to this relational concept of *bangsa*, Malays felt themselves to be in competition and economically disadvantaged vis-à-vis other groups, especially the Chinese. Malays held a marginal numerical superiority, giving them political clout in postcolonial democratic elections. As a result, UMNO led the government from independence through the 1990s, in coalition with much weaker partners, the Barisan Nasional (National Front). Under UMNO, development, or *pembangunan*, evolved as a major political and cultural paradigm from the 1950s on. In turn, the evolution of *pembangunan* laid the foundation for the dissociation of Malay ethnic and class identities in the late 20th century.

Under the NEP, *pembangunan* became ever more entrenched in Malay discourse and the fate and legitimacy of UMNO and the Barisan Nasional became more closely tied to the government's ability to bring development to Malaysia, particularly to the Malay population. By its own logic, the NEP may be judged a success (Faaland et al. 1990:129–151; Gomez and Jomo 1997; Government of Malaysia 1991; Pramanik 1994). Although not without its critics (see, for example, Gomez and Jomo 1997; Jomo 1986; Khoo 1995; Mehmet 1989), the NEP era was one that saw rapid industrialization, urbanization, and rural infrastructural development.²⁹ At the same time, the NEP, to the degree that it succeeded in its goal of reducing association of ethnicity with economic function, created greater economic, or class, divisions among Malays as a whole. It also fostered the urban-bound migration and changed gender relations that included the trends discussed above, that is, a feminization of the industrial workforce and a shift in familial economic responsibilities from parents to adult children (specifically to *abang*).

Both Idris and Nizam came of age under the policies and political economy of the NEP. Emphasis on Malay participation in the industrial economy played a direct role in their opportunities. In Nizam's case, negotiations between

the interests of Japanese capital in locating highly skilled employees at relatively low labor costs and of the Malaysian state in securing industrial employment for its citizens created an opportunity for him to leverage his university credentials toward gaining a management-level position in a multinational corporation. Idris benefited from this intersection of global capital and national interest as well. The Proton national car project, backed by Japanese capital, created a job for him. And when economic recession hit, domestic politics and his claim to Malay identity ensured that he did not lose it.

By the 1990s a pervasive ideology of development held sway in Malaysia, so much so that it had become an integral part of the cultural landscape of the country. The explicit political and economic agenda of the government under the rubric of *pembangunan* had taken hold in a general way throughout much of everyday life. Although primarily economic, *pembangunan* came to be the medium of discourse for personal, social, and religious (Islamic) development as well. From the explicit discourses of political parties and mass media to personal conversations, expectations of improvement of living conditions over time, as well as of personal futures, became part and parcel of progressive visions of the future. The pervasiveness of *pembangunan* and its progressive visions united Malays (and Malaysians generally) by providing a basis for national identity. But at the same time that *pembangunan* united Malays, the discourse differentiated and divided them as well. The most persistent and common line discursively dividing Malays within a rubric of *pembangunan* was that between "New," urban Malays and the *orang kampung*, their rural counterparts.

Melayu baru, orang kampung, and the geography of Malay identity

On November 8, 1991, in a keynote speech at the United Malay National Organization Annual Meeting, Prime Minister Mahathir introduced his vision of the "New Malay" (or *Melayu Baru*).³⁰ Mahathir declared that it would be necessary to engender a new outlook and attitude among members of the country's largest ethnic group, embodied in the figure of the New Malay, as a cornerstone of his broader "Vision 2020." This New Malay would encompass a "new Malay ethnic group" (*bangsa Melayu baru*), one made up of individuals who had the capacity to face the challenges of the coming century and a culture (*budaya*) appropriate for the modern times. The New Malay individual, according to Mahathir, would be one who could compete in the marketplace without governmental help, be educated, knowledgeable, sophisticated, reliable, disciplined, trustworthy, and skilled. The imperative to foster this New Malay went to the very survival of Malays into the next century. Without such an initiative, Mahathir warned, Malays would lose their place in competition with other ethnic groups. Moreover, Mahathir

portrayed the struggle to foster this New Malay as a religious struggle (a *jihād*) in defense of Islam. Without the transformation of old Malays into new ones, Islam would continue to be seen as a religion associated with backwardness and poverty.

In many ways, Mahathir's pronouncement on the New Malay was in and of itself nothing new (cf. Harper 1996:242; Khoo 1995; Rustam 1993). Over a decade before he became prime minister, Mahathir became quite well known for his controversial treatise *The Malay Dilemma* (1970), an extended argument couched in a social Darwinist rhetoric that at once condemned Malays for their backwardness and incited them to struggle to better themselves. At the time, Mahathir and other Malay elites suggested that a "mental revolution" was required among Malays to bring them into the modern world and capitalist economy.³¹ The figure of the New Malay is very much in keeping with Mahathir's analysis of Malayness and of the backwardness of Malays, begun over two decades earlier, which in turn resonates with the writings of Eunos and other Malay journalists at the turn of the century.³² But what was new about the New Malay was the ascendance of a vision of Malays as leading capitalists and industrialists at a moment when such a vision appeared an actual possibility, though obviously only for some Malays. Moreover, in contrast to ideologues such as Eunos, whose writings engendered affective bonds between Malay elites and a Malay peasantry, the New Malay moved in the opposite direction, cutting Malay elites loose from their "backward" brethren.³³

Although the rhetoric of the New Malay sought to secure an advantageous position for Malays both nationally and globally, it simultaneously registered an increasing class polarization within the Malay population. The New Malay formed a male, urban, entrepreneurial ideal (cf. Stivens 1998:107), which not only marginalizes women but also alienates increasingly disenfranchised Malay rural and working-class men (cf. Khoo 1995:336–338; Shamsul 1997a: 258). The most ubiquitous signifiers of class in the discourse of the New Malay do not present themselves as such. Instead, they appear in the spatial dimension of the New Malay, constructed as it is across an urban–rural divide, with an incitement to "Malay urbanization." A contrast with the rural, backward *orang kampung* crystallized through the development of the concept of the urban, forward-looking New Malay. Similarly, although the rhetoric of the New Malay generally does not address gender explicitly, it strongly implies the masculinity of the New Malay subject.

Speeches, seminars, editorials, and various other authoritative modes of discourse expounded on the New Malay ad nauseam after Mahathir introduced the idea. The purveyors of the concept were mainly middle-class, wealthy, politically interested elites. Two years after Mahathir first articulated the concept, a book entitled *Melayu Baru* [The New Malay], by Muhammad Haji Muhd Taib, a major figure in

UMNO politics, developed the concept at length.³⁴ *Melayu Baru* was only one of many writings on the topic of the New Malay, though among these, it was the most prominent.³⁵

The book opens by posing the question "What is Wrong with the Old Malay?" (*Apa Salah Melayu Lama?*). The answer, according to the author, is that Malays are confused about their identity, faith, and direction (Muhammad 1993:4–16). Malays are weighed down by feudalism and tradition, the continuation of animist and Hindu practices, and a tendency to create scapegoats and heroes, all contributing, the author argues, to a feeling of inadequacy among them (Muhammad 1993:7–10). The author praises the potential for greatness among Malays but also notes a lack of motivation to change (Muhammad 1993:13–14). Motivation can be achieved, according to the argument in *Melayu Baru*, through privatization and reducing Malay dependence on the public, government sector (Muhammad 1993:14–15). Much of the rest of the book is a prescription on how this is to be accomplished.

Although the book ranges over issues of international standing, science, education, and Islam, a key component of *Melayu Baru* is the spatial dimension implicit in transformation from Old to New Malay. The spatial dimension of the New Malay reiterates a structure of feeling surrounding the urban and the rural found in many other arenas of Malay discourse from school books to television programs (Thompson 2000). This spatial dimension is not a simple geography but a whole dichotomous universe of attitudes, characteristics, and practices mapped onto a rural–urban divide. The first (and most extensive) prescriptive chapter of *Melayu Baru* thus calls for the urbanization of Malays (*membandarkan Melayu*).³⁶ Malay urbanization entails both a physical and a nonphysical transformation. The author argues that the nonphysical transformation is of greater importance but is often ignored (Muhammad 1993:47). The *kampung* is not just a physical location for Malays but also has a conceptual character. The word *kampung*, according to the author of *Melayu Baru*, brings to mind an image of houses scattered over a wide area and a few coffee shops (for wasting time) (Muhammad 1993:47). But, he continues, it also implies a particular worldview: a simple, peaceful, relaxed life, motivation to make only enough to live on, and a lack of aspirations (Muhammad 1993:48). Not all *kampung* values are negative, but Malays in the *kampung* are still caught up in negative traditions.

In contrast to the *kampung*, as set forth in *Melayu Baru*, the city has a complete infrastructure, a government, and a diverse economy. The competition between various sectors in the economy brings those involved to understand the concept of "survival," and competition forces people to improve (Muhammad 1993:50). The author believes that this competition instills good values even in those who do not succeed in the urban economy and that, for their own good, Malays in general need to be torn from their ties to *kampung*

life and tradition (Muhammad 1993:54). But the main goal of this process of urbanization and industrialization is to provide an opportunity for a class of Malay industrialists, entrepreneurs, and merchants to emerge (Muhammad 1993:72).

Although Malay women have long been involved in markets and entrepreneurship, the sort of entrepreneur envisioned under the rubric of the New Malay is implicitly male. Rather than a small-scale entrepreneur, the New Malay primarily valorizes upwardly mobile professionals and large-scale industrialists who can compete on a global scale (Muhammad 1993:72). Women are not explicitly excluded from these activities, but a separate and competing sphere of activity—that of housewife—is encouraged for them (Stivens 1998). At the same time, the ideal of male (and husband) as provider works in tandem with the image of the modern Malay housewife to shape asymmetrical roles for both women and men. At a practical level, this has operated to encourage status seeking among men in *kampung* (Thompson 2000) and undermines the participation of women in entrepreneurial activities among the Malay middle class and elites (Sloane 1999).

This formulation of the New Malay is solidly entrenched in what Shamsul has called the "authority defined" social reality of Malaysia, "one which is authoritatively defined by people who are part of the dominant power structure" (1996b:478–479; see also Peletz 1995, 1996). This "official" discourse of the New Malay has two separate but interrelated objectives. It proposes, on the one hand, to produce successful Malays and, on the other hand, it provides an ideological basis for eliminating or reducing ethnically based social programs. Oh Myung-Seok has suggested that the New Malay never really captured the popular imagination and is seen by most Malays as "just 'rhetoric' and 'politic' without real meaning" (1998:97–98; see also Shamsul 1999:92). This point of view accurately reflects a common conscious response to questions of the importance of *Melayu Baru* put to many Malays. At the same time, *Melayu Baru*, as rhetorical and political as it may be, signaled a realignment of the grounds of Malayness in the 1990s, one to which migrant male subjects such as Nizam and Idris were central.

New Malay, old Malay, just Malay?

The progressive visions of *pembangunan* and zealous projections of a New Malay subjectivity do not transparently translate onto the experiences and stories of rural to urban migrant Malay men who practically and figuratively cross and connect the urban and rural spaces of Malaysia. Discordant notes and existential anxieties of the "New Malay" discourse appear in the ways in which non-elite Malays narrate their experiences and comment on the lexicon of *pembangunan* and *Melayu Baru*. In the 1990s, the hyphen binding

Malay-peasant—the affiliation of Melayu and orang kampung—still resonated in the national consciousness. At the same time, the discourses of pembangunan and Melayu Baru generated desires and anxieties among those who do not feel that the New Malay reflects their own experience or socioeconomic position. Asked to discuss the New Malay, both Idris and Nizam worked to reconcile the New Malay ideal with other fields of identity.

When I asked Idris about Melayu Baru in 1998, his initial response was somewhat evasive. “I don’t really know what that is all about,” he told me. As I continued to draw him out about this topic, he said that he did not really consider himself a New Malay but that he is, rather, an “Old Malay” or “Just Malay.” His response registered a certain unease with the discourse. Idris had undergone the process of urbanization meant to transform Old Malays into New ones. He was involved in the industrial economy and had tried since high school to make a success of his life. As he told me, years earlier he had felt a responsibility, as the oldest of seven brothers and sisters, to study hard and get a good job to set a good example for them. A good job for Idris had always meant a job in the industrial sector or in the civil service. He had never considered staying in the kampung where he grew up. And in 1998, he was working hard at two jobs. But Idris felt that his kampung background and, perhaps even more so, his class position—as a worker rather than manager or owner—excluded him from the circle of New Malays (cf. Khoo 1995:336–337; Shamsul 1997a:258–259). By contrast, then, he placed himself in the camp of Old Malays. Recognizing the negative connotations attached to Old Malays, he shifted terms to “*Just Malay*” and reiterated that he does not really care (*tak ambiltahu*) about all that.

This did not foreclose our discussion, though, and Idris continued, saying that he understands Melayu Baru as a call for Malays to control the national economy in the way that they currently control national politics. He (literally) recited a textbook history of Japanese, Chinese (communist), and British control of Malaysia, when times were difficult or dangerous for Malays. After Tengku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia’s first prime minister, asked for independence from Queen Elizabeth, Malays regained control of the government. And now, under Mahathir, the New Malays are going to gain control of the economy. As much as Idris’s narrative conforms to histories gleaned from schoolbooks and other popular discourse, his story subverts the official ideology of the New Malay. In his version, the New Malay does not denote a new group that will compete with the Chinese and others without specific help from the government. Instead, Idris discursively contains the New Malay by folding it back into the logic of the ethnically specific economic policies that had held sway since the 1970s. The New Malay of Mahathir’s vision calls for individuals who would achieve success without government help.³⁷ But Idris relates, albeit un-

easily, to the New Malay as another version of ethnically based social and economic politics.

Nizam takes a different view of the New Malay, framing it in a political and Islamic discourse, picking up on and emphasizing the role of a religious pembangunan to accompany or even supercede economic development. On the issue of Melayu Baru and Mahathir’s Vision 2020, he argues that PAS’s position is not very different from that of the government. PAS, too, he says, is interested in a program of progress and development but one that is more Islamically oriented. The problem with Melayu Baru and Vision 2020, in Nizam’s eyes, is that people know them only as slogans. The idea behind Melayu Baru is that Malays need to turn from tapping rubber in the kampung toward involvement in corporations, factories, and business. PAS, he insists, is not against any of these things. But the real idea of the New Malay is that Malays need to change their mentality. Nizam thinks that many, especially those in rural areas and working in factories, do not understand this. All they see or understand is material change. They see new clothes and new houses and think those things are the essence of the New Malay. And even more problematic in Nizam’s eyes, these people see the social changes in towns—as manifested in discos and free sex—and think that they constitute the desirable New Malay milieu. Nevertheless, Nizam supports the New Malay ideology, if undertaken with an Islamic emphasis.

Both Idris and Nizam face the New Malay dilemma (cf. Shamsul 1997a:258) of negotiating a shifting sense of ethnic identity, dynamically related to the political economy as well as structures of feeling around masculinity, migrancy, Islam, and other fields of identity. The discursive construction of the New Malay as a male individual implicitly marginalizes Malay women, be they entrepreneurs, factory workers, or housewives, as did earlier representations of the Malay peasant as male (Stivens 1998:92–93, 2000:19). For Idris and Nizam, the new representations make demands on them as men. A dynamic similar to that described in Peletz’s analysis of discourses on masculinity in Negeri Sembilan can be seen at work in the context of the New Malay. The official discourses of New Malay masculinity set standards for male behavior that imply the attainment of education, status, and wealth, which most Malay men cannot meet in practice (cf. Peletz 1995, 1996). Underlying this discourse is a theory of political economy that seeks to rearrange the flow of government largess under the rubric of privatization (Gomez and Jomo 1997). Likewise, the New Malay associates a reworked ethnic identity with a reconciliation of Islamic religion and material concerns (with the emphasis on the latter). Finally, it presents a new geography of ethnicity, relocating the New Malay in the urban sphere.

Both Nizam and Idris draw on alternative strands of contemporary Malay discourse to reframe the “official” version of the New Malay and reconcile it with the crosscutting

fields of religious and class identities in which they find themselves. Nizam, who can reasonably aspire to the economic position espoused in the rhetoric of the New Malay, easily identifies with it; even though his political identity, involved as he is with the Islamic party in opposition to the ruling coalition, mitigates against the possibility of an overly materialist or secular interpretation of New Malayness. His attitude toward the New Malay keeps intact the notion of a mental revolution for backward and gullible Malays from the countryside and the urban working class and reinforces the superiority of highly educated, business-oriented, and economically successful Malays.

Idris is less at ease with New Malayness. Though not as consciously involved in national politics as Nizam, Idris nominally aligns himself with the UMNO government. Although he is not very interested in politics, while still in Sungai Siputeh in 1995, he participated in the festive atmosphere of the general election campaign that year, along with many other village youths, putting up posters and stringing banners along the roadside. He also draws clear connections between the ruling party, his vocational education, and his employment in a high-profile automobile manufacturing enterprise closely tied to the government's industrialization program. Idris can point to the benefits of Malay political power in his own experiences. He does not identify with the image of corporate industrialist or middle-class cosmopolitan that distinguishes the New Malay. But his own interpretation of the New Malay is explicitly materialist (in contrast to Nizam) and seeks to reincorporate the New Malay into a framework of ethnic affiliation in which (Just) Malays extend their dominance in politics into the realm of the economy.

Idris's and Nizam's experience and reactions to the New Malay demonstrate the crosscutting fields of identity that articulate with contemporary Malayness. The contested terrain of Malay identity is experienced in relationship to other contested terrains of class, gender, religion, and migrancy, each in turn historically constructed in relationship to the others as well as to the prevailing political economy and other social forces.³⁸ The Malay-peasant complex of the early 20th century, although androcentric and promoted for different reasons by a British colonial bureaucracy and Malay intelligentsia, corresponded to the lived experience of a great majority of Malays (or, at least, Malay men). The New Malay, by contrast, valorizes a Malay elite, at the expense of working-class Malays like Idris. At the same time, among an increasingly independent Malay middle class, some, such as Nizam, attach more importance to their Islamic identity than to Malay ethnicity.

Conclusion

Malay male migrants such as Idris and Nizam must work out what Malayness as well as masculinity and place-based

identities mean to them as they stand on shifting social sands. Modern or postmodern "dissociation" of identities has recently been a popular theme of cultural analysis (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Kipp 1996). The historical trajectory of Malay identity in the 20th century demonstrates that the process is not simply one of dissociation but, rather, an ongoing process of *both* association and dissociation within intersecting fields of identity and sociocultural and political-economic forces. These fields of identity—Malayness, masculinity, migrancy, and others—are, following Williams (1977), *qualities* of social experience and relationship with historically emergent and shifting structures. The power of identities to constitute and condition the experiences of subjects derives (in part, at least) from mutually reinforcing associations between different fields—for example, the rural male Malay peasant of the early 20th century or the urban male New Malay entrepreneur of the late 20th century. At the same time, the shift from Old Malay to New, the gendered expectations of masculinity under conditions of industrial development, and the changing relationship of migrants to urban and rural places demonstrate that such associated structures of identity, which may seem solidly grounded and mutually reinforcing in one era, become dissociated over time (cf. Kipp 1996). Dissociation, in my view, however, does not signal an end to social and cultural structure or a moment in which "anything goes." Rather, it is a moment in which the prevailing social forces and subjects acting within the constraints of those forces rework the landscape of identity, doing so at points of structural dissociation and indeterminate articulation, such as the points at which Malayness, masculinity, migrancy, and class intersect in Malaysia—what Laclau calls the "uneven edges" of the social structure (1990:61).

These interactions of multiple fields of identity suggest that what Rehman Rashid called the "private cocoon of self, into which might be admitted only those of (one's) own kind" is in fact complex and multifaceted. The question posed to him on his Malaysian journey, "What ARE you?" (asked not only by Malaysians but also by anthropologists around the world), solicits answers that too often and too easily devolve into a recapitulation of stereotypes that conceal this complexity. Easy compartmentalization of identities into categories such as ethnicity, class, gender, religion, or geography, without examining the points of articulation between them, both feeds such stereotyping and diffuses the complexity and contradictions of lived experience. On the other hand, an uncritical theoretical indulgence in the postmodern proliferation of cultural forms and alternative identities that focuses on "surface orientations" may miss the (metaphorically) deeper strata in the "geology" of experience—the histories, government policies, international flows of capital, religious ideologies, and multiple subjectivities that shape lives. Recognizing this complexity requires

that we turn the question from "What are you?" to "What are the social forces and fields of identity that shape us?"

Shifts in fields of identity operate at multiple levels. In this article, I have focused on the intersection of individual experience with larger social and historical trends to move toward an understanding of the diversity of human experience that is not fixed at the level of identity politics—based, for example, on ethnicity, gender, place, or class—which generalizes conflicting experiences between groups. Instead, I have shown here diversity as it is experienced through the articulation of multiple fields of identity in the subjective experience of individuals. This is not a matter merely of the idiosyncrasies of individual life histories (though those too can surely have important consequences for the individuals involved). The cases of Nizam and Idris demonstrate that historically and socially constituted fields of identity, such as those of Malayness, masculinity, migrancy, and others, are complex and sometimes contradictory in and of themselves. They articulate with one another in shaping the constraints and choices that individual subjects negotiate over a lifetime.

In Malaysia, the early 1990s were a prime moment to shift away from the NEP and toward a new organizing principle for government policy, both because of the social and economic changes that had taken place under the NEP and because in 1990 the plan itself expired officially (if not necessarily in practice). Although the New Malay laid the ideological groundwork for a shift in government policy—one that would shift away from the NEP's sort of affirmative action for Malays and toward a more thorough sort of neoliberalism—the actual transformation of the rhetoric into policy is a slower and uncertain process. The possibility of change was predicated on the attenuation of Malayness as a form of (political) identity, related to its dissociation from "peasant," greater emphasis on Muslim identity by some (such as Nizam) in the middle class (cf. Nagata 1984), and the dismissal of rural and working-class Malays in the rhetoric of the New Malay. This reorientation of Malayness signals an important moment for reworking the topography of Malaysian identity politics—not only of ethnic and ethnic-cum-religious identity but also in fields of gender, geography, and class—as subjects such as Nizam and Idris negotiate these contested fields of identity.

Notes

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1. *Bumiputera*, or "sons of the soil," is an ethnic classification that includes non-Malay (non-Muslim) groups considered to be "native" (in opposition to the large Chinese and Indian groups in Malaysia). On the relationship between "Malay" and "bumiputera," see Shamsul 1996b. This article addresses the experience of Malay Muslims in peninsular Malaysia. On the peninsula, non-Malay bumiputera (or *orang asli*) are marginalized both economically and in the ethnic imaginary of the nation (Ong 1999:221; the situation in the east Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah is quite different and would require a wholly separate treatment, but those states too are marginal to the national discourse dominated by the peninsula).

The ethnicity percentages cited in the text are the most recent figures from the prime minister's office. Malays as a subset of bumiputera make up 47 percent of the total population. The figures for Chinese and Indians as percentages of the population on the peninsula (with which I am primarily dealing in this article) are somewhat higher than for Malaysia as a whole. A dominant theme since independence has been the relative balance between Malays and bumiputeras, on the one hand, and the "immigrant" population of Chinese and Indians, on the other. Higher birthrates among Malays and bumiputeras have led to a gradual increase in their ratio in the population during the past half-century.

2. I am building here in part on Rita Kipp's (1996) work and her evocative phrase "dissociated identities" as well as on the work of G. Carter Bentley (1987) and Dorinne Kondo (1990) in thinking about the relationship of subjects to fields of social and cultural identity.

3. In anthropology, geographic or place-based identities are often taken as a subset or aspect of ethnicity (from Geertz 1973 to Appadurai 1996). Only recently have anthropologists begun to examine place-based identities per se (e.g., Feld and Basso 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Kahn 2000). Even our vocabulary for discussing this aspect of human experience seems underdeveloped. Thus I use the somewhat awkward phrase *place-based or geographic identities* to signify the relationship between identity and place.

4. See, for example, Appadurai 1996:12, which highlights the shift in emphasis from n. *culture* to adj. *cultural*.

5. There is a deep argument between postmodernists (such as Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Jameson), who seek to erase the "individual" of the Enlightenment as a central agent in social and cultural dynamics, and "high modernists" (the term used by Giddens), who seek to rehabilitate individual agency within a framework of postmodernist discourse. Following Laclau and others, I seek to reconcile what admittedly may be an irresolvable philosophical dispute through a dynamic dialectical relationship between the subjects and objective structures.

6. Foucault's metaphorical use of "archaeology," and the subsequent method he uses for uncovering historical strata of meaning, constitute a useful guide as well (Foucault 1965, 1970, 1977, 1978). My attention here, however, is focused more closely on the present and only allows for a cursory "archaeology" or "excavation" (to return to geology) of systems of meaning from a historical perspective (see also note 38).

7. Like Appadurai (1996:46), I would suggest that any theory of cause and effect with regard to the relationship of subjectivity and structure should look to the fractal logic of Chaos theory (Gleick 1988; Kellert 1993). From what I see, however, anthropologists are a very long way from any practical application of the mathematics of Chaos theory to social experience. In addition, the phenomena that Chaos theory helps to explain, such as genetics and weather patterns, although they seem to be impossibly "complex" from the

standpoint of Euclidean geometry, are probably far simpler than human social interaction. Thus, attempts at understanding subjective agency with respect to social change remains partial and anecdotal at best. But that is no reason to avoid trying!

8. Williams, with his detailed attention to language, notes that finding an appropriate term for this sense of structure is difficult and even suggests *structures of experience* as a possible alternative (1977:132). The term *structures of feeling* attempts to capture the sense of something both profound yet at the same time intangible.

9. I use *class* to mean Idris's and Nizam's relationship to the means of production and consumption. From the complementary subjective point of view, class can be seen as a subject's access to and adoption of various income or livelihood-generating strategies within a particular political economy.

10. In this article, I consider the NEP era to include 1971–2000. Others refer to 1991 onward as the post-NEP era (e.g., Gomez and Jomo 1997). In large part, this is more a difference in nomenclature than substance from my periodization. I consider the 1990s to be "late" rather than "post" NEP because of the continuing dominance of the NEP framework in government policy, if not rhetoric. Although the NEP officially ended in 1990 and was replaced by the New Development Policy (NDP) (Government of Malaysia 1991), in practical terms the NDP continued in much the same direction as the NEP.

11. I am referring to work being done on the vast array of experience that does not fall neatly into normalized heterosexuality (e.g., Anderson 1996; Jackson 1997; Oetomo 1996; Yik 1998).

12. If only peninsular Malaysia is considered, it grew from 37.2 percent urban in 1980 to 54.3 percent urban in 1991 (Leete 1996:2). There are some problems with direct comparison of these figures because of changes in the procedures used to count "urban" areas (Brookfield 1994:278; Cho 1990:147–148; Leete 1996:27; Yeoh and Hirschman 1980:3–5). The overall transformation, however, from a predominantly rural country to one that is predominantly urban, is not in doubt.

13. MARA was an outgrowth of the Rural Industrial Development Authority (RIDA), begun in 1953 by the British under political pressure from Malay interests (Shamsul 1997a:246–247).

14. When Idris started, he regularly worked two eight-hour shifts, but by mid-1998, the factory was operating with only one shift per day. Working overtime ("O.T."), Idris had been able to make over RM1,000 per month. Without O.T., he makes just over RM500 per month. In the mid-1990s, the exchange rate hovered around \$1.00 = RM2.50; during the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98, that rate fell and was eventually fixed at \$1.00 = RM3.80.

15. Yeoh Seng-Guan 2001 provides an insightful examination of the urban social and cultural juxtapositions between kampung squatter settlements and *taman* housing estates.

16. During the NEP era, the government provided overseas scholarships to tens if not hundreds of thousands of Malay students. Nizam also had an opportunity to study overseas but chose to remain in Malaysia.

17. In his new position, Nizam earned RM 1,800 per month. After three years, he was earning over RM3,000 (plus a yearly bonus that equaled three or four months' pay) and a transportation allowance of RM370 per month plus mileage.

18. Much of the discussion in the summer of 1998 revolved around the circulation of a book outlining the "50 reasons why Anwar cannot become Prime Minister," which included charges that would later play a central role in the dramatic downfall of then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim (Funston 1999; Khoo 2000).

19. To compensate, Nizam encouraged and paid for his parents to come visit more frequently in the Klang Valley.

20. Here I am only discussing heterosexuality (for discussions of nonheterosexual Malay male experience, see Peletz 1996; Thompson 2002; Yik 1998).

21. These gendered imperatives to migrate to gain wealth and status have historical and cultural antecedents in the concept of *merantau* (to travel out into the world) among Malays (cf. Kahn 1980; Kato 1982; Tugby 1977) and elsewhere in Southeast Asia (cf. Margold 1995).

22. *Abang* is used in Malay language as a form of address by any younger sibling to an older brother, but the eldest brother (or *sulung*) is always addressed as abang among siblings. Elder siblings are expected to provide for their younger siblings, seen most overtly when older siblings give money to younger siblings at holidays and on other occasions. Whereas both older brothers and sisters (*kakak*) have such an obligation to younger siblings (*adik*), in marriage, a husband assumes the role of abang and thus provider (ideally, if not always practically) to his wife and, later, children.

23. Janet Carsten (1997:92–94) notes that in her fieldwork encounters and interviews, although her Malay interlocutors presented *abang* as the appropriate form of address by wives toward their husbands, the term was generally avoided in practice. Carsten argues that the term is heavily loaded both with a sense of status hierarchy and with intimacy, and that individuals who wish to elude those implications may avoid it and other kinship terms. Although agreeing with Carsten's analysis, I would note that in my own fieldwork experience, I came across numerous instances in which women used *abang* as a form of address to male partners. The use of the term, in practice, should be seen as highly situational (as opposed to generally avoided). Carsten notes that a young woman might send a third party (such as a small child) to call her husband from another room as a way to avoid using this term when others are present. My impression is that the term was most likely to be used, rather than avoided, in situations of intimacy or when a woman was making a request of her male partner (thus, deploying the implications of abang responsibility to adik to her advantage, though, in so doing she reinforced the hierarchies implied in the relationship as well).

24. Patricia Sloane (1999:26–40) describes similar shifts and tensions in marital relationships among upwardly mobile Malays in Kuala Lumpur.

25. In her survey of middle-class Malay families in urban Malaysia, Maila Stivens (1998:100–101) found that although many men contribute to household chores, their contributions tend to be erratic.

26. Those who fall under the broader category of bumiputera also receive special privileges under Malaysian government policies (see Shamsul 1996a and note 1).

27. Aihwa Ong has described this differential treatment of citizens as a form of "graduated sovereignty" and part of a larger scheme of governmentality for managing a world of "flexible citizenship" (1999:217–218). Her argument also extends to and reflects the emergence of the New Malay, in which a "zone of superior privileges is planned for a largely Malay entrepreneurial elite" (Ong 1999:219).

28. Ethnic identity is not always unquestioned or unproblematic in Malaysia. In particular, people who are not easily identified phenotypically as Malay, Chinese, Indian, or Other, such as Rehman Rashid, face the question posed in the introduction—"What are you?" (see also Karim 1996:14–15). The vast majority of Malays in Malaysia, however, do not generally question their ethnic identity nor do others question it. The questions that arise, in one form or another, are of the sort I am addressing here—what it means to be a Malay.

29. Of course, the NEP alone was not responsible for the successes or failures of development during this era. Global capital

flows and other factors played a major role. Within Malaysia, however, rightly or wrongly, the NEP has been seen as the centerpiece of government policy and primary agent of economic outcomes since 1971.

30. The speech was reported in *Utusan Malaysia*, Saturday, November 9, 1991, in an article entitled "Mahathir: Lahirkan Melayu Baru" (Mahathir: Give Birth to a New Malay). Details of the speech discussed here are drawn from that article. Although the speech also gestured to a *bumiputera baru* or "New Bumiputera," in it and in subsequent constructions of this "new" ethnic figure, the focus was mainly on Malay Muslims, with the non-Muslim bumiputera largely dropping out of the picture (see also note 1).

31. For an insightful, historical critique of Mahathir's thesis and other contemporary writings, see Syed Hussein Alatas 1977.

32. Harper 1996 notes other precursors to the New Malay as well.

33. Malay political power has long relied on patronage relationships between elites and non-elite, largely rural Malays. Thus, the "cutting loose" I discuss here is a very uneven and complicated process. The New Malay works more effectively at the level of ideology than practice. It also lays the groundwork, however, of a justification for reducing some of the affirmative action and other programs that Malays (including, as I point out, both Idris and Nizam) have benefited from. This course is obviously fraught with difficulty for the Malay establishment and by no means is moving toward a certain conclusion.

34. I am told that *Melayu Baru* was ghost written on behalf of Muhammad Haji Muhd Taib. The point here is not so much his authorship of the book but its position as the most popular and comprehensive articulation of the New Malay ideology and as intimately associated with the UMNO Malay establishment.

35. Other volumes that developed the concept of the New Malay include the more Islamic-oriented work of Siddiq Fadil (1992) and a collection of writings and speeches from a symposium on the New Malay (with no author identified) sponsored by Kumpulan Perangsang Selangor Berhad (1993). The latter book included a keynote address for the symposium by Muhammad Haji Muhd Taib.

36. This is a shift from government policies up to the 1980s that, at least nominally, sought to discourage rural to urban migration (Sivalingam 1993).

37. Mahathir's vision foresees a reduction in the kind of help, such as the educational and employment opportunities Idris has received. Using the powers of government to shape a favorable environment for Malay industrialists and entrepreneurs is another matter (cf. Shamsul 1997a:259).

38. In this article, I have outlined the historical contours of Malay identity and class in Malaysia. Gender, migrancy, and religious identities have likewise undergone historical transformations in Malaysia (see, e.g., on gender: Ackerman 1991; Carsten 1997; Firth 1966; Manderson 1980; Ong 1987; Peletz 1995, 1996; Stivens 1996; Strange 1981; on migrancy: Kato 1982; Norazit 1993, 1996; Thompson 2000; Tugby 1977; on religion: Nagata 1984; Ong 1995; Shamsul 1997b; Sloane 1999).

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