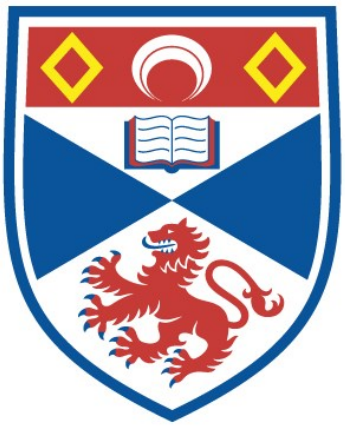
The myth of beneficial colonisation: coloniality of knowledge production in constructing Singapore's history

Muneerah Ab Razak

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ
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Abstract

This thesis argues that epistemic justice can only occur when we go beyond diversifying and dewesternising, and instead engage with knowledge production from the colonial difference. Engaging with indigenous and local narratives that are enacting 'border thinking' firstly critiques the partial stories of modernity by elucidating modernity/coloniality and secondly, offers alternatives to modernity/coloniality. I am guided by the scholarship on modernity/coloniality/decoloniality to examine knowledge production in Singapore. From the discussions of decolonial scholars on coloniality of knowledge, I arrive at a two-part decolonial framework for this thesis, in which I: (1) critique dominant, hegemonic Eurocentric narratives and expose experiences of modernity/coloniality and, (2) re-engage and reconstitute creative constructions of alternatives through the excavation of local knowledges and praxis that are responding to modernity/coloniality.

Within the first part of the framework, I excavate foundational narratives of modernity found in colonial-era history textbooks, written by the British colonial government, during the period of British colonisation in Malaya. I then examine to what extent these narratives were critiqued or reproduced by the contemporary Singapore government in the 2019 Bicentennial commemorations in Singapore. The discussion of diversifying and dewesternising arise when some of these critical efforts in the Bicentennial critiqued British colonisation without acknowledging modernity/coloniality. For the second part of the framework, I engage with *Utusan Melayu*, a Malay newspaper written in Jawi script based in Singapore, as an example of an alternative people's history which demonstrates how speaking from the colonial difference offers a fuller story of modernity/coloniality. I also explore *Utusan Melayu* as a source of border thinking and ask whether it offers alternatives to modernity/coloniality. I conclude by illustrating how epistemic injustice manifests materially in Singapore – showing how the partial stories of modernity justify the pursuit of a Eurocentric modernity. This in turn allows global colonialities to be reproduced locally.

List of Figures

Figure 1: An illustration of Mignolo's analogy (Photo drawn by my younger brother, Muhammad Nazheef) 45

Figure 2: Statue of Sir Stamford Raffles installed at the Padang in 1887 for Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee Day (Photo by National Archives of Singapore) 88

Figure 3: Statue of Sir Stamford Raffles at the north of Boat Quay bank, the heart of the economic district in Singapore (Photo by author) 89

Figure 4: This is the plaque beneath the statue of Raffles at Boat Quay. This is written in four different languages, English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin, to symbolise the different races in Singapore. The text reads “On this historic site, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles first landed in Singapore on 28th January 1819 and with genius and perception changed the destiny of Singapore from an obscure fishing village to a great seaport and modern metropolis” (Photo by author) 90

Figure 5: Overview of the Singaporean state institutions involved with the 2019 Singapore Bicentennial (Graphic by author) 95

Figure 6: The "disappearing" statue of Sir Stamford Raffles near the Singapore River (Photos by Channel News Asia) (CNA 2019a) 96

Figure 7: Four other pioneers stand with Raffles for the Bicentennial. The statues are of (left to right) Sang Nila Utama, Munshi Abdullah, Tan Tock Seng, Sir Stamford Raffles and Naraina Pillai (Photo by Channel News Asia) (CNA 2019b) 97

Figure 8: The Bicentennial Experience at Fort Canning. The picture on the left shows Act 3, depicting the graphics spinning and, on the right, Act 5, where the audience walks through the ‘rain enclosure’ to experience Singapore’s first rainy National Day Parade in 1965, with an umbrella (Photo by TODAY, Mediacorp) 98

Figure 9: A section of "An Old New World Exhibition" at National Museum of Singapore (Photo by GSM Project) 99

Figure 10: "On Paper" Exhibition at the National Library in Singapore (Photo by National Library Board) 99

Figure 11: One of the prints in the "Seekor Singa..." exhibition, depicting an imagined scene of a British official and a Malay ruler travelling on the back of an elephant into Singapore after the signing the 1824 Anglo Dutch Treaty. MHC commented that the British and the Malays were depicted as equals when ‘the terms of the treaty was anything but equal’ (Illustrated by R. Canto Woodville) .. 100

Figure 12: On the left, a picture of construction workers being transported on a truck in Singapore (Photo by Humans Not Cargo, Flickr). On the right, a picture of Filipino domestic helpers at the Church of Saint Alphonsus on Palm Sunday (Photo by Andrew Koay) 158

Figure 14: Prince William arrives in Singapore Changi Airport where a massive crowd cheers and wave Union Jack flags to welcome him (Photo by Mothership SG) 168

List of Abbreviations

AMCJA	All-Malaya Council of Joint Action
API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Movement of Conscious Youth)
AWAS	Angkatan Wanita Sedar (Movement of Conscious Women)
BATAS	Barisan Tani SeMalaya (Peasants Front)
CMIO	Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (race model in Singapore)
FMS	Federated Malay States
KMM	Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Union of Malay Youth)
KMS	Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (Union of Malay Singaporeans)
MATA	Majlis Agama Tertinggi Malaya (Supreme Religious Council of Malaya)
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union
MHC	Malay Heritage Centre
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
NDYL	New Democratic Youth League
NLB	National Library Board
NMS	National Museum of Singapore
PAP	People's Action Party
PETA	Pembela Tanah Air (Defender of the Motherland)
PKMM	Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (Malay Nationalist Party, MNP)
PKR	Partai Rakyat Singapura (Singapore People's Party)
PMFTU	Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Centre of People's Power)
SBO	Singapore Bicentennial Office
SITC	Sultan Idris Training College
SS	Straits Settlements
SFTU	Singapore Federation of Trade Unions
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
UMS	Unfederated Malay States

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..... **i**
Abstract ..... **iii**
List of Figures ..... **iv**
List of Abbreviations ..... **v**
Table of Contents ..... **vi**
Chapter 1: Introduction **1**
Research Questions 2
Background Context: Celebrating 200 years of colonisation? 3
Choice of Theoretical Framework: modernity/coloniality and decoloniality 5
Methodology and method: Two-part decolonial methodology and thematic narrative analysis as method 9
Case study selection 11
Situating the thesis in existing historiography and decolonial scholarship of Singapore 14
The history of Singapore 14
Alternative Histories 17
Malay Nationalism 18
Singapore and decolonial studies 19
A note on positionality 21
Chapter Structures 23
Chapter 2: Theoretical framework **25**
Modernity/coloniality: 'modernity' is not a neutral signifier 25
Coloniality of knowledge within the colonial matrix of power 28
School of Autonomous Knowledge 30
Eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality 31
(1) Geographical centering of Europe: Historical and Cultural Avatars 33
(2) Body-politics of knowledge: the Eurocentric 'I' 35
(3) Methodological Eurocentrism 37
Responses to Eurocentrism 38
(1) Diversifying: De-centering Europe 39
(2) Dewesterinising: Non-European modernities 40
(3) Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism 41
The case for decoloniality 43
Geo-politics of knowledge and the colonial difference 43
Delinking and border thinking 46
Post-script: some clarifications on theory 49
Weaknesses of the Latin American School of decoloniality 49

Is everything anti-colonial decolonial? 49
Postcolonial vs decolonial? 50
Concluding Reflections 52
Chapter 3: Colonial history writing 54
Vernacular Schools in British Malaya 55
History Curriculum in English Vernacular Schools 57
History Curriculum in Malay Vernacular Schools 59
Dual-track system for Malay vernacular education: The masses and the traditional elite 59
History curriculum: the 1917 Winstedt Report 62
Foundational narratives of modernity within colonial history textbooks 63
Body-politic of knowledge 64
Narrative #1: The British as the centre of Malayan history 68
Narrative #2: The British were benevolent colonisers 72
Narrative #3: The civilising mission benefitted Malaya 76
Narrative #4: Nation-state as universal conception of space 79
Conclusion: Foundations of colonial logics in history textbooks 83
Chapter 4: Current-day history making 85
The genealogy of the 2019 Bicentennial commemoration: 1919 and 1969 87
2019 Bicentennial commemorations 91
Bicentennial Exhibitions 93
1. "Only Raffles Remains": the statues 96
Museum Exhibitions 97
Partial critiques of British colonisation: diversifying and dewesternising 100
Diversifying: Adding more diverse actors without interrogating Eurocentrism 101
Dewesternising: Pursuing a 'Singaporean' modernity 103
Acknowledging modernity/coloniality 107
Narrative #2: The British were benevolent colonisers 108
Narrative #3: The civilising mission was beneficial 111
Narrative #4: Concretisation of Singapore's borders 113
Narrative #5: Singapore did not have links with the Malay world 114
Conclusion 116
Chapter 5: Knowledge from the colonial wound 119
Selection of case study: *Utusan Melayu* 120
An introduction to *Utusan Melayu*, 1939-1970 122
Accessibility of Utusan Melayu: readership and the Jawi-script 125
Historical context of 1946-1948 in Malaya 126
Considerations of Border Thinking within *Utusan Melayu* 129

(1) Were the British at the centre of Singapore's history? 129
(2) Were the British benevolent colonisers? 132
i. The struggles of the Malay masses under British colonisation 132
ii. Uncovering the intentions of British colonisation in Malaya 135
iii. British colonisation was violent 137
(3) Was the civilising mission beneficial? 140
i. Merdeka as self-rule 141
ii. Merdeka beyond class hierarchies 141
iii. Merdeka as consciousness 142
iv. Merdeka as solidarity and struggle for justice 143
(4) Are the Singapore national borders natural? 145
(5) Is Singapore part of the Malay peninsula? 148
Concluding Reflections 151
Chapter 6: Coloniality of knowledge is central to the colonial matrix of power 153
Part 1: Global designs reflected materially in Singapore 154
Commodification of labour power from the Global South 156
Exploitation of natural resources 159
Racialised civilisational narratives 160
Part 2: Local histories represented in *Utusan Melayu* 161
Countering the myth of beneficial colonisation 162
A Merdeka future vs the civilising mission 163
Indigeneity of Singaporean Malays 163
Conclusion 166
Chapter 7: Conclusion 168
Introduction 168
Summary of argument and research implications 169
Further research 171
Concluding Remarks 171
Bibliography 173

Chapter 1
Introduction

"It is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues" – Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, 20)

In 2019, the Singapore government organised a nation-wide commemoration of 200 years since the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles, the British East India Company (EIC) administrator and often labelled as the founder of Singapore (Chan and Haq 1987). With the Bicentennial commemorations, the Singaporean government sought to take a nuanced view of British colonisation, stating that colonisation had been both good and bad for Singapore. This nuanced view can be considered a more critical perspective within the official post-colonial state narrative that has been centring Raffles and British colonisation in its history.

However, my thesis argues that adding multiple voices in the writing of Singapore's history (diversifying) to critique British colonisation, while still justifying Singapore's pursuit of its own version of modernity (dewesternising), does not effectively decolonise knowledge production. Despite the nuanced approach to remembering colonisation, the main narrative of modernity remains – without the experience of British colonisation, Singapore would not have attained 'civilisation', its global position as an affluent city-state, or a peaceful multi-racial entrepôt. Simply put, the post-colonial Singaporean state is willing to critique British colonisation but still celebrates Eurocentric modernity[1]. I argue that by not critiquing Eurocentric modernity, the Singapore government inevitably risks reproducing coloniality[2], as modernity is so deeply imbricated in the structures of European colonial domination globally. This world-system[3], where modernity is constitutive of coloniality, was conceptualised by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007, 168) as 'modernity/coloniality'.

Thus, the core argument of this thesis is that epistemic justice can only occur when we go beyond diversifying and dewesternising, and instead engage with knowledge production from the margins. To move beyond modernity/coloniality, I argue that thinking from the margins of

[1] 'Eurocentric modernity', along with the 'modernity/coloniality', will be elaborated in depth in chapter 2. 'Eurocentric modernity' refers to the rise of science and rational thought culminated in the Enlightenment in Europe, emergence of bureaucracy, rapid urbanisation and economic development, secularisation, rise of nation states and the expansion of the capitalist world system. These developments are labelled Eurocentric as these standards of 'civilisation' are being imposed as universal standards through the process of colonisation, and yet, they are not being acknowledged. For example, the partial story of modernity asserts that the British imparted good governance and principles of free trade. Recognising coloniality as part of modernity, modernity/coloniality, acknowledges the darker side, such as slavery, labour exploitation and appropriation of land.

[2] Colonialism is the full or partial control of the sovereignty of one nation or people by another, mainly by means of economic and political conquest, exploitation, genocide, and/or settlement. On the other hand, Coloniality, refers to long-term patterns of power that emerge as a result of modern colonialism, capitalism, and slavery that mainly shape racial and gender hierarchies, labour, culture, intersubjective relations, knowledge production, and more, beyond physical colonial institutions. (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 143)

[3] The world-systems approach (Wallerstein 1974) asserts that individual national economies are deeply interconnected, especially via the flow of labour and resources from core countries, semi-periphery countries and the periphery countries.

modernity/coloniality ('border thinking') has the potential to not only critique modernity/coloniality but offer alternative logics or epistemologies towards more just futures. I illustrate this by examining the coloniality of knowledge production within the unique case study of Singapore.

Overall, the thesis is structured by a two-part decolonial framework in which I: (1) critique dominant, hegemonic Eurocentric narratives and expose experiences of modernity/coloniality and, (2) re-engage and reconstitute creative constructions of alternatives through the excavation of local knowledges and praxis that were responding to modernity/coloniality.

Within the first part of the framework, I excavate foundational narratives of modernity found in the first official colonial history textbooks. I then examine to what extent these narratives were critiqued or reproduced by the contemporary Singapore government in the 2019 Bicentennial commemorations. For the second part of the framework, I engage with the narratives within the Malay newspaper written in the Jawi script, *Utusan Melayu*, during the post World War II (WWII) period. I explore how speaking from the margins offers a fuller story of modernity/coloniality and ask whether it offers alternatives to modernity/coloniality.

Research Questions

With this broad overview, this thesis seeks to address two questions. I stated earlier that the Singapore government inevitably risks reproducing coloniality. The first question is how and why is coloniality insidious to Singapore, even if the negative features of colonisation are recognised? As the Singapore government alluded to within the Bicentennial, if modernity meant attaining 'good' things like education, governance and economic development that has made Singapore one of the wealthiest nations, it seems as though coloniality should remain a necessary evil. Secondly, I consider Grosfoguel's (2009, 10) question "how can we overcome Eurocentric modernity without throwing away the best of modernity as many Third World fundamentalists do"? Is there a holistic decolonial framework that ensures looking beyond diversifying and dewesternising, which addresses coloniality?

To guide me in answering these questions, I conceptualise a two-part decolonial framework, inspired by both Indigenous scholars, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Poka Laenui (2000), as well as scholars engaging with decoloniality, such as Seth (2013, 2) and Mignolo (2007). I also engage with discourse analysis of the historical narratives within Singapore. This framework seeks to attain "epistemic justice[4]" (Shilliam 2016b, 376): the first part would be identifying what narratives of modernity are hegemonic in the Singaporean state's official writing of history and what logics of coloniality they hide. The second part is to reconstitute knowledges from the 'border'. 'Border thinking'

[4] Shilliam (2016a, 255) defines epistemic justice to be "a reckoning with the racialized inequalities of knowledge cultivation that have historically accompanied the European colonial project". This will be elaborated in Chapter 2.

(Anzaldúa 1987) has the potential to not only critique modernity by exposing coloniality, but also offer alternative logics towards more just futures.

Background Context: Celebrating 200 years of colonisation?

Before going into the thesis contents, I seek to illustrate the political climate, intellectual considerations, and personal reflections that have motivated this thesis. In this introduction, I lay out my theoretical and methodological choices that will structure the thesis. I then situate the thesis within existing historiography and outline reflections on my positionality. This chapter ends with the chapter structures of the whole thesis.

There is a growing global impulse to continue the struggles of post- and anti-colonial movements that were at its height in the 60s and 70s. Ranging from calls for self-determination by Indigenous Peoples around the world including Palestinians, to student-led movements to decolonise the curriculum manifested in the 2015 South African movement, Rhodes Must Fall, there have been sustained, continuous efforts to decolonise, reevaluate the modern/colonial world we inhabit and seek alternative knowledges. Different global communities and individuals are actively reflecting on the legacies of colonial rule and imperial administrations and their impact on the local and global systems of power. They are also seeking alternative knowledges rooted within their own local traditions and knowledge systems to imagine different futures outside of modernity/coloniality. Imagining, or reimagining the world, is a way for subjugated peoples to understand and theorise injustice and provide alternatives from within our own traditions (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 204).

Parallel to students calling to tear down the Cecil Rhodes statue in South Africa and the more recent toppling of the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol in 2020, the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles is standing tall in the centre of the financial district in Singapore, unchallenged and to an extent, celebrated. In 2019, the Singapore government organised a commemoration of 200 years since the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles (Chan and Haq 1987), led by a statutory board under the Prime Minister's Office, the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO). The arrival of the British to the island was marked as a key milestone in Singapore's history. Official statements by the state justified this commemoration not as a celebration of British colonisation, but instead, an opportunity to look beyond colonisation. The SBO were quick to reassure the public that the commemoration would avoid glorifying colonialism and take a more complex and nuanced view: "[Singapore's history] actually began in 1299" (Bicentennial 2019). These efforts had the potential to be subversive as it no longer considered the arrival of the British and the experience of British colonisation as 'point zero' of Singapore history.

The Bicentennial encouraged conversations about the history of British colonisation in Singapore, ranging from attributing Singapore's success to colonial rule to highlighting the darker side of British colonisation. More importantly to me, the 2019 Bicentennial illuminated the hegemonic

narratives about British colonisation that Singapore internalised, despite the efforts to offer critical perspectives of history. Unlike the experiences of many other colonies and nations, Singapore's political leaders seem to have remembered the British as 'benevolent colonial masters'. Such examples would be Mr Tommy Koh, Ambassador-At-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Chairman of the Institute of Policy Studies and the National Heritage Board, who said that British rule was "60 percent good, 40 percent bad" (2019). He conceded that the British disrupted and negatively impacted the way of life in Singapore. However, T. Koh (2019) wrote that "unlike other colonial masters in Southeast Asia, the British did leave us with a positive legacy", citing the creation of a free port, free trade and good economic infrastructure and rule of law (essentially, the promise of modernity: public hygiene, education, medicine, and scientific development). The post-colonial national rhetoric claims that for all the flaws of colonisation, British colonial rule laid the foundations for the city-state's "success" today.

Beyond the Bicentennial, such narratives were internalised and repeated, even by politicians in opposition political parties. Recently, with the passing of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022, an opposition Worker's Party member of parliament, Jamus Lim (2022), posted a tribute post on Facebook about her mixed legacy. Part of the post is below:

> "As a country, Singapore has benefited from its colonial history in a number of ways: we enjoyed investment from Great Britain that helped us develop from a fishing village to an important global port, missionaries started schools that transferred education and knowledge (and many remain among the most esteemed on the island today), and we inherited institutions—such as a Westminster parliamentary system, a common law legal framework, and a well-structured bureaucracy—that helped us massively in our development journey. We also inherited several colonial-era hangovers, such as CPF[5], racial structures (think CMIO[6]), and the soon-to-be-debated 377A[7]—that we've had to contend with and, at the very least, adapt to our own needs.
>
> As far as colonies go, we were fortunate. We had a strategic location for a seafaring empire, but no real natural resources of consequence. Britain saw Singapore as a settlement colony, and this enabled the sort of mostly benevolent rule that has contributed, for more good than ill, to the society we see today. For other extractive colonies, or where violent suppression was more pervasive, the population's view of their former colonial masters tends to be far less charitable. All this is a reminder of how, in addition to sound governance and hard work, it is useful to remember that we have also benefited from more than a modicum of good luck."

[5] CPF refers to Central Provident Fund in Singapore, started in 1955, under British colonial rule. It is a mandatory social security savings scheme that requires all employers and employees to contribute a portion of the employee's monthly gross salary to the provident fund (Ministry of Manpower 2022).
[6] CMIO refers to the racial structuring in Singapore: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others.
[7] Section 377A was a law in Singapore that criminalized sex between consenting adult males, introduced under British colonial rule in 1938. It remained as part of the Penal Code until it was subsequently repealed in 2023 (P.L. Lim 2010).

These narratives, as put forward by Lim, were representative of the 'critical' praxis during the Bicentennial – the negative aspects of colonisation such as the creation of racial categories and criminalisation of homosexual acts, were recognised but ultimately, the experience of British colonisation was still lauded and appreciated as Singapore 'benefitted' from the experience. As Lim (2022) continued in his comments to the post, he did not "see the world in stark black and white terms, where one's distaste for certain practices automatically translates to rejecting all of its outcomes (or even denying their benefits)". Having a 'nuanced' view of the processes of colonisation, not only relegates the 'colonial' to the past but also ignores how processes of modernity go hand in hand with coloniality. Modernity and coloniality are not parallel processes but are constitutive of each other, different sides of the same coin.

The narratives above are representative of how the state was performing criticality within the Bicentennial, which resulted in highlighting the negative impacts and the silences of colonisation, while retaining foundational beliefs about great development and attainment of modern civilisation. These narratives complement Singapore's reputation as a "North in the South" or "Third World to First" nation, as former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (2000) asserted. In *Can Asians Think*, Kishore Mahbubani (1998) expanded how there is a shift in global power, with Asian countries such as Singapore appropriating capitalism and modernity. Mahbubani argued that Asian states are 'dewesternising' as there is an active confrontation with Western epistemic racism but at the same time, an appropriation of Western 'modernity' (Walter Mignolo 2011, 42). With this analysis, Western modernity is then attributed to British colonisation whereas the appropriation of Western modernity is attributed to the genius governance of the post-colonial state, with Lee Kuan Yew leading the People's Action Party (PAP). This appropriation of modernity is also referred to as alternative modernities. More simply articulated, these are modernities from non-European perspectives, however, they still retain the same colonial logics that advanced the West (Eurocentric). Such non-European Eurocentric modernities still erase the darker side of modernity or, more insidiously, recognise coloniality but assert that it is a necessary evil towards a greater good, Eurocentric modernity. I argue that both diversifying and dewesternising, as forms of critique against Western modernity, do not effectively examine and dismantle logics of coloniality, which enables coloniality to be maintained and reproduced (Gani, 2017).

Choice of Theoretical Framework: modernity/coloniality and decoloniality

How and why then is coloniality insidious, even while allowing the reality of dewesternisation? The post-colonial rhetoric of Singapore's 'exceptionalism[8]' (Barr 2020a), that colonisation in Singapore was not violent and was beneficial to the island, not only distances Singapore from the experiences of colonialism of the majority of the global population but also ignores coloniality within its own shores.

[8] Singapore was the only country that became "Third world to First world", leaving its neighbours behind. This was due to its hard work and principles of meritocracy, stressing the adherence to (East) "Asian values" in development.

It must be admitted that there was harm enacted in Malaya[9] due to European colonisation. For example, land dispossession, native Malay epistemologies marginalised, ties with the wider Malay world disrupted and racial hierarchies and stereotypes of the peoples that inhabited Malaya institutionalised.

The path of modernity that Singapore chose in the post-colonial era has continued to affect its peoples unequally. The aim of limitless economic and physical growth is accompanied by the dependence on labour and resources from other countries and the commodification of humans and labour. Examples of coloniality behind the modernity that Singapore pursues are the increase of poorly-paid, poorly-housed and poorly-treated migrant workers from the Global South, the widening of the income gap, and harmful impacts on the environment, such as the extraction of resources like sand from Cambodia (John and Jamieson 2020). COVID-19 exacerbated these inequalities and it particularly hit the poor and our foreign labour workers, who were living in overcrowded spaces, without the proper resources to isolate or recover, as well as those affected by retrenchment and unemployment. The safety that I felt – with my ability to isolate in a safe home, access to vaccines and privilege of working from home – was not afforded equally to everyone else on the island, and globally. The 'benefit' that is promised with development and modernity always seems to be at the expense of others. In addition, while only celebrating the contributions of British imperialism and immigrants, who were deemed to have transformed the island into an international financial hub, Singapore's Malay origins and the contributions of indigenous[10] Singaporeans have been marginalised (Rahim 2009, 14).

From these discussions, how should we understand modernity/coloniality? The modern/colonial world system framework (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Walter Mignolo 2011; Castro-Gomez 1995) was developed by Latin American scholars to critique modernity as a Eurocentric project. Modernity is framed by a Eurocentric civilisational rhetoric, a "narrative that builds Western civilisation by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, 'coloniality'" (Walter Mignolo 2011, 2-3). The Eurocentric civilisational rhetoric positions the West in a superior position, with the West holding the keys to salvation and the rest needing salvation. This salvation, or civilizing mission (or modernity) was then exported to the rest of the world through colonial expansion since the 15th century, using the "rhetoric of modernity" (Walter Mignolo 2017):

[9] Malaya refers to the geographic entity of British Malaya, which includes a set of states on the Malay Peninsula and Singapore, brought under British hegemony between the 18th century and 20th century. Malaya is used to refer to the Federated and Unfederated Malay states (FMS and UMS), which were British protectorates with their own local rulers, as well as the Straits Settlements (SS), which were under direct control of the British Crown (Andaya and Andaya 2017).

[10] Malays are considered indigenous (or native) to the Malay world but not categorised as 'Indigenous Peoples' (capital "I"), as the Malays constitute a majority in Malaysia and are politically, economically and socially dominant. Indigeneity in the Malay world and in many parts of Southeast Asia is not as clearly defined as in the Americas, Australia or New Zealand, where there is a distinct native-settler dichotomy. Indigenous Peoples refers to the Orang Asli, an administrative category that includes the many different aboriginal groups in the Malay Peninsula. For a deeper discussion on the layered histories of the term "Indigenous", see Rusaslina Idrus (2022).

> "the imposition of Christianity in order to convert the so-called *savages* and *barbarians* in the 16th century, followed by the imposition of *white man's burden* and his *civilising mission* in the 18th and 19th century, the imposition of the *developmental project* in the 20th century, and more recently, the imperial project of military interventions under the rhetoric of *democracy* and *human rights* in the 21st century" (Grosfoguel 2009, 25; Maldonado-Torres 2011).

The rhetoric of modernity, understood as the rhetoric of salvation, legitimises and obscures its inherent structures of violence, extraction and oppressions that go hand in hand with modern civilisation (Maldonado-Torres 2011).

Coloniality refers to the darker side of modernity. Mignolo (2011, 2) stated that "coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today". Coloniality of power, as developed by Aníbal Quijano (2000), defines structures of power, control, and hegemony that have emerged during the era of colonialism, which stretches from the conquest of the Americas in the 15th century to the present. Coloniality of power points to the principles and logics of colonialism that have survived the end of formal colonialism itself. If formal colonial rule and imperial administration are defined as *colonialism*, then the principles and rationalities of colonial rule that outlive formal colonialism are defined as *coloniality* (coloniality of power: (Quijano and Ennis 2000; Quijano 2007); of being: (Wynter 2003; Maldonado-Torres 2007); of gender: (María Lugones 2007); global coloniality: (Escobar 2004; Walter Mignolo 2000)). The coloniality of power identifies the current world system to be a modern/colonial/capitalist-world system, constitutive of an international division of labour, with race as an organising principle. The system of hierarchies posited by Quijano (2000) was based on racial classification and difference. Lugones (2007) added that the gender-based domination systems did not disappear but were integrated into the race-based hierarchies. These systems of hierarchies were then manifested in the economy with the racial and gender division of labour.

Essentially, coloniality centres race and gender as organising principles, which not only puts human beings into a racial hierarchy, but also sustains an asymmetrical global power relations and a singular Eurocentric epistemology, that is assumed to be universal, secular, and scientific. Beyond coloniality's obvious economic and social manifestations (such as the racial stratification of labour and the proliferation of inequality and racism), these oppressive hierarchies also pervade the realm of knowledge and culture. So much of what we experience of the modern world has been constructed out of Western imperial categories that the coloniality of knowledge is perhaps harder to discern and more insidious to overcome. In the case of Singapore, despite the absence of colonial powers, coloniality continues not only in the legacies that the British left but also in how coloniality – the unequal and exploitative structures, practices, epistemologies and logics – is being reproduced, to extract maximum profits from the land and people (Han 2023, 117).

In chapter 2, I will go into a deeper discussion on modernity/coloniality. However, at this juncture, I would like to stress that throughout the thesis, I use 'modernity' to mean 'Eurocentric modernity' as within the world-system understanding of modernity/coloniality, 'modernity' is not a neutral signifier of an era but carries the baggage of a Eurocentric civilisational rhetoric and imaginations that serve to impose Western superiority and the West as a standard.

Decoloniality is then meant to dismantle power relations and conceptions of knowledge that allow the reproduction of racial, gender and geo-political hierarchies present in our modern/colonial world (Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019, 213). Quijano proposes that if coloniality is a necessary component of modernity, decoloniality cannot happen if global imperial/colonial designs in the name of modernity are maintained (Walter Mignolo 2017). Decoloniality subsumes a myriad of liberatory projects and critical engagements emerging from previously colonised physical and epistemic sites and peoples. These engagements are born from the experience of living in the asymmetrical modern world order sustained by the colonial matrices of power and epistemologies that maintain the hierarchies. What distinguishes decoloniality from other existing critical social theories is the locus of its enunciation and its genealogy, which privileges epistemologies outside of Eurocentrism, from the "borders".

Using modernity/coloniality/decoloniality as the framework of my thesis allows me to look at the international and global politics holistically, critically engaging with the local legacies of colonialism, and how it is reflected and implicated in global power relations. It also provides me the theoretical and methodological tools to deconstruct the coloniality of knowledge in Singapore. More importantly, decoloniality then seeks epistemic justice in privileging the perspectives of those whom the modern/colonial world has brought much pain and injustice. Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 36) stated that "coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonisation. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges." "Thinking from the borders" allow us to interrogate or resurface neglected local histories/praxis/epistemologies that are confronting global designs (Shilliam 2016b, 378).

These theoretical discussions in decolonial studies elucidate the guiding principles and decolonial ethos to adhere to, situated within the politics of decolonisation – goals of self-determination, global social justice and healing. This is important to acknowledge as "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck and Yang 2012). Although this thesis specifically seeks to contribute to the discussions of coloniality of knowledge, knowledge production remains an integral part of the larger colonial matrix of power. This connection will be elaborated theoretically in Chapter 2 and elucidated using the Singapore case study in Chapter 6.

Methodology and method: Two-part decolonial methodology and thematic narrative analysis as method

Within the focus of coloniality of knowledge, is there then, a holistic decolonial framework that ensures looking beyond diversifying and dewesternising, which addresses coloniality? This thesis specifically seeks to contribute to the discussions of coloniality of knowledge within decolonial and Indigenous scholarships, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. I articulate a two-part framework of deconstruction and reconstruction that will guide me in interrogating knowledge production in Singapore: (1) to critique dominant, hegemonic Eurocentric narratives and identify logics of coloniality (2) to re-engage and cultivate creative reconstitutions of alternatives, through the excavation of local knowledges and praxis that are responding to modernity/coloniality, engaging with border thinking.

The central methodology used in this thesis is critical historiography. This methodology was the natural choice in a bid to "reclaim the construction of historical narratives that erase colonialism and reduce slavery to an unfortunate exception in an otherwise proud past" (Taylor-Garcia 2012, 2). Historiography refers to the writing of history, instead of history itself. It is concerned with how the past is written, especially questioning the assumptions and epistemological underpinnings (Ankersmit 1994; White 1973). Through the suggested decolonial framework, this means deconstructing history (Tuhiwai Smith 2012) and identifying the partial stories of modernity that have been told from the ego-politics of knowledge (Walter Mignolo 2007). In addition, it also means history must be involved in reconstruction: engaging with "people's history" or *sejarah rakyat* in Malay[11]. Reconstruction means recovering marginalised knowledges and engaging in border thinking.

In terms of methods, the poststructuralist approach has developed a historiographical approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA[12]) that seeks to "reveal the hidden assumptions in received and naturalised historical accounts, with a particular emphasis on the language used in their elaboration" (Flowerdew 2012, 17). Traditionally in CDA, discourse is studied synchronically, which means that the text, language or discourse at a particular point in time is examined. Discourse analysts will focus on individual texts or group of texts and analyse how the text relates to other texts. In this sense, the analysis is historical as it has to show how changes in textual structure correspond with changes in social circumstances (Fairclough 1992, 8-9). But Flowerdew (2012, 17) mentioned how there is a tendency to provide a static snapshot rather than a dynamic analysis, that emphasises how discourse develops over time. A diachronic analysis is the study of what changes over time and what stays the same. Ruth Wodak (2016) named this approach the 'discourse-historical method'. Within this historiographical approach of CDA, I am interested in the analyses of narratives instead of discourses or language per se. Instead

[11] There is a deeper elaboration on this in the section titled "Situating the thesis in existing historiography of Singapore".
[12] For more details on the critical discourse analysis, see (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018; Wodak and Meyer 2016)

of "some form of systematic analysis of texts" (Fairclough 2010, 10). Riessman (2008) suggested thematic analysis as an option for narrative analysis, where the focus is on the content of a story. Thematic analyses focus on the *what* of narratives. An example would be how Richardson (2018) used a discourse-historical framework to investigate the arguments and narratives related to Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration.

The thematic analysis is thus, useful for me to analyse how the Singapore government, both colonial and current, has written about British colonisation and how the narratives have changed or remained the same over time. However, as this thesis is guided by a decolonial ethos, the thematic analyses will be focused on excavating *what* stories are told about modernity/coloniality, and essentially, what stories are not, i.e. the hiding of coloniality and silencing of some epistemologies and voices.

With the two-part framework, methodology and methods outlined, the thesis will be structured according to this framework, beginning with (1) an interrogation of hegemonic narratives of modernity. Within the first part of the decolonial framework, covered in Chapters 3 and 4, I seek to examine dominant official accounts of the experience of colonisation in Singapore and compare colonial knowledge production with contemporary state knowledge production. Using the case study of history-writing by the colonial and post-colonial governments in Singapore, I ask what are the hegemonic narratives of modernity within these sources? I conceptualise narratives of modernity to be grand Eurocentric metanarratives of historical developments. These narratives of modernity tell a partial story of modernity and hide coloniality. As thematic analysis focuses on the *what* of narratives, I excavated these foundational narratives of modernity within the colonial textbooks:

(1) the British were at centre of Malayan/Singapore history,
(2) the British were benevolent colonisers,
(3) the civilising mission was beneficial for Singapore and,
(4) the national territorial boundaries found in Southeast Asia today are natural and universal conceptions of space.

These narratives of modernity will be a constant point of analysis throughout the thesis.

Therefore, in Chapter 3, I examine these foundational narratives of modernity within the site of knowledge production by the colonial government in Singapore. In Chapter 4, I analyse to what extent was the current Singapore government more critical in (re)writing history. I argue that despite diversifying and dewesternising efforts, the narratives of modernity persisted.

The second part of the framework seeks to (2) re-engage with local knowledges from colonised communities, that are responding and reacting to their material challenges caused by global designs. In Chapter 5, I focus on the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper, as I argue that it is a potential source of border thinking of Singaporean Malays from the 1940s-60s.

Case study selection

Below I outline the sources that I select for this thesis, which are: colonial history textbooks; the Bicentennial museum exhibitions; and the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper.

1. *Colonial history textbooks*

I intend to compare colonial narratives with contemporary ones. As my starting point was the 2019 Bicentennial, the only accessible source representing the colonial state's voice in history writing was in the creation of the first official textbooks for the English and Malay vernacular schools in Malaya in the early 1900s. These history textbooks are foundational texts, formative textbooks to Singapore's own writing of history in its nation-building period (Soda 2020). This was arguably the first instance of the "creation" of Malayan history and its presentation to the public, which is reflective of the state narrative. These textbooks were accepted as reliable sources of information on Malaya's colonial history till the 1950s, as the official files of the Colonial Office were not accessible then (G. Lee 2016).

I will analyse the textbooks in two ways: firstly, looking at the context in which they were produced, interrogating the social and political practices to identify how modernity/coloniality has been maintained and, secondly, identifying the hegemonic narratives of modernity from its contents.

The textbooks that will be examined are below:

<u>English Schools</u>

1. *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*, by Frank Swettenham, 1906, updated in 1929
2. *History of Malaya*, by Richard Winstedt, 1935

<u>Malay Schools</u>[13]

3. *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (A Book of Malay History), by R Winstedt, 1918
4. *Ilmu Alam Melayu* (Knowledge of the Malay World), by R Winstedt, 1918
5. *Sejarah Alam Melayu* (History of the Malay World), by Abdul Hadi Haji Hassan, 1920s

Soda Naoki (2001) wrote extensively on the transmission of colonial knowledge about the Malay world in pre-war colonial Malaya and highlighted the colonial conceptualisation of Malay territoriality, time and periodisation of Malay history. He analysed three out of the five textbooks on Malayan history listed above. While there will be some overlap, my study differs in that I have included textbooks created for the English schools to analyse it alongside the narratives found in Malay schools

[13] Specifically, for the teaching of history in the teacher training colleges.

and teacher training colleges textbooks as there were a significant number of English schools in Singapore. In addition, differing from Naoki, I elucidate the four foundational narratives of modernity about Malaya that are found within the textbooks.

2. *Bicentennial Museum Exhibitions*

After identifying the colonial foundations of knowledge production in Malaya, through the textbooks, I will compare these foundational narratives found in the textbooks with present-day history writing. As I would like to compare official state narratives of colonisation in Singapore that were presented to the public, I chose the most apparent narratives presented in public exhibition during the 2019 Bicentennial commemorations. Due to the specificity of the commemorations and my personal lived experience of witnessing the commemorations, I chose to compare the formative colonial textbooks with the exhibitions instead of current-day history textbooks for secondary schools as they both represent the state narrative and were intended for public engagements. The content of analyses can be compared even though the mediums are different – textbooks for vernacular school vs Bicentennial museum exhibitions.

Similar to the analysis of the textbooks, I will highlight the context and historical significance of the Bicentennial commemorations and then, highlight the narratives of modernity/coloniality. I also argue that the current Singapore government intended to be more critical of British colonisation, which resulted in a range of responses from diversifying and dewesternising to addressing coloniality.

I analyse the contents of the following Bicentennial exhibitions in Chapter 4:

1. Statues put up alongside Raffles for the 2019 Bicentennial commemorations, set up by the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO), 2019
2. The Bicentennial Experience, Fort Canning, set up by SBO, 1 October 2019 to 31 December 2019
3. An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s-1819, set up by National Museum of Singapore (NMS), 21 September 2019 to 29 March 2020
4. On Paper: Singapore before 1867, set up by National Library Board (NLB), 27 September 2019 to 22 March 2020
5. *Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera & Sebingkai Cermin*: Reflecting & refracting Singapura, set up by Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), 12 October 2019 to 21 June 2020

3. *Utusan Melayu Newspaper*

Within the textbooks and the exhibitions, I am conscious as to whose stories and voices were highlighted and whose were missing. The voices of those who protested for structural and systemic changes during the colonial period, such as the leftist groups, labour movements and communist groups across Malaya and other instances of anti-colonial activity (Malay voices) were not highlighted at all.

I chose to analyse *Utusan Melayu*, a Malay newspaper based in Singapore, in the second part of the decolonial framework as it is a source of alternative history and a potential source of border

thinking. I intend to highlight the narratives within the newspaper from the period of 1946 to 1948 that critique the partial stories of modernity told by the state perspective, unveil coloniality in Singapore and Malaya and offer alternatives to modernity/coloniality. *Utusan* occupies the position of colonial difference, which serves as a foil to the narratives of modernity espoused by both the colonial and post-colonial Singapore state. *Utusan Melayu* belongs to 'an-other history', which has no warranty of being better by the simple fact that it speaks from the colonial difference. It simply means that it is "an-other frame of consciousness that perceived and senses the world that cannot be subsumed by and under the consciousness and sensibilities that have been produced in the social forms and life and institutions within the empire" (Walter Mignolo 2007, 464). The narratives found in *Utusan* were less glorifying and celebratory of modernity than in the colonial and post-colonial state's narratives. I argue that beyond a critique of historical content, *Utusan Melayu* offers a site of an-other way of knowing (Walter Mignolo 2012, 22).

Despite having the reputation for reflecting the anti-colonial nationalist ideals of the paper's editors, the contents of *Utusan Melayu* have not been heavily researched. One of the few scholars to draw attention to it was Lily Zubaidah (2008, 97), who mentioned the significant role *Utusan Melayu* played as "the mouthpiece of an ascendant Malay nationalism" and how the newspaper reflected the the development of anti-colonial Malay nationalism which impacted the political orientation of the Singapore Malay community. She highlighted how *Utusan Melayu* spotlighted the plight of urban and rural Malays, which allowed the non-Malay and leftist political activists and intellectuals to be cognisant of the problems confronting the Malay masses. Zainuddin Maidin (2013) also wrote an in-depth history covering the developments of *Utusan Melayu* and its journalists. He (2013, 2) asserted how *Utusan* was "sympathetic to the peoples struggles, labour struggles and struggles of the oppressed". Zahairin bin Abdul Rahman (1988) also wrote his undergraduate thesis on the origins and history of Utusan Melayu, covering the pre-war and post-war developments. He did go into the contents of *Utusan*, highlighting how the newspaper was reacting and influencing political developments.

Despite its anti-colonial reputation, one of the reasons *Utusan Melayu* remains largely understudied and overlooked in the official history-making of Singapore is that it was printed in the Jawi script, which is no longer widely read today. Since its conception, the newspaper was printed in Malay, in the Jawi script (with modified Arabic letters instead of the Roman script). Jawi script newspapers and magazine articles published after the 1930s and 1941 in the Malay peninsula had strong readership among the Malays and remains to be interesting sources for identifying Malay aspirations and intellectual thought. Jawi newspapers were published in different geographic centres of Malay intellectual and political thought, such as Singapore (*Warta Malaya* and *Utusan Melayu*), Kuala Lumpur (*Majlis*), Penang (*Saudara*) and Negeri Sembilan (*Majalah Guru*). These newspapers were a reflection of "an epistemic community that actively participated in contesting and negotiating different visions of the Malay future" (Southeast Asia Digital Library 2020). Prior to the spread of Islam in

Southeast Asia, Old Malay was written in the Pallava script, which soon saw the introduction of Arabic writing system, with the arrival of Muslim merchants in the region. The Arabic script was adapted by the Malays to suit the spoken Classical Malay, to include sounds that were not found in Arabic. The acceptance of the Arabic writing in Turkey, Persia and India was then also seen in the Malay peninsula (Winstedt 1961). It remained to be the most common way of writing Malay until it as displaced over the course of the 20th century by Rumi or Roman script. Today, Malay is being written and taught in romanised letters.

The move from Jawi to Rumi script as the default writing representation of the Malay language was not a result of colonial policy but from the Malays seeking to modernise. The stipulation of 1962 Language Act set Roman alphabets as the official writing for Malay language. There were different language policies in both Singapore and Malaysia. However, focusing on Singapore, Jawi was relegated to religious schools, teachings and learnings. It was officially phased out of the curriculum, with only one out of six Madrasahs (full-time religious schools) having Jawi in their curriculum. This meant that currently, Jawi can only be read by the Muslim community that can read Malay. Even within the minority Muslim community in Singapore, a small portion of the community is able to read Jawi. Such issues of accessibility could be a contributing factor as to why newspapers like *Utusan Melayu* are not featured in official state history writing. In addition to being able to read Malay, I am aware of how a once prominent script like Jawi is fading away. I thus, saw the value of recovering this knowledge that could fade away from Singapore's history and include *Utsuan* into the discussions on decoloniality.

Situating the thesis in existing historiography and decolonial scholarship of Singapore

I have elucidated how this thesis seeks to deconstruct hegemonic historical narrations and re-engage with alternative knowledges in Singapore. My thesis asserts that Singapore's experience of (re)writing history is thus a valuable case study to bring into conversation with scholarship on modernity/coloniality. For this assertion to be apparent, I need to situate this thesis within existing historiographies as this thesis relies on reconstructions of history from the bottom-up. It is important to recognise what work has been done and where my thesis sits. I briefly outline the different works that speak on three areas: the general history of Singapore, alternative histories, and Malay nationalism in Singapore. In addition, as my thesis explicitly engages with decoloniality and Singapore as a case study, I will highlight works that do not necessarily explicitly engage with decolonial studies but carry the decolonial ethos.

The history of Singapore

Classical Malay historical texts, such as *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai, Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, were not considered 'proper' sources of history by historians who favoured Eurocentric approaches (Lau 1992, 58; Kwa 1985). This will be more apparent in Chapter 3, as

Swettenham and Winstedt also disregarded the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) while writing the Malayan history textbooks. Within these classical texts, there were evidences of Singapore being a pre-colonial hub of commercial activity integral to the Sri Vijaya and Majapahit kingdoms in the Malay Archipelago (O. Hussain 2009). With doubts casted on the classical Malay texts, most Singaporean historians have selectively relied on historical Chinese and European sources when examining Singapore's history (Rahim 2009, 23). This has also led to the prevalent belief that Singapore is a land devoid of pre-colonial history. This will be explored in depth in chapter 3 and 4, where I examine official colonial history texts and compare the narratives with contemporary official historical narratives.

Despite a plethora of works on Singapore's pre-colonial history, Stamford Raffles and the British colonisers then acquired a symbolic and material significance as actors who revitalised the sleepy fishing village[14]. The history of Singapore is often approached by considering British colonisation as a necessary process in the formulation of its national history – using the nation-state and 'big man' approaches to history (Heng and Aljunied 2011, 14). Since there had been no "Singapore" as we understand it today before the onset of the British, historians had to write history, to match their boundaries to the geographic space of modern Singapore. Thus, within the 'great men' approach, there are numerous works on Sir Stamford Raffles (Bastin 2019). Alongside this, significant University of Singapore history professors established the "no-Singapore-before-Raffles" history template, which allowed for the narrative of Singapore needing the dynamic intervention of British colonisation to persist (Huang 2021, 107). The key Professors of History in Singapore included Wong Lin Ken (1991), K.G. Tregonning (1969), and Mary Turnbull (2009) who all defined Singapore's national history within the framework of British "commercial and strategic interest in the Malay Peninsula during the eighteenth century" (Kwa 2018, 2).

This framework does not only justify Singapore's post-colonial commitment to economic growth in line with a capitalist model, but also projects Singapore as a land of immigrants. Despite the official recognised status of Malays as indigenous peoples of Singapore in Section 152, at National Day parades and national songs, all Singaporeans have been referred to as immigrants from 'faraway lands' (Rahim 2009, 24). The recognition of Singapore as part of a vibrant network of Malay maritime ports and empires was regarded as a dangerous foundation towards special privileges for race based on indigeneity (Hong and Huang 2008, 25). The arrival of Stamford Raffles acted as an 'equaliser' for the different racial groups (Chan and Haq 1987).

These narratives were produced within the context of important post-colonial debates about perspective in historical writing (S.H. Alatas 1962; Bastin 1960). The post-colonial context saw a need to produce independent historiography that were autonomous from the worldview or chronology of

[14] This is written on the plaque beneath the Raffles statue in Boat Quay.

colonialism – "autonomous history" (Smail 1961). Attending to the problem of "Europe-centric" and "Eurocentric" history writing, these discussions highlighted how historians who adopt a Eurocentric stance tend to focus on the European impact on these places (this will be elaborated in the discussion on Eurocentrism in Chapter 2). The meant that Southeast Asian (SEA) history centred around interactions brought about by European traders and colonisers. Smail (1961) also differentiated a Eurocentric "perspective" and a Eurocentric "moral viewpoint". He argued that anticolonial historians had been successful in switching the moral viewpoint of SEA History to an "Asia-centric" one through the criticism of colonialism but the basic narrative of SEA did not change. This argument states that being critical of the Portuguese attack on Malacca was an example of an Asia-centric nationalist moral viewpoint, but still reflects a Eurocentric perspective as the main actors in SEA history remain Europeans. All that changed was the moral implications of the actions of European imperialists. These discussions on Eurocentrism will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

Moving away from the "no-Singapore-beyond-Raffles" template, there are other key history texts that note Singapore's history as a trading post (instead of an 'obscure fishing village' as the post-colonial Singapore state argues, this will be elaborated in Chapter 4). Other works on Malayan colonial history by S.H. Alatas (1971), Trocki (1979), Cheah Boon Keng (1998), Andaya and Andaya (2017), Milner (2008), Miksic (2000), Reid (1988), Barr (2020a) and Khoo Kay Kim (1979) all acknowledged Singapore's inclusion in the larger Malay World and part of the extensive network of maritime port in the Malay Peninsula. Beyond its location and free entrepot status, the highly developed pre-colonial regional trade and the economic activity in the Dutch East Indies were also considered as factors for facilitating rapid growth in nineteenth century Singapore. There were historians who were expanding on the processes and problems of immigration and settlement of the different ethnic groups (Arasaratnam 1970; Mandal 2018; S.-M. Sai 2023).

There are other academic publications that sought to look beyond Raffles and British colonisation. Borschberg (2017) wrote on considering Singapore's position within the *longue durée*, which includes its pre-colonial developments. Kwa and Borschberg (2019) then edited a collection that sought to look beyond the British and the nation-state framework. It included Singapore's earlier cycles of globalisation, focusing on its maritime history. The Bicentennial saw the publishing of another edited work by Kwa and Borschberg, looking at seven hundred years of Singapore (2019). Going beyond the *longue durée* framework, Heng and Aljunied (2011, 16), have also published a collection of chapters that uses global history as a framework. This allowed for the incorporation of collective social memories of the people beyond great achievements of the founding fathers of Singapore. Global history as a framework can serve as a vital link between imperial and nationalist historiographies in SEA. Beyond the discipline of history, there are significant efforts to critique narratives of modernity in Singapore (Y.Y. Teo 2018b; Sa'at, Joraimi, and Sai 2021; Loh, Thum, and Chia 2017; George 2000), whether in academic writings or cultural productions.

Alternative Histories

Aside from privileging the role of British colonisation in Singapore's history, 'alternative' histories of Singapore provide alternative accounts that supplement silences within hegemonic historical narratives. More specific to the period of post-World War II, with the return of the British, there was a growth in Malayan nationalisms. Beyond "an elitist English-language nationalist narrative" (Thum 2012, 87), there were a variety of indigenous and vernacular Malayan nationalisms that have developed due to the "profound displacements taking place below the elite level which made these mass movements possible" (Thum 2012, 87). Central developments within these experiments of liberation movements, were discussions on Malayan identity and *merdeka* (freedom) as a value and aspiration. Broadly, this period is often summarised by the Singapore state as a period of the red scare of communism, managing racial tensions, and negotiating with the colonial power. The official state narratives, from both post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore, on this period are comfortably silenced, focusing instead on the state's post-colonial developments (Yap 2014, 10).

There have been historical accounts supplementing the history of this period in recent years, such as *The Fajar Generation* (Poh, Tan, and Koh 2010), collating essays written by or about the members of the University of Malaya Socialist Club. The book details the story of a group of men and women who advanced the radical agenda of anti-colonialism, democracy, multiculturalism and social justice through the agency of a university club. Other earlier accounts of alternative histories are in forms of biographical accounts and memoirs of political oppositions and detainees: Francis Seow's *To Catch a Tartar* (1994), Said Zahari's *Dark Clouds at Dawn* (2001), *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History* edited by Poh Soo Kai (2015) and Teo Soh Lung's *Beyond the Blue Gate* (2010). In 2023, Thum also recently published a book that discussed nationalism and the period of decolonisation in Malaya, focusing on leaders of the main groups "which most heavily influenced Singapore's anti-colonial nationalism – the Chinese-speaking, the working class, and the left-wing intellectuals" (Thum 2023). Complementing these alternative histories was the deconstruction of official state narratives in Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli's book, *The Scripting of National History* (2008). The authors highlighted the constructed nature of the state-endorsed official history, which overlooked what happened in the past and put forward a version that the state intended to be understood (ibid, 14).

There have been other engagements with alternative or more critical historiographies outside of academia, which includes Sonny Liew's graphic novel, *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* (2015) and playwright and writer Alfian Saat's creative works. The most recent play he wrote and directed, in conjunction with the Singapore Bicentennial, was titled "Merdeka / 獨立 /சுதந்திரம்". In collaboration with playwright Neo Hai Bin, the play reflected how history and understandings of humanity have been altered by colonialism (2019). In addition, there are also advocacy works by *Orang*

Laut SG, a project founded by a fourth-generation *Orang Laut*[15], Firdaus Sani. The collective advocates for the preservation of the oral histories, cultures and traditions of the *Orang Laut.* It is also a space for islanders to connect and network. Recently, in July 2023, *Orang Laut SG* organised a fundraising event for next year's *Hari Orang Pulau* (Islanders Day). The event, which attracted more than half of the islander communities, was a space for former islanders and their descendants to share knowledges and celebrate their communities and heritage.

Malay Nationalism

In terms of alternative histories, I also seek to include more Malay voices into the conversation of writing Singapore's history, which have generally been overlooked even in existing alternative histories. As highlighted previously, the alternative histories covered English-speaking or Chinese-speaking radical anti-colonialists or leftists. Said Zahari's memoir (2001) is invaluable as he recounted his time working at *Utusan Melayu*, and how he had developed close relationships with the leaders and activists from left-wing political parties, trade unions and other organisations in Singapore, including *Barisan Sosialis* (Socialist Front) leaders Lim Chin Siong, Dominic Puthucheary and Poh Soo Kai. Despite being approached by Lim to join *Barisan Sosialis*, he decided to join *Partai Rakyat Singapura* (PKR, Singapore People's Party), which had Malay leftist and nationalist roots. The day after he was elected President and intended to form an alliance with *Barisan Sosialis*, he was detained under Operation Coldstore, a joint operation by the Singapore and Malayan governments, and the British colonial authorities that detained more than 100 leftist leaders, unionists and activists (Zahari 2001).

This insight into the decisions and alliances made by Said Zahari, pushed me to question what the subjectivities and concerns of Singaporean Malays were. As we shall learn in Chapter 3 and 4, this side of history was completely ignored in the state's narratives of history. Beyond recognising Singapore as part of the Malay world, the development and negotiation of ideas relating to indigeneity and its implications to the land and citizenship are not presented in Singapore's national history at all. Claims of indigeneity are not only regarded as a dangerous foundation towards special privileges, but also understood to go against post-colonial Singapore's national values of multi-culturalism and equality between races. The negotiations and developments of Malay nationalisms (Omar 1993) are deemed dangerous as conversations surrounding race and religion are amongst the main contemporary fault lines in Singapore. Malay nationalism ranged from the bourgeois nationalism privileging the Malays and excluding the non-Malay races from being equal citizens to more radical experiments of a

[15] *Orang Laut* refers to "island people" or "sea people", Singapore's Indigenous islanders. They were groups of seafaring nomads living on boats around the Malay Peninsula. During the period when the British thought Singapore was uninhabited, the *Orang Laut* had been using the island as a place to live. As skilled mariners, they played an important role in Malay history (Anuar 2020). They are also referred to as islanders as they inhabited the islands around mainland Singapore, before the Singapore government mandated relocation of all who inhabited the islands to the mainland. The islands were then used for different developments, such as using it as landfill, military training and land reclamation.

Malay nation premised on a non-ethnic and inclusive understanding of Malayness (Brophy 2021) However, due to internal security concerns and the pervasiveness of contemporary national borders, accounts on Singapore's history rarely include these different negotiations and developments of Malay nationalisms.

However, as evidenced by Said and *Utusan Melayu,* despite being under full British rule as a crown colony in Singapore, Singapore Malays were cognisant to and were influenced by the developments of Malay nationalism and the vast ideological cross-fertilisation across the Straits of Melaka (Rahim 2008). Khoo (2006, xxviii) explained that "Malay political activities became more widespread on the Peninsula" after WWII, and Singapore "remained the centre of Malaya literary and journalistic activities". Headquartered in Singapore, *Utusan Melayu* was a source that reflected these discussions and ideological developments. I will elaborate on the historical context in more depth in Chapter 5.

Despite Yusok Ishak's portrait being on our Singapore dollar notes as the first President of Singapore, I never knew that he was the founder of the newspaper, let alone a newspaper with leftist anti-colonial leanings like *Utusan Melayu*. In this thesis, I seek to address these gaps and analyse the contents of *Utusan Melayu* from the framework of border thinking. I chose the issues between 1946-1948, as it represented the period when *Utusan*'s political leanings were developing towards anti-colonialism, before it had to accommodate to a changing environment which was political dominated by UMNO in the late 1950s (Z. Abdul Rahman 1988, 49). I also seek to spotlight the difficult realities and conversations behind Malay nationalism and anti-colonialism that were present in the newspaper, as well as grant epistemic authority to *Utusan* to speak about their experience of modernity/coloniality.

Singapore and decolonial studies

Aside from alternative histories and critical historiographies, there are significant works that explicitly synthesised scholarship about Singapore and decolonial frameworks. Efforts to put decolonial frameworks and scholarships in conversation with Singapore have been developing in other disciplines such as in Asian cultural studies (D.P.S. Goh 2015), aesthesis (Walter Mignolo and K. 2013), sociology and social theory (Leon Moosavi 2023) and efforts towards decolonising knowledge production in sociological theory (S.F. Alatas and Sinha 2017). Beyond these explicit engagements, there are important works that align with decolonial motives and methods but do not explicitly engage with decolonial scholarship, which will be summarised below.

A pioneering effort in interrogating colonial knowledge production in the Malay world was Syed Hussein Alatas' *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977). Published in 1977, Alatas' interrogation of the colonial construction of Malay, Filipino and Javanese natives influenced Edward Said's own *Orientalism*, which was published a year later (J. Byrd and Miri 2022, 1). His analysis interrogated the colonial creation of racial stereotypes that served to reinforced colonial ideology and capitalism. Alatas

(1971) had earlier published a critical, pioneering intervention where he problematised the sparkling image of Raffles in *Thomas Stamford Raffles: Schemer or Reformer?* by highlighting his political philosophy based on colonialism. As a colonial master and administrator, Raffles viewed the peoples in Southeast Asia within the lens of the civilising mission and how he intended to bring "progress" to the region. Contrary to the history of Raffles that I learnt as a Singaporean, which was how Raffles brought Singapore into an age of enlightenment and progress, Alatas also highlighted Raffles' incompetence as a leader and crimes he was involved in during his administration, such as his support for the opium trade and the Banjarmasin Affair[16]. Syed Hussein Alatas was a pioneer in interrogating the coloniality of knowledge production in the Malay world.

More recently, similar to Hong and Huang's work (2008), *Raffles Renounced* also questioned hegemonic state narratives of history. They did not refer to decolonial scholarship explicitly, but the collection adhered to a decolonial ethos. *Raffles Renounced: Towards a Merdeka History* (Sa'at, Joraimi, and Sai 2021) consisted of reflections, plays, interviews and articles. The collection put forward "*merdeka* history" as a framework, a history that is not diversified or dewesternised, which were approaches that the Bicentennial took; instead, it sought to overhaul frameworks that are relied upon by history, such as going beyond the nation-state framework and positioning Singapore as part of the Malay World, looking beyond Singapore as an inevitable product of capitalist logics, and actively forefronting feminist histories. Historian PJ Thum (2019) also did not explicitly engage with the modernity/coloniality world-system but his article highlighted how Singapore's independence can be considered a continuation of colonialism in Singapore – this is explicitly linked to the idea of coloniality. He (2019) argued that Singapore's governance, its authoritarianism and bureaucratic state, as well as its rhetorics and strategies used to justify PAP policies are evolutions of the rhetoric and strategies of the late-colonial British government.

Beyond Singapore, these conversations on a *merdeka* history complements frameworks such as *sejarah rakyat* put forward by Malaysian academic Syed Husin Ali (2017b). *Sejarah rakyat* as a framework already guides the publications, knowledge production and praxis of Malaysian organisations such as *Imagined Malaysia* and *Pusat Sejarah Rakyat*. *Sejarah rakyat* looks away from formal narratives of history – a history written by the victors, mainly the post-colonial elites. He proposed the conception of *sejarah rakyat*, which has been understood as people's history or history from below, as opposed to a history without people or a people without history (D. Wong 2020). With this current conception of providing agency and subjecthood of history to ordinary people, it resembles other frameworks such as subaltern history and history from below (Thompson 1963; Gani 2023).

[16] For more information on the Banjarmasin Affair, see Alatas (1971). Alatas illustrated that Raffles was involved in the suspicious acquisition of territory along Borneo coast by his friend, Alexander Hare, who was involved in corruption and forced labour.

Considering the discussions on border thinking and epistemologies of the South, *sejarah rakyat* and *merdeka* history have the potential to be part of decolonial methodology. This means focusing on the *rakyat* (people) or the subject from the border – beings who hold ontological and epistemological positions that are grounded in colonial wounds and imperial subordination, the wretched (Fanon 2004). Synthesising both frameworks of peoples' history and border thinking grants me the tools as a scholar looking at Malay history to cultivate and validate knowledge that is born in struggle against systemic injustices and oppressions caused by characteristics of coloniality – capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy (Grosfoguel 2009).

A note on positionality

As this thesis focuses on coloniality of knowledge, it is imperative that I recognise how being a PhD candidate in a university in the Global North leaves me open to many blindspots. Universities have played and continue to play a central role in furthering Eurocentric epistemology as the only source of valid knowledge and universities in the Global North as the only site of valid knowledge production (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu 2018). Being in the university has meant, the language I write in, the structure I write in, and what I am expected to produce at the end of the PhD journey, are all reflections and contributions to scholarship and academia, but none of this is necessarily the most accessible form of sharing knowledge with my community members. I personally, must make a conscious effort to be able to re-produce the discussions in this dissertation to be shared outside of academia. Ironically, the university also aided my unlearning and relearning as I had access to more critical ideas and scholars, which will be engaged with in Chapter 2. As a student in universities in the UK and a researcher in the National University of Singapore (NUS), I was also granted the opportunity and resources to engage in workshops and seminars within the Malay peninsula and beyond, where I was exposed to wider discussions on decoloniality[17].

Despite these blindspots, I also reflect on my position as a researcher, with the unique life experiences as a Singaporean Indian-Malay Muslim. I have spent most of my university education in the United Kingdom, which allows me to take on a sort of insider/outsider role (Mullings 1999). Being Singaporean, I am motivated to do this research as these are government narratives that I have grown up hearing and learning. While at the same time, as a minority who is racialised as part of the 'Malay Muslim' community, I observed the disconnects between the national narratives and my community's experiences. This allowed me to have a clearer understanding of how knowledge production can affect material life. Studying in the United Kingdom, especially in an institution like University of St Andrews, also puts me in a position of an 'outsider', but at the same time, grants me some critical

[17] Being in universities granted me the privilege and access to be able to learn directly from scholars that I look up to, not only in terms of their ideas but from the content of their character. Amongst them are my supervisor Dr Jasmine Gani, Prof Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Prof Abdullahi An-Na'im, Prof Syed Farid Alatas, Dr Roberto D. Hernández, Dr Azhar Ibrahim and more.

distance in researching about Singapore. Despite occupying institutions that maintain the coloniality of knowledge such as the University of St Andrews, I am cognisant of the peripheral position I am in – in terms of being and seeing – somewhat occupying the borders as well.

In line with the decolonial ethos of revitalizing marginal knowledges, I have chosen to study *Utusan Melayu*, a Malay newspaper written in the Jawi script, as a source of alternative history and border thinking. As will be elaborated in more depth in chapter 5, the Malay language was written in the Jawi script and due to modernising forces, Malay became standardised in the Roman script. Despite Jawi not being used officially, I still remember it being taught in *madrasah* (religious classes) until it suddenly stopped when I was in primary school. The fact that I can engage with English, Malay and Jawi was a great motivator for me to go forward with this thesis as it enabled me to engage with sources that are not usually referred to in history-making in Singapore.

In terms of exercising critical thinking in Singapore, I recognise the privilege that being in academia, in the UK, grants me despite its issues with wider accessibility. In Singapore, "historical research takes place in a context where the makers, gatekeepers and safe keepers possess a controlling influence on what histories, and whose histories, are written" (Loh and Liew 2010, 3). Han (2023, 60) also elaborated the many ways and cases of gatekeeping in Singapore, asserting that "in a system where there is control over archives and information, the dominant party can selectively amplify or obscure perspectives in accordance with their interests, propping up myths and stories that lend legitimacy to the party, its founders and the structures, literal and figurative, that they've built". Lack of information impedes Singaporeans' knowledge of our own histories, and eases those in power to broadcast their own claims and narratives, without any challenge or accountability (Han 2023, 86). There are critical discursive spaces in Singapore to an extent, but I recognise that being within academia in the UK affords a level of safety to explore these histories. With regards to these limitations, I have chosen materials that are readily available in the Singapore, Malaysian, and British archives and libraries.

This research project thus, means so much personally as I have the freedom to explore these ideas, supported and supervised by someone like my doctoral supervisor Dr Gani, who has been instrumental in nurturing these ideas and research interests. These reflections on positionality highlight the importance of our embodied experience. Who our primary interlocutors are affects the knowledge we (re)produce and play an important role in framing, facilitating, giving us permission to critique, as opposed to being limited, or self-censoring, even if done unconsciously. This PhD journey is a space for me to uncover and unlearn hegemonic narratives that I have grown up with and lived through, as well as engage directly with subjectivities of Singaporean Malay Muslims of the past that I have never been exposed to, which were critical, varied, flawed and dynamic. This project has granted me the confidence of being a researcher who is an agent myself, instead of having to occupy an 'unbiased' observer position, and to be someone "capable of or interested in research, or as having expert

knowledge about [myself] and [my] conditions" as Tuhiwai-Smith (2012, x) so eloquently puts it. In many ways, I hope that I have been able to embody the praxis of border thinking through this project – not just on paper but as a scholar.

Chapter Structures

With the theoretical and methodological framework laid out, the next chapter, Chapter 2 expands on the theoretical considerations that will guide this thesis, focusing on modernity/coloniality, coloniality of knowledge and Eurocentrism. Chapter 2 aims to highlight how coloniality of knowledge is a key aspect of the colonial matrix of power and how Eurocentrism is the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality. I categorise Eurocentrism into three different aspects – geographical, body-political and methodological Eurocentrism. This thesis argues that there have been responses to Eurocentrism that are not sufficient to decolonise knowledge production. To go beyond these insufficient responses, I argue that the epistemological position of colonial difference and thinking from the border must be considered, to not only critique modernity by exposing coloniality but going further to legitimise and cultivate marginalised knowledges and epistemologies. These considerations form a two-part decolonial framework that will guide the thesis: (1) identifying hegemonic narratives of modernity and what logics of coloniality they hide; and (2) engaging with border thinking.

Within the two-part framework, part (1) covers Chapter 3 and 4. In chapter 3, I seek to determine the hegemonic narratives of modernity found in the first history textbooks, created by the colonial government in British Malaya. These textbooks were printed for the English and Malay schools in Malaya. The textbooks that will be examined were stated in the section on 'Methodology'. I have extracted four foundational narratives of modernity that will then be compared to current-day knowledge production in Singapore to examine how the narratives have changed or are being reproduced.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the Singaporean post-colonial state's narrative on Singapore's experience of British colonisation to be able to contrast it with the colonial state's narrative of history in Chapter 3. I examine the exhibitions set up for the 2019 Bicentennial commemorations. The exhibitions had a critical potential as the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO), the government-sanctioned organiser of the commemorations, intended the commemorations to be more critical in remembering the darker side of colonialism in the region and thus sought to introduce indigenous sources or artifacts that told a different history. I argue that there were significant critical efforts within the Bicentennial – the overall purpose and narrative that was forefronted in the Bicentennial was to appreciate how far Singapore had developed without British colonial administration. However, I argue that the diversifying and dewesternising critiques still retained some narratives of modernity, to empower the local postcolonial elite and their vision of the future for the nation.

In Chapter 5, I focus on knowledge production from the colonial difference, namely *Utsuan Melayu.* While there were more critical efforts during the recent Bicentennial to include more indigenous sources and recognise the negative aspects of colonisation, the overall narrative of modernity that the civilising mission was beneficial for Singapore was preserved in Singapore's commitment to capitalist modernity. Part 2 of the decolonial framework states that epistemic justice can only occur when we go beyond diversifying and dewesternising and engage with knowledge production from the colonial difference. Chapter 5 moves on to part 2 of the framework, where I seek epistemic justice by engaging with the contents of the Malay newspaper *Utusan Melayu*, from the period of 1946 to 1948. This not only offers a critique on the partial stories of modernity by elucidating modernity/coloniality but also the potential for border thinking.

In Chapter 6, I bring the findings together and directly engage with the two research questions posed: firstly, how and why is coloniality insidious? Does coloniality of knowledge affect the 'real world'? Secondly, how can we find alternatives beyond modernity/coloniality? In the first section of this chapter, I illustrate how global colonialities are manifested materially in Singapore in the pursuit of modernity. The narratives of modernity not only ignore the realities of modernity/coloniality, but also justify preservation of these unequal hierarchies that 'benefit' a handful at the expense of other communities, epistemologies and the environment. In the second part of the chapter, I reflect on the contributions of the contents of *Utusan Melayu* that I have excavated in the previous chapters. *Utusan Melayu* granted us a fuller story of modernity/coloniality from the epistemological position of the Singapore Malay and offered foundational ideas towards alternatives for the future.

Finally, the conclusions reiterates that this thesis is part of a larger intent within a decolonising framework, to acknowledge the existence of modernity/coloniality and work towards moving beyond it through border thinking. The conclusion summarises the arguments within the thesis and reflects on what future research can be done. Ultimately, this thesis argues that diversifying and dewesternising are not critical enough and that epistemic justice can be attained by legitimating knowledge production from the borders.

Chapter 2
Theoretical framework: Modernity/Coloniality and Border Thinking

"[a]ll the energies poured into critical theory, into novel and demystifying theoretical praxes like the new historicism and deconstruction and Marxism have avoided the major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture, namely imperialism" – Edward Said (1993)

As mentioned in the introduction, I conceptualise a two-part theoretical decolonial framework that will guide me in this thesis. The first part would be identifying hegemonic narratives of modernity in the Singapore government's (both colonial and contemporary) writing of history and what logics of coloniality they hide. Upon analysing the contents of official colonial and contemporary history writing in Singapore, I argue that diversifying and dewesternising, as forms of critique against colonisation while still celebrating the rhetoric of modernity, do not effectively examine and dismantle logics of coloniality. This enables coloniality to be maintained and reproduced in different ways (Gani 2017). The second part of the framework calls for going beyond critiquing hegemonic narratives of modernity and engaging with knowledges from the 'borders' of modernity/coloniality (Anzaldúa 1987) – attaining epistemic justice (Shilliam 2016a, 376). In this thesis, I will be engaging with the Malay newspaper *Utusan Melayu.*

This chapter elucidates the theoretical considerations that guides this thesis, which are the modernity/coloniality world-system and the concept of border thinking. I will first delve into the conception of modernity/coloniality and clarify the conceptual differences of colonisation and coloniality. I then discuss how coloniality is linked to modernity. I clarify how Eurocentrism is linked to modernity/coloniality and what responses to Eurocentrism have been short of decoloniality. To go beyond Eurocentrism, I elaborate on the epistemic colonial difference (Walter Mignolo 2002) and the idea of decoloniality, which involves praxis like delinking and border thinking that allows us to move towards legitimising and cultivating subaltern knowledges and epistemologies that have been marginalised (Shilliam 2015, 7). The two-part framework will culminate in chapter 6 that will illuminate how coloniality of knowledge have material implications in Singapore and maintains the colonial matrix of power.

Modernity/coloniality: 'modernity' is not a neutral signifier

The impetus for the Bicentennial celebrations by the Singapore government was to consider how the colonial past had (or had not) impacted the present. This is based on the assumption that colonialism came to a definite conclusion as a historical period – colonisation was something that existed in the *past*, so Singapore can reflect on its positive and negative influences *now*. Colonisation is the full or partial control of the sovereignty of one nation or people by another, mainly by means of economic and political conquest, exploitation, genocide and/or settlements (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 143). With the attainment of independence, colonisation was indeed something that had legally ended.

However, beyond the physical colonial institutions, Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007) coined the term modernity/coloniality to conceptualise colonialism as a system of power, a world-system, that was formed and sustained beyond physical decolonisation – coloniality. As developed by decolonial scholars and practitioners (Quijano 2007, 120; Walter Mignolo 2011, 2; María Lugones 2007; Rivera Cusicanqui 2012; Wynter 2003), coloniality refers to the long-term patterns of power, that emerge as a result of modern colonialism, capitalism, and slavery that mainly shape racial and gender hierarchies, labour, culture, intersubjective relations, knowledge production and more (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 143). Fundamentally tied to 1492 and Europe's encounter with the Americas and the Atlantic Ocean through processes and systems of colonialism, slavery and capitalism, the conquest of the 'Americas' "began the constitution of a new world order, culminating, five hundred years later, in a global power covering the whole planet" (Quijano 2007, 168). Coloniality of power signified the colonial-like power relations that exists today, "the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension" (Walter Mignolo 2011, 2). Quijano (2007) argued that the modernity that Europe subscribes to and made hegemonic is constituted in the structures of colonial domination, hence, these two concepts go hand in hand: modernity/coloniality. Bhambra (2014, 115) agreed that modernity is "so deeply imbricated in the structures of European colonial domination over the rest of the world that it is impossible to separate the two". Mignolo and Walsh (2018) consolidated the conception of modernity/coloniality by elaborating that there is no modernity without coloniality as coloniality is constitutive of modernity. If they go hand in hand, this means that "the unfinished project of modernity carries over its shoulders the unfinished project of coloniality" (Walter Mignolo 2006, 312).

What then is the project of modernity? Modernity has been given a definitive temporal and spatial historical origin, which was in seventeenth century Europe, surrounding the processes of Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. The processes consolidated with the Industrial Revolution (Escobar 2010, 35-36). Modernity also holds definitive feature or characteristics as summarised by sociologist Stuart Hall (1992):

1. Secular forms of political power and authority and conceptions of sovereignty operating within defined territorial boundaries grew to be dominant, manifested in institutions like the modern nation-state (Weber 1964, 78).

2. A capitalist economy based on the large-scale production and consumption of commodities for the market, ownership of private property and the accumulation of capital (assets from investments or profits) on a systematic, long-term basis (Brown 1992). Philosophically, its foundations are characterised by the idea of progress and development (Escobar 2010, 6).

3. Moving away from the traditional social order, "with its fixed social hierarchies and overlapping allegiances, and the appearance of dynamic social and sexual division of labour.

In modern capitalist societies, this was characterised by new class formations, and distinctive patriarchal relations between men and women" (Hall and Gielben 1992, 6).

4. The decline of the religious world view, and the rise of secularism (Asad 2003). The notion of 'Man' is seen "as the foundation for all knowledge and order of the world, separate from the natural and divine" (Escobar 2010, 36).

5. Hall added two other aspects of modernity under the 'cultural', which was how the processes of the Reformation and the Enlightenment affected the ways of producing and classifying knowledge (Hall and Gielben 1992, 6). Modernity is associated with rationalisation, universalisation, and individuation (Escobar 2010, 6).

6. The other feature was the construction of cultural and social identities, referring to the sense of belonging, which draws people together into an 'imagined community'. He asserted that this was the construction of symbolic boundaries which defined who does not belong or who is excluded from it (Gellner 1965).

When modernity is seen as a project that aims at institutionalising these features (Asad 2003, 13), it is inevitable to recognise that a particular local history internal to Europe, has been universalised to become a global design (Escobar 2010, 37). Hallaq (2013, 13) eloquently commented that "the West lives somewhat more comfortably in a present that locates itself within a historical process that has been of its own creation". These features of modernity, dictated by the terms of the Enlightenment, industrial and technological revolutions, capitalism and the institution of the nation-state, were organically developed in Europe, whereas the rest of the world followed or had been pressured to. This was represented in Hegel's philosophy of history that "there is something distinctive and superior about the period of modernity, a period for which all previous history has been somehow preparatory" (O'Connor 2008, 181). As a hegemonic discourse and project determined by institutions and intellectuals of the West, the 'rest' did not have the privilege to draw on their own traditions, epistemologies and historical experiences to shape their own futures. This will be discussed in more depth in the subsection on 'Eurocentrism'.

The features of modernity clearly emerged from factors internal to Europe. Despite this, there have been efforts to refute modernity as synonymous with the West, conceding the possibility of being modern in culturally different ways – multiple modernities or alternative modernities (Eisenstadt 2000; Wittrock 1998). However, critics (Bhambra 2007; Schmidt 2006, 2008) have argued how this approach is still rooted in a Eurocentric vision. The multiple modernities approach argue that multiple non-Western modernities only emerge after the encounter with European modernities, preserving the West as the origin of modernity. Mignolo (2011) also argued that multiple modernities still retain the same framework of knowledge, that privileges Eurocentric modernity. It is just enunciated from different locations (for example, Egypt, India or other countries). What approaches like multiple modernities fail to realise is that the West was not already modern before the rest of the world but it is through the colonial relationship that modernity is formed. Bhambra (2007, 68) argued that the "modernity has to be understood as formed in and through the colonial relationship – colonisation was not simply an

outcome of modernity, or shaped by modernity, but rather modernity itself, the modern world developed out of colonial encounters" – a conception of modernity in congruence with the modern/colonial world-system.

Considering modernity as constitutive of coloniality shifts the formative moment of modernity away from the Enlightenment of the end of the 18th century but reveals the conquest and colonisation of America as "the point of origin of the capitalist world system, enabled by gold and silver from America; *the origin of Europe's own concept of modernity*" (Escobar, 2003, p.60, my emphasis). This recognition immediately reveals the relationship between the advent of modernity and colonial domination, how the Western project of modernity is dependent upon European colonisation over the majority of the world. The development of scientific thought, the exploration and 'discovery' of Europeans of other worlds, the expansion of trade, the establishment of colonies and the systematic colonisation of indigenous peoples since the sixteenth century are facets of modernity.

Here, I stress again that 'modernity' within modernity/coloniality is thus not a neutral signifier as it centres Eurocentric civilisational rhetoric and imaginations that serve to impose Western superiority and the West as a standard – Eurocentrism is the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality (Escobar, 2003, p.38,). Going back to the first research question, in the pursuit of a Eurocentric modernity, Singapore is inevitably going to reproduce coloniality as they are constitutive of one another. Without acknowledging the basic premise of modernity/coloniality, the Singaporean state separated the experience of colonisation from the pursuit of modernity and therefore resulted in being able to attain 'nuance'– "60 percent good, 40 percent bad" (T. Koh 2019).

Coloniality of knowledge within the colonial matrix of power

I have established that beyond the physical affair of colonisation, coloniality remains with the unfinished project of modernity. This larger colonial matrix of power is also called "coloniality of power", which looks at how the current asymmetrical global order was constructed and constituted into a racially hierarchised, Eurocentric, capitalist, patriarchal, heteronormative, Christian, modern power structure. Grosfoguel (2011, 19-20) expanded that it is an "entanglement or […] intersectionality of multiple and heterogenous global hierarchies (heterarchies) [that] includes sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy (of the European/non-European divide) transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures". Quijano (2007, 171) declared that "[C]oloniality of power is based upon 'racial' social classification of the world population under Eurocentered world power. But coloniality of power is not exhausted in the problem of 'racist' social relations. It pervaded and modulated the basic instances of the Eurocentered capitalist colonial/modern world power to become the cornerstone of this coloniality of power". Lugones (2007) argued not for an alternative gendered reading of modernity/coloniality but to understand that modernity/coloniality simultaneously disrupted existing

epistemologies and shaped new hierarchies of race, gender and sexuality. Gender was used, along with race, for colonial classification that created hierarchies to justify subjugation. Her conceptualisation of modernity/coloniality was that with decolonisation, gender-based domination did not disappear but was integrated into the racial hierarchies. Grosfoguel (2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argued that instead of the emergence of the 'postcolonial world', there was the translation of visible direct colonialism into invisible global coloniality. Ndlovu-Gatsheni further added that the colonial matrix of power can be divided into three: the coloniality of power (Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019), coloniality of knowledge (Chiumbu 2017) and coloniality of being[18] (Wynter 2003). As I seek to interrogate narratives in Singapore's history writing, this thesis is specifically concerned about coloniality of knowledge.

Coloniality of knowledge is a unit of analysis of decoloniality that looks at issues of epistemology and knowledge systems. Accompanying modernity/coloniality was the rhetoric of salvation, which resulted in the systemic repression of beliefs, ideas, images, symbols or different modes of knowing that were not useful or threatening to global colonisation (Quijano 2007, 120). Alongside the silencing, colonisers also expropriated indigenous knowledges such as knowledges with regards to mining, agriculture, engineering, and production to aid colonial expansion and monopolised knowledge production. Silencing other forms of knowledges and experiences by relegating them as inferior was a means of social and cultural control (Grosfoguel 2007). The killing, silencing, annihilation, or devaluing of a knowledge system is also referred to as 'epistemicide' (Patin and Yeon 2019).

Inevitably, when other epistemologies were relegated to 'barbarian' or 'primitive' margins, this also made the colonisers the markers and standards of progress (Tucker 2018, 220). Coloniality of knowledge acknowledges that modern epistemology was historically founded on the assumption that white European males were the sole arbiters of knowledge and truth, claims of the rationality of the 'first' modern subject. Castro-Gomez (Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 2008) termed this claim as the "zero-point". This turning point consolidated Europeans as observers whose scientific methods, morals and ethics overrode all other epistemologies and ontologies. Western epistemology remains in our common sense – our ways of being, speaking, listening, and knowing are rooted in Euro-American ideals that are sustained by Eurocentrism (Chiumbu 2017). Eurocentrism is thus, the knowledge form of coloniality. The hegemonic episteme privileges the different characteristics of Eurocentrism that will be elaborated in the next section – universalism, neutrality, delocalised knowledge, and prioritising positivist methodology. Analysing the coloniality of knowledge in Singapore by identifying Eurocentric historical narratives as well as the practices oriented to sever the 'wretched' from their material and

[18] The coloniality of being inquires on the making of modern subjectivities and issues of the self, the human ontology.

discursive past and memories synthesises postcolonial theory's emphasis on agency with world-system theory's emphasis on structure (Grosfoguel 2011, 17).

School of Autonomous Knowledge

A critical tradition that has emerged from Southeast Asia, specifically in Singapore and Malaysia itself, is the 'Alatas school of autonomous knowledge', based on the works of S.H. Alatas and consolidated by his son, Syed Farid Alatas and his students from the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore. Briefly, in this subsection, I will highlight how the autonomous knowledge approach goes beyond the decolonial studies' focus on Eurocentrism and why despite this, I will still utilise modernity/coloniality as a framework in this thesis.

Beyond Eurocentrism (which will be discussed in the next section), autonomous knowledge questions other overlooked hegemonic orientations of knowledge production. With the persistence of coloniality of knowledge within knowledge production in the Malay World[19], S.H. Alatas wrote on the need for an autonomous social science tradition in Asia (S.F. Alatas 2022, 8). Here, he (1974) argued that even after physical decolonisation, there still remained "captive minds" within segments of contemporary Asian academic production. The captive mind lacks creativity and ability to raise original problems and is alienated from major societal issues and its own traditions. It is basically the "wholesale importation of ideas from the Western world to eastern societies" without due consideration of their socio-economic context (S.H. Alatas 1974). Similar to the 'colonisation of the mind' (Ngugi 1986), Alatas (1969) termed this self-induced captivity as "intellectual imperialism[20]".

Syed Farid Alatas expanded on the foundations his father laid to consolidate the 'Alatas approach' into a school of thought – school of autonomous knowledge. He argued that there are multiple strands of dominant hegemonic orientations in knowledge productions. Eurocentrism is often seen as the biggest problematic hegemonic orientation of knowledge production, however, Alatas (2022, 6) argued other hegemonic orientations can be discerned when we shift our focus to Third World knowledge production. Other hegemonic orientations may or may not be related to colonialism or Eurocentrism[21] but "often predate colonialism by centuries, orientations such as androcentrism, traditionalism, ethnonationalism, sectarianism and so on" (Leon Moosavi and Alatas 2023, 5). By elaborating on other hegemonic orientations in addition to Eurocentrism, autonomous knowledge seeks to overcome not only, Eurocentrism, but other hegemonic knowledges. This expands and adds to the conception of border thinking, which will be elaborated later. In terms of theory building and concept formation, it advocates for the production of "theories and concepts that are relevant, that emerge from

[19] S.H. Alatas theorised colonisation (1956, 9) and reproduction of coloniality by the Malay post-colonial elite (S.H. Alatas 1977, 159-163).
[20] To read more on intellectual imperialism, see Syed Farid Alatas (2001, 61-62).
[21] Some of these hegemonic orientations were exacerbated or put in service of the global colonial capitalist world order.

our own surroundings, our own traditions and that are relevant to the understanding of our problems" as well as "rooted in the moral concerns" (Leon Moosavi and Alatas 2023, 5). Essentially, this school of thought, emerging in the Malay World, advocates for autonomy from all hegemonic orientations in knowledge creations.

The school of autonomous knowledge speaks directly to coloniality of knowledge as a unit of analysis. It complements or even stretched the concept of border thinking as it addresses a wider range of hegemonies within knowledge production from the colonial difference. As will be explored in more depth in the subsection titled 'delinking and border thinking', border thinking grants us the tools to overcome Eurocentrism within modernity/coloniality and autonomous knowledge allows us to interrogate intellectual imperialism and other hegemonic orientations within border thinking – such as ethnocentrism and more.

While the school of autonomous knowledge expands on the conception of border thinking, in this thesis, I still choose to be heavily guided by the Latin American school of decolonial studies as the modern/colonial world system paradigm is extremely useful. While the Malay studies school of autonomous knowledge allows for more discussion within coloniality of knowledge, the decolonial school allows me to situate coloniality of knowledge within the larger paradigm of modernity/coloniality. The application of the modernity/coloniality paradigm within decolonial studies allows me to discern between dewesternising and decolonising in knowledge production.

I also still centre Eurocentrism within modernity/coloniality in this thesis, precisely because it was centred by both the colonial and post-colonial Singapore state. In examining Singapore's national rhetoric and its denial of the existence of a modernity that is deeply imbricated in coloniality, decolonial studies is the most relevant theoretical framework that offers tools to examine the history writing of the post-colonial Singapore state and how this coloniality of knowledge reflects onto the material modern/colonial world. Within this theory chapter, I will explore how coloniality of knowledge and autonomous knowledge, two critical traditions developed from the Global South, speak to each other and how the Malay Studies school of autonomous knowledge expands my understanding of border thinking. Viewing *sejarah rakyat* (people's history) as a potential source of border thinking, is also a form of creative exercise that goes beyond 'captivity'.

Eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality

The centrality of the West in the advent of modernity created the mainstream assumption of inherent superiority in many aspects, in European governance and political structures, economic institutions and practices, culture and epistemologies (Ferguson 2012; Huntington 1997). There were numerous pre-existent world-economies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that made up the long-distance trade system that stretched through the Mediterranean into the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, across the Indian Ocean, stopping at the Strait of Malacca, before reaching the Far East (Abu-Lughod 1989,

12). Without these pre-existing transnational trade routes and economies, literally starting from 'point zero', Europe's colonial ventures would not have amassed the wealth that it did. Despite mainstream belief, there was neither a historical exception or necessity that allowed the West to attain hegemonic status compared to the rest nor an inherent deficiency in the cultures and economies of the "rest" that caused its demotion as world powers. The development of Western capitalism and colonial accumulation and conquest allowed the West to consolidate its material gains that were derived from unequal development (ibid, 371). Fundamental assumptions of colonised nations such as how these nations were unable to develop at the level and standard of the West due to their inherent deficiencies, are due to how knowledge was and continues to be produced and disseminated (Said 1991).

Eurocentrism is thus, a system of knowledge which was made globally hegemonic (Escobar 2010, 39). Europe is "written in as the originator of all developments (democracy, sovereignty, human rights) and … that narrative structures the temporal and spatial hierarchies through which we understand the development of the international"(Capan 2018). Mignolo (2007, 451) referred to Eurocentrism as the Totality of modernity defining Totality as something that "negates, exclude[s], occlude[s] the difference and possibilities of other totalities". Grosfoguel (2012, 22) characterised the Totality of modernity as form of Eurocentric fundamentalism, defining fundamentalism to be "perspectives that assumes their own cosmology and epistemology to be superior and as the only source of truth, inferiorising and denying equality to other epistemologies and cosmologies, then Eurocentrism is not merely a form of fundamentalism but the hegemonic fundamentalism in the world today". This claim to universality then structures the temporal and spatial hierarchies of the international (Capan 2018).

One of the earliest uses of Eurocentrism was by the Egyptian Marxist Samir Amin (1989), within the context of dependency models in economics. Amin was exploring how Western capitalism led to global capitalist development that was the result of subjugation of "Other" peoples and cultures. This inevitably led to the underdevelopment of the periphery (Global South) and the development of the core (Global North). Social scientists from across disciplines such as sociology (S.F. Alatas and Sinha 2017) and anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1989) have been adopting the term to illustrate a way of seeing *and* not-seeing that is rooted in a several claims and experiences that are rooted in European or Anglo-American values and experiences. Hobson (2007, 93) added that Eurocentrism is the assumption that Europe is at the centre of all things and it maintains its position through generating a "logic of immanence". It then spreads its logic globally to "remake the world in its own image". Succinctly, Eurocentrism is "a set of practices – scientific, cultural, political – which overtly (mostly in the era of colonial imperialism) or tacitly (mostly in the postcolonial era) seek to establish and maintain the primacy of post-Enlightenment European political and epistemic culture at the expense of alternative political systems and epistemologies" (Vasilaki 2012, 4).

For the purposes of this thesis, I have synthesised key discussions of Eurocentrism into three distinct categories: The first is (1) the geographical centring of Eurocentrism, where there is an exclusive application of the "Western" gaze on the international. This focuses on the question 'where is knowledge produced?' and which locations are prioritised. The second category is (2) the body-politic of Eurocentrism, questioning 'who is producing knowledge'? Racial/ethnic and feminist subaltern perspectives are useful in responding to this problem as they position the subject that speaks in a particular location in the power structure. The third category is (3) methodological Eurocentrism, where the methodologies and epistemologies used in academia are rooted in Eurocentric knowledge systems. I discuss the responses to Eurocentrism after this section, as they are relevant to analysing how the current Singapore government sought to critique colonial knowledge production.

(1) Geographical centering of Europe: Historical and Cultural Avatars

Rutazibwa and Shilliam (2018, 2) offered a division of Eurocentrism into imaginary Eurocentrism and methodological Eurocentrism. In my analysis, imaginary Eurocentrism is similar to the categorisation of knowledge production offered by other decolonial scholars – geo- and body politics of knowledge (Walter Mignolo 2000). Imaginary Eurocentrism refers to questions of the location or locus of knowledge. Where does knowledge come from? From where do theorists and practitioners think? Why is Western knowledge universal and objective while other knowledges are considered provincial and situated? Why has Eurocentered epistemology been successful in hiding its own geo-historical and bio-graphical location? To be more precise, I synthesise these categories to be more explicit, and divide imaginary Eurocentrism into firstly, the geographical centring of Europe and secondly, the body politic of knowledge.

While knowledge from the West should not be inherently faulted, the geographical centring of Europe within Eurocentrism assigns superiority and exceptionality to Europe, and by extension the Global North (Wallerstein 1997). 'Civilisation' and the status of 'human' were limited to the standards set by Europe and those who did not live according to the systems were relegated to 'savage' nations that needed to be salvaged. Sabaratnam (2013) elaborated on historical and cultural 'avatars' of Eurocentrism.

The historical avatar of Eurocentrism is broadly understood as Europe being the principal subject of World History (Sabaratnam 2013), one anchored in a linear progression from Ancient Greece and Rome to modern Europe, creating a universal world history that developed modernity. This avatar of Eurocentrism explains why in Raffles Girls School in Singapore, I was constantly surrounded by symbols within Greek mythology such as the statue of Athena at the school entrance and singing the school songs which referred to 'High Olympus', 'Prometheus Flame' and the 'gryphon'. Raffles, the British colonial administrator, was somehow directly linked to Greek Mythology, in a "progressive linearity of straight time" (Rao 2020, 16). Mignolo (2000, x) specified that Eurocentrism is the

"perverse belief that the unfolding of world history has been of one temporality and would, of necessity, lead to a present that corresponds to the Western civilisation that Hegel summarised in his celebrated lessons in the philosophy of history". Buzan and Little (2001) succinctly summarizes Eurocentrism as "world history centred on Europe". More specifically, Europe is centred even during periods when it was not a key player in shaping global politics. With Europe at the centre, the emergence of capitalism and industrialisation in the West positioned Europe as the bastion of modernity (Thiong'o 1993, xvi). Non-Western societies were either 'outside' of history or needed to catch up with Western development. By extension, the assumption is that Europe is the origin and originator of global developments such as capitalism, states, sovereignty, security, and the international system. The events outside of Europe become derivative of events that have already occurred in Europe (O'Connor 2008).

In conversation with historical avatars, culturalist avatars of Eurocentrism centre civilisational thinking stemming from the Enlightenment, which assigns the West as secular, rational Christian, liberal democratic and civilised as opposed to the 'Other' that is traditional, spiritual, barbaric, and mystical. There is a binary created between the 'West' and the 'non-West' (Sabaratnam 2013). This civilisational thinking relegated knowledges of the non-West to outside of modernity and needed to conform to the standards set. Civilisational thinking justified and constituted the civilising mission and the project of modernity – the development of scientific thought, the 'discovery' explorations by Europeans, moving away from tradition or religions, expansion of trade, implementing good governance and the emergence of bureaucracy as well as the creation of nation-states.

Both cultural and historical avatars of Eurocentrism led to Europe being at the top of the global racial hierarchy, setting the 'standard of civilisation'. Civilisation linked with progress "became a scale by which the countries of the world were categorised into "civilised", barbarous, and savage spheres" (Gong 1984, 55). This binary was maintained and reproduced in *The Spirit of the Laws* by Montesquieu, which was common among Enlightenment thinkers from Wolff ('civilised' and 'barbarous' nations) to Kant ('civilised' and 'savage' nations) (Tarazova 2012, 919). Nineteenth century lawyers and commentators on legal aspects of international affairs considered only 'civilised nations' as full members of the family of nations, while 'barbarous nations' has less legal capacity, effectively only being partially recognised as a member of the family of nations. The 'savages' were believed to be "doomed to fall by the wayside", not capable of acting 'human' and thus, unable to govern nations, let alone themselves (Gong 1984, 55-57). The idea of progress, coupled with the standard of civilisation, provided the justification to European powers to expand globally to civilise backward peoples (Pitts 2005).

Race is undoubtedly intertwined with the concept of civilisation as the differences between the colonisers and the colonised were placed in the power structure of race – "a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others"(Quijano and

Ennis 2000, 533). The 'discovery' expeditions in the Americas produced new historical social identities that set the foundations for civilisational thinking promoted by the Enlightenment and subsequently, the later stages of colonisation. Terms such as Spanish and Portuguese, and later on, European, which used to refer to geographic origins, soon acquired racial connotations. In defining racialised civilisation hierarchies, the idea of the "West" was concretised when it was re-presented back to colonised nations. In this way, colonisation not only meant the imposition of Western authority over lands, governments, economies and systems of law, it meant the imposition of Western authority over indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures, which includes not only determining which knowledges are valid but also appropriating indigenous knowledges and re-presenting them as Western discoveries or knowledges, the authorship and authority of their representations (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 63).

In Chapter 3, I illustrate how this category of Eurocentrism was manifested in the colonial textbooks with the literal centring of the British in the writing of Malayan history. The writing of history also adhered to the neoliberal and imperialist temporal logics, reflecting the gradual progress from primitivity to civilisation.

(2) Body-politics of knowledge: the Eurocentric 'I'

Straddling the line between geography and epistemology, the "body-politics of knowledge" is a term used by sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel, following Fanon (1967) and Anzaldúa (1987) to express that knowledges are always situated. Race and feminist subaltern scholars have asserted that every single person speaks from a particular location within the power structures, and no one is beyond the hierarchies of race, class, gender and spirituality found in the modern world system. Enrique Dussel, a Latin American philosopher, named this positioning as "geopolitics of knowledge" (2003) while Black feminist scholars called this "afro-centric epistemology" (Patricia Hill Collins 2000). Even earlier in the century, Du Bois (1925) introduced the concept of the global "colour line" to outline the global structure of exploitation of labour, based on the hierarchy of race. He centred race and racism as the fundamental organising principles of international politics. He elaborated that the "lived experience" was legitimate as knowledge claims. The "veil" referred to the "episteme of the global colour line" (Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015), which symbolises the lived experience of racism. While everyone within the veil can understand the experiences within and outside of it, it is difficult for those outside of the veil to truly understand the Black experience, which makes the experience of the subjugated legitimate in terms of knowledge production and claims. This is also similar to Mignolo's border thinking (2011), where those at the border, geographically and/or epistemologically, are able to effectively delink and be epistemically disobedient. In general, body-politics of knowledge asks the questions: who is allowed to speak? Who produces 'legitimate' knowledge? Who is always given a platform or privilege to speak?

In contrast to this positionality, a Eurocentric body politics hides the "I". The historical avatar of Eurocentrism maintains that European history is universal, the natural progression of time, neutral and objective. By implication, this means that the subject speaking from the position of 'Europe' is also allocated these assumptions. Modern philosophy is based on Rene Descartes' (1912) famous phrase "I think, therefore I am" – the key moment in the history of western thought where the *western man* (white, male, Christian) replaces God as creator and source of Truth. Man's own rationality became the foundation of knowledge in European modernity (Grosfoguel 2011). For Descartes, the "I" is able to claim a universal, God-eyed view of knowledge that is beyond time and space. This subject is given the assumption of objectivity and neutrality because it hides the local and particular perspective under an abstract universalism. This Cartesian philosophy still serves as a criterion for knowledge production manifested in the object-subject split and the myth that the researcher from the West or using Western methods and/or epistemology can produce unbiased knowledge, which will be elaborated in the next subsection. It reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge and the source of 'civilised' knowledge (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 66). This point of view has been referred to as epistemology of the zero point, that hides the local under an abstract universalism (Castro-Gomez 1995). The concept implied that "I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 252). This epistemic position is called the "ego politics of knowledge" (Grosfoguel 2007, 214).

On the contrary, when knowledge is situated in the geo- and/or body-politics of knowledge, they are often dismissed as biased, unscientific, unserious and therefore, inferior knowledge. This also confines other knowledges to the particular and can never achieve the universal. Eurocentric knowledge production is thus largely embedded in racialised discourses. The Cartesian philosophy is so embedded in modern knowledge institutions that it affects the power dynamic present in knowledge production today: who dominates the selection of speakers and experts in conferences, who speaks for whom, whose knowledge is closest to or recognised as the 'facts'. The Western man, and the rest who are in close proximity to whiteness, is offered epistemic privilege.

In addition to that, the difference between the geographical centring and the body-politic is also a question of the epistemic location rather than social location. Someone socially located on the oppressed side of power relations does not necessary think epistemically from a subaltern epistemic location. As Grosfoguel (2009, 14) rightly pointed out, it is the success of the modern/colonial world-system that made subjects in the socially located oppressed side think epistemically like those in the hegemonic position. As discussed in the introduction, Alatas (1974) decried 'the captive mind' of Asian intellectuals, when he elaborated that people from the Global South still deferred to Northern ideas and epistemologies despite the physical liberation of territories. He suggested that to overcome Northern paradigms and frameworks, those from the Global South or thinking from the border should think with a 'creative mind'. The creative mind to Alatas entails dismantling Eurocentric descriptions of the

representation of the Global South as well as fresh, original analyses of the local context (1977). I suggest that Alatas' call for the "creative mind" is similar to Mignolo's concept of "delinking", which will be explored in later sections. In this sense, it is also accurate to say that the epistemological South can be present in the geographical North, with many scholars and activists thinking and acting at the "border" despite being socially located in a position of hegemony. This aspect of Eurocentrism is important within the discussions of border thinking, which will be elaborated in the later part of this chapter.

(3) Methodological Eurocentrism

Last but not least, beyond the geographical centring of Europe and considering the body-politic of knowledge, methodological Eurocentrism draws from a particular knowledge system with specific rules and values. Methodological Eurocentrism refers to the systemic reproduction of specific tools and approaches to ascertain knowledge. This involves privileging specific scholars and their works, specific theories and concepts that prefer the "rational, falsifiable and other linear, over other sources of knowledges as the basis of science" (Rutazibwa and Shilliam 2018). This theory of knowledge is derived from empiricism and uses the scientific paradigm of positivism (Amin and Moore 1989, 154-8). Positivism is an approach to society that aims to emulate the natural sciences using scientific methods and quantitative means to examine and understand the social world of human beings and societies. It emphasises the scientific method such as logical reasoning and empirical experience as the only sources of knowledge. This framework sees the world as deterministic and operates by laws of cause and effect that can be discerned. Positivism puts objective knowledge of society as something possible while normative visions of morality and ethics are considered subjective and irrational (Chilisa 2012, 26).

Stemming from the same family, is post-positivism, influenced by a philosophy called critical realism. Post-positivism, like positivism, assume that there is a reality independent of our thinking that can be studied objectively through the scientific method. The difference is that post-positivists argue that all observation is fallible and so reality cannot be known with certainty. Observations are theoretical and influenced by researcher's biases and worldviews, so objectivity can be achieved by using multiple observations and data to get closer to the Truth (Chilisa 2012, 27).

The assumptions behind positivism (and post-positivism) are based around understanding of the subject-object relations. The first supposition is that the subject is an isolated individual, objective and able to discern fact and produce knowledge. The second is that the 'object' is a category that is separate from the subject individual and is mutually exclusive and external to the subject. Considering the cultural and historical avatars of Eurocentrism discussed above, with Europe as the origin and originator of all developments in the international sphere, epistemologically, the primacy of Europe allows it and everyone who associates with it the position of the 'object'. This further justifies the

temporal and spatial hierarchies found in the development of the international – the 'West' and the 'non-West'. This is exactly why Stuart Hall (1992) argued that Eurocentric epistemology makes it possible to characterise and classify societies into categories, for societies to be represented, to compare societies to a model and to rank societies based on a criterion of evaluations. Thus, the alterities are established by the period of "discovery and reproduced and sustained through Eurocentrism as a mode of organising knowledge" (Capan 2017).

In addition, methodological eurocentrism and its privileging of positivism has resulted in the suppression of alternative modes of knowledge and thereby, universalising itself. Methodological Eurocentrism thus, justifies the other two aspects of Eurocentrism: it allows for the centring of Europe as knowledge authority and the ego politics of knowledge. On top of organising knowledge and societies into hierarchies, methodological Eurocentrism delegitimises other forms of knowledge production and methodologies as 'unscientific' and therefore inferior knowledge. This relegates non-Western subjectivities or histories to the particular and demotes the East to the realms of barbarism and savagery. Methodological Eurocentrism has material implications such as propping up the civilisational hierarchy that places the West, with its rational culture and institutions (for example, democracy, capitalism, rule of law, individualism and science) as identifiers of civilisation. The Rest are uncivilised, developing, authoritarian, superstition, collectivism and lawlessness (Hobson 2012). A manifestation of this can be seen in Chapter 3, where local works of history are deemed 'unscientific' and thus, not considered as legitimate knowledge. Methodological eurocentrism was also the main reason for the production of official 'scientific' textbooks so that the natives could be taught the 'proper' version of their own histories.

These categories of Eurocentrism highlight the various ways epistemic injustice and racialised inequalities have accompanied the project of modernity/coloniality (Shilliam 2016b, 376). Without considering these different aspects of Eurocentrism holistically as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality, responses to Eurocentrism result in diversifying and dewesternising, which will be elaborated in the next subsection.

Responses to Eurocentrism

Modernity and its knowledge form, Eurocentrism, has not been without its critiques and responses. In this section, I explore the necessary responses to Eurocentrism, however, I argue that these responses do not consider the modernity/coloniality complex and the colonial difference, which make these responses lacking. In the study of the textbooks and the Bicentennial, we see some of these responses manifesting.

(1) Diversifying: De-centering Europe

The natural response to the geographical centring of Europe is decentring or "provincialising" it, as Chakrabarty (2000) aptly described. Using the field of International Relations (IR) as an example, there is a growing engagement with non-Western political views and histories to produce a "global IR", one that included a diversity of voices, histories, and worldviews. Acharya and Buzan (2010, 18-19) stated that non-Western IR exists but is 'hidden', and Tickner (2003b) concurred that IR has been silent about the Third World. Global IR distinguishes itself from mainstream IR by prioritising local or cultural standpoints and systems of thought from different regions globally. The emerging Global IR paradigm investigates why regional non-Western politics and political experiences have been marginalised in IR theory and how there can be a new IR theory that is more inclusive and holistically steeped in the local, regional contexts. There have been efforts to include important political figures and concepts or issues from the non-Western world from Latin American (Tickner 2003a), Middle Eastern (Karpat 1968), Asian (Acharya and Buzan 2010) and African (Odoom and Andrews 2017) thinkers. There are numerous works highlighting political thought about the international stemming within Asia, ranging from lndia, China and Japan. The Indian political philosopher, Chatterjee (1993) discussed the central contradiction of nationalism in India: while being used to attain freedom from European domination, nationalism still remained within the epistemological cage of post-Enlightenment rationalist discourse. He explicitly pointed out how Third World nationalism was not as emancipatory as it claimed to be as it was turned into state ideology to legitimise the rule of the ruling classes and propelling India towards modernisation. Jenco (2016) centred the Chinese experiences and ideas on social and political dilemmas. Instead of reproducing Eurocentric knowledge in Chinese form, this edited book sought to "universalise" Chinese thought, breaking the boundaries of Chinese and non-Chinese thought.

These works are invaluable as they are a rich addition to the current Eurocentric mainstream and these scholarships provide a nuanced analysis of political thought from across the globe. The unifying goal within the paradigm of Global IR is to challenge mainstream IR that does not obviously include voices from the Global South. It provides an avenue to de-Westernise inquiries and topics and deconstruct the spatio-temporal ordering of events as it is presented. Even within these works, there are discussions on who the scholars of the Global South are and the Eurocentric labels of regions. What determines 'African'? Would Morocco's experience be like that of Tanzania? Bringing in 'non-Western' perspectives and experiences into IR does not resolve the ethnocentrism of IR and the geographical issue of focusing on European perspectives or experiences of the international.

However, if we are not careful, global IR could merely be diversifying IR. The examples given above are critical in that they interrogated the 'international' and Eurocentric roots of political terms. The decolonial in IR would focus on how imperialism and colonialism are core processes in the rise of the modern state system and/or global capitalist economy (Walter Mignolo 2002). Alongside

questioning why there is a lack of African, Asian or Latin American theorists or scholars pushing for a truly 'international' IR, there should also be a thorough investigation on the impact of Western imperialism on indigenous systems of knowledge production in the Global South. Diversifying IR, without a decolonial critique, has implications on how we study non-Western parts of the world: the Western episteme remains intact but with new contents. Without interrogating diversification, we unconsciously interpret indigenous epistemologies through a Western lens. The hegemonic ontology of the West might be disrupted but "the epistemic privilege of the First World" (Walter Mignolo and Escobar 2010) is still maintained. Without considering the colonial matrix of power within Global IR, coloniality of knowledge is bound to be reproduced (Tucker 2018, 216).

(2) Dewesterinising: Non-European modernities

Aside from fitting different forms of thought into the mainstream, such diversifying paradigms could also reproduce their own versions of hegemony or imperialism. As Vasilaki (2012, 7) rightly highlights, such paradigms are merely "mirror-image of the logic underpinning Western dominance: based on the idea of uniqueness of a 'special' civilisation, culture or nation, its 'special' place in the world and its 'special' mission, they often produce their own versions of hegemony and imperialism". Bilgin (2016, 494), using Amin's conception, defines this as "Eurocentrism as consciousness". Walter Mignolo (2011) and Dirlik (2013) have also differentiated these paradigms as multiple or alternative modernities. Different narratives of modernity are brought forward within the same principles and politics of knowledge. At the heart of it, alternative modernities can be described as the same frameworks of knowledge enunciated from different locations, the framework still privileging modernity (Walter Mignolo 2011). Alternative modernities are offered but decolonial scholars urge scholars and practitioners to go further and provide alternatives *to* modernity/coloniality, questioning the assumptions and darker side of modernity – coloniality. Wallerstein (1997) defined efforts to highlight progress and modernisation outside 'Europe' while remaining within the same conceptual grids as 'anti-Eurocentric Eurocentrism' or as Mignolo labelled it 'non-European modernities'. The different perspectives on the international or the experience of modernity is not only a question of physical geographical location but also the power differentials and body-politic of knowledge.

This is how Mignolo conceptualised dewesternisation (2012): at the basic level, it is a political delinking from economic decisions of the West but still retaining practices of capitalism and the idea of development remains unquestioned. In dewesternisation, post-colonial countries are making their own independent decisions regarding politics of development and economic control of the state – delinking from the Western imperative. Grosfoguel (2011) added that dewesternisation is a kind of response to Eurocentric modernity, with post-colonial states seeking non-Eurocentric modernities – countering obvious Western modernisation paradigms but internalising and maintaining selective aspects of modernity/coloniality. This is manifested in the establishment of alternative global political-

economic formations such as BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the Asian Infrastructural and Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI) (Kho 2017).

An example would be the idea of 'Asian Values'. This became prominent in the beginning of the 1990s in an attempt to counter modernisation theory. It was led by prime ministers of Malaysia and Singapore who declared human rights as culturally relative to the West (Glück 2015). 'Asian values' separate Asia and the Western world based on their value orientations: placing society, community, and loyalty to the extended family above the individual; valuing order instead of freedoms and contestations; hard work, liberal economics and appointed authority instead of democracy and popular vote (Jenco 2013). Despite 'Asia' being extremely diverse, these values are related to Confucianism, instead of Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, or other religions that exist in the region. While countering the Western modernisation paradigm, it had internalised aspects of modernity/coloniality that remained unquestioned – internalising the civilising mission, the myth of the lazy native (specifically, the Malays and the Filipinos) and the idea of economic development. This highlights the 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 2006) in dewesternisation that essentialises modernity – either with a 'absolute exteriority' to modernity or adopting selected characteristics of modernity as a political strategy that empowers, the ruling elite (D.P.S. Goh 2012).

(3) Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism

Dewesternisation is thus, a form of pluralised or alternative modernity, which retains the Totality or fundamentalism of modernity. I argue that if dewesternisation is a key response of the 'non-West' to modernity, then postmodern criticism of modernity is one of the key European responses to modernity. This thesis does not focus theoretically on postmodernism and its critiques of Eurocentrism[22]. However, I will briefly engage in some of the discussions by postcolonial and decolonial scholars that highlighted how critical theory have not come to terms with its colonial erasures despite its critiques of Eurocentrism.

Postmodernism provides useful tools for critiquing modernity, however decolonial scholars have argued that it remains within the Eurocentric body-politic of knowledge as postmodernism does not recognise modernity as modernity/coloniality (Maldonado-torres 2004). Mignolo (2007, 451) wrote that "Quijano acknowledges that postmodern thinkers already criticized the modern concept of Totality; but this critique is limited and internal to European history and the history of European ideas". In an earlier work, Mignolo (2000, 37) labelled this modern criticism of modernity (postmodernity) as "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism". I use Foucault as an example to highlight his own colonial unconscious. Foucault was writing from what Mignolo conceptualised as an 'imperial difference'

[22] For more in depth discussion on postmodernism as a "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism" (Walter Mignolo 2000, 37), see Dussel (2008) and Tlostanova and Mignolo's (2012) discussions on poststructuralism and Marxism.

(2002, 58). Foucault's Eurocentrism was clear in his selective critique of modernity while still relying on modernity itself (Walter Mignolo 2007). He characterised the formation of power-knowledge regimes as originating within Europe, and highlighted the development of the epistemology of modernity in a way that was blind to its colonial context (Alcoff 2007, 80). Venn (2009) highlighted how Foucault largely focused on discourses and key works of German ordoliberals and American neoliberals when critiquing liberalism and neoliberalism. He neglected the reason for the growth and effects of both liberalism and neoliberalism on the rest of the world, effectively ignoring the role and processes of colonialism in these developments. Young (2001, 397) also noticed the absence of the colonial world in his work, "for the most part, he [Foucault] preserved a scrupulous silence on such issues and has, as a result, been widely criticised for alleged eurocentrism". He pointed this out in contrast to Foucault's awareness of France's policies towards its colonies and violence in Vietnam and Algeria. Foucault's analyses of knowledge and power lacked an understanding of how racism and colonisation were at the root of Enlightenment discourses (Alcoff 2007). These apparent omissions were critiqued by scholars within the postcolonial tradition (Bhambra 2014, 115). Said's (1991) *Orientalism* and his analysis of power, authority and governmentality was highly influenced by Foucault's work but its original contribution was that fact that these concepts were used to understand the dynamics of the colonial world – a lived reality for many peoples. This could be considered epistemic delinking (Walter Mignolo 2012) or utilising the creative mind (S.H. Alatas 1977). The limitation of postmodernism here would be as Mignolo articulates simply, a "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism".

With postcolonialism, Mignolo (2007, 452) argued that it is still "heavily dependent on post-structuralism as far as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacquese Derrida have been acknowledged as the grounding of the post-colonial canon: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha." This is Mignolo's main criticism of postcolonialism: that it relies on the same terms of conversation, which had produced colonial logics and hid the colonial difference. Despite Mignolo's critical observations, I argue that postcolonialism has influences from other philosophical and practical traditions, such lived experiences on the margins or anti-colonial thought. Postcolonial thinkers do take a step further than poststructuralists in terms of considering subjectivity and power structures that consider the experience of colonialism and its aftermath. They have an explicit political commitment to the subaltern[23] and the marginalised (Spivak 1998), which is a creative reinterpretation of Western ideas. I will discuss the key differences between postcolonialism, anti-colonialism and decoloniality in more depth towards the end of the chapter.

[23] The 'subaltern' is the category, adapted by the subaltern studies collective from Gramsci, given to those considered to be at the lowest level of the social hierarchy. It is a heterogenous community of people who are denied access to "hegemonic power". Communities usually included in this category are the illiterate peasantry, sub-proletariat and tribal communities restricted by their spatial, economic, and linguistic capabilities (Spivak 1998).

In summary, these responses – diversifying, dewesternising and Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism – are obviously critiquing modernity, however, they do not recognise coloniality as constitutive of modernity. Dussel (in Mignolo, 2002, 57) stressed that these critiques are important and necessary, but they are not enough. This lack of recognition does not deter the critique of the negative aspects of Western modernity, however, only a partial story of modernity is critiqued. As Escobar (2010, 40) articulated, "critiques of modernity, in short, are blind to the (epistemic and cultural) colonial difference that becomes the focus of modernity/coloniality". The next section highlights what the colonial difference is and what its implications are.

The case for decoloniality

Departing from Edward Said's (1993) question at the start of the chapter, with the weaknesses in the responses to Eurocentrism, how do we properly and holistically address it?

Geo-politics of knowledge and the colonial difference

In order to properly address Eurocentrism, it has to be understood as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality. Eurocentrism, as the knowledge model, assumes a zero-point perspective that "hides its local and particular perspective [local European historical experience] under abstract universalism [making it globally hegemonic]" (Grosfoguel 2007, 214, interpretations are mine) – the ego-politics of knowledge. On the other hand, the geo-politics of knowledge recognises that knowledges are always from a "specific location in the gender, class, racial and sexual hierarchies of a particular region in the modern/colonial world-system" (Grosfoguel 2002, 208). As a concept, it complements the body-politic of knowledge (particularity of the ethnicity or body producing knowledge), discussed in the section of 'Eurocentrism'. To move away from Eurocentrism, means to consider the particularities of the body, time and location of the knowledge producer and accept that knowledges and realities are anchored in the material and cultural world.

The 'colonial difference' only becomes visible when modernity is recognised to be intrinsically tied to the colonial experience. It refers to a physical and imaginary position where the coloniality of power confronts local cosmologies or where global designs meet local histories. Informed by Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2000), the colonial difference is a position of coloniality within the project of modernity. Mignolo (2005, 36) argued that "[…] the concept of colonial difference is based, precisely, on imperial/colonial power differentials". The colonial difference goes further than treating colonialism as an object of study, it allows for border thinking as a new epistemological dimension (Walter Mignolo 2012, 38). Grosfoguel (2002, 209) added that "the notion of colonial difference is important to geopolitically locate the forms of thinking and cosmologies produced by subaltern subjects as opposed to hegemonic global designs". I equate the ego-politics of knowledge with the epistemic imperial difference and the geo-politics of knowledge as the colonial difference.

The concept of geopolitics of knowledge and colonial difference allows us to understand knowledge production at a deeper level. Essentially, it enables us to differentiate between knowledge production by those who participate in building the modern/colonial world and those who have been left out of the discussion. Mignolo (2002, 63) gave the example of the emerging capitalists who were critical of slavery and wanted to end an industry that supported plantation owners and slaveholders, however, was still benefitting from the industrial revolution. The partial stories of modernity from the capitalists would include criticism of slavery, but still celebrating capitalist processes and development. On the other hand, the events seen and narrated by Black Africans and American Indians, who were not taken into account in the formations of social organisations and knowledge production, provide us with an understanding of modernity/coloniality. In addition, the distinction between liberation and emancipation as discussed by Dussel also highlights the concepts of the imperial/colonial difference. Dussel (cited in (Walter Mignolo 2007, 454)) argued that they are two distinct projects that are located on different geopolitical terrains – 'emancipation' made universal claims in the projects grounded in liberal and socialist traditions of the European enlightenment whereas 'liberation' emerged from social movements struggling against the political, economic and epistemological colonisation. Walter Mignolo (2007, 466) illustrated a helpful analogy to understand the geo-politics of knowledge (or the position of colonial difference):

> "A lake looks different when you are sailing on it than when you are looking at it from the top of the mountains surrounding it. Different perspectives on modernity are not only a question of the eyes, then, but also of consciousness and of physical location and power differential – those who look from the peak of the mountain see the horizon and the lake, while those inhabiting the lake see the water, the fish and the waves surrounded by mountains but not the horizon."

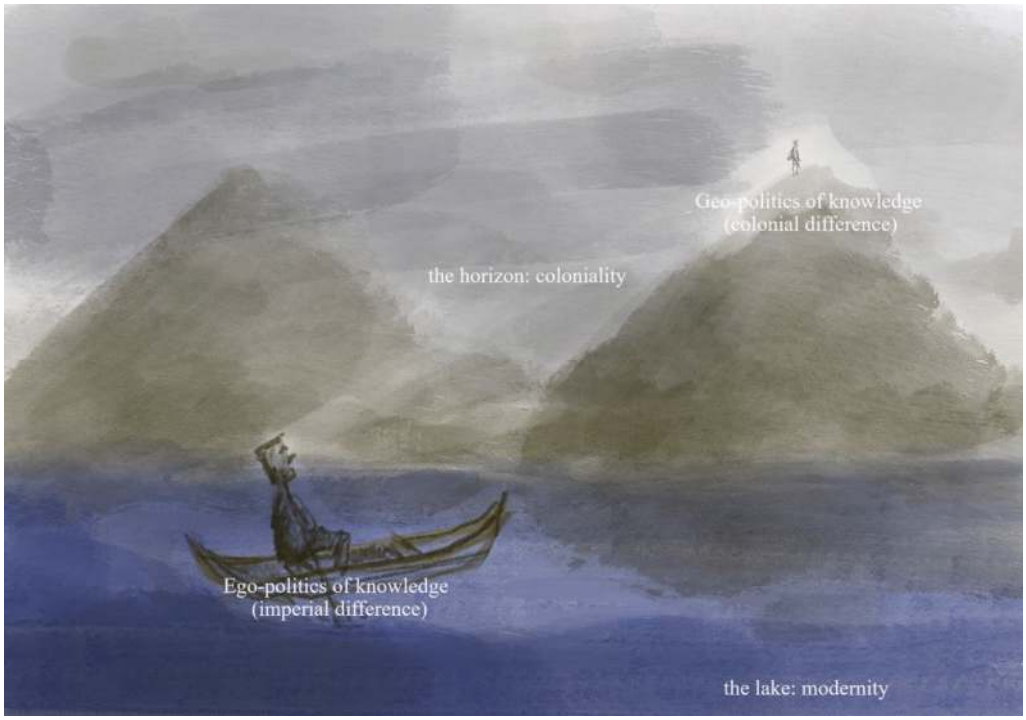

Figure 1: An illustration of Mignolo's analogy (Photo drawn by my younger brother, Muhammad Nazheef)

This does not mean that the colonised would immediately be speaking from a colonial difference, by the bare fact that they were colonised (Grosfoguel 2002, 209). Grosfoguel (2002, 203) argued that nationalists and colonialists discourses "are thinking from a power position in the colonial divide of the modern/colonial world, while subaltern subjects are thinking from the subordinate side of the colonial difference". Aside from being able to locate power differentials in knowledge production, geopolitically locating knowledge production from the colonial difference allows us to legitimise subaltern cosmologies, thinking processes and political strategies as legitimate knowledge production that are critical of hegemonic perspectives – "border thinking". This is the theoretical reasoning behind my choice to study *Utusan Melayu*. The newspaper spoke from the position of the colonial difference as events seen and narrated by the Malays behind the newspaper were not taken into account in knowledge production in post-colonial Singapore.

In summary, the implication of recognising coloniality as constitutive of modernity is that modernity/coloniality is not only concerned with the internal history of Europe but also the historical processes of the colonial world since 1500s. This not only allows us to spotlight the history as seen from the colonies or from the colonial difference, but "it also introduces a horizon to imagine global futures: modernity can no longer be superseded within the history of Europe itself, either by postmodernity or altermodernity; in that regard, asserts and reclaims what has been denied to the non-European world: their capacity to think, to govern themselves, to prosper without the guidance of the modern, post-modern or alter-modern agents and institutions" (Walter Mignolo and Escobar 2010, 12). In Chapter 5, *Utusan Melayu* offers narratives that are different to the narratives of modernity found in

the colonial textbook and the Bicentennial – those from the imperial difference or the power position of the colonial divide. For example, while the Singapore post-colonial state chose to remember the British colonial experience as 'good' and 'bad', *Utusan* remained consistent in highlighting the plight of different Malay communities, such as the farmers and fishermen, that were affected by colonial capitalism. The newspaper also offers insight into what *merdeka* (freedom) means for the Malays and what they want for a more just future.

Delinking and border thinking

Only in recognising the colonial difference can border thinking occur. The decolonial shift, or border thinking and theorising emerged in response to the violent nature of Eurocentrism that continues to reproduce the assumption of universality, the 'zero-point and the inferiority of the 'other', which justifies the suppression and marginalisation of epistemologies and bodies (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). As there is no 'pure', absolute outside of modernity/coloniality, border thinking does not happen irrespective of modernity, but in response to it. It rejects Eurocentrism as the cognitive framework of modernity/coloniality and seeks to attain epistemic justice. Epistemic justice calls for "a reckoning with the racialized inequalities of knowledge production that have historically accompanied the European colonial project" (Shilliam 2016b, 376). This injustice in knowledge production was upheld by the ideology of modernity, Eurocentrism, that separates people into those who are competent to rule themselves and civilised and those who are not. Epistemic justice means reinstating epistemic authority to knowledge systems and sites of production of those occupying the colonial difference and validating what the sources consider "what counts as a problem, what constitutes the problems and what are the means of redress" (Shilliam 2016a, 255). Simply put, border thinking is the epistemic response of the individuals and communities located in the colonial difference to the Eurocentric project of modernity, modernity/coloniality (Grosfoguel 2009). It refers to the shift in knowledge formation to alternative knowledge traditions, cosmologies and epistemologies which operate beyond the colonial matrix of power.

This shift towards prioritising knowledge from the colonial difference or uncovering alternative ways of thinking and being from the "border[24]", was a concept first coined by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). African American writer bell hooks (1990) also wrote of the radical possibility of 'choosing the margins' as a site of belonging as much as it is a site of struggle and resistance. Border thinking is then developed within decolonial studies as an epistemological position that is grounded in colonial wounds and imperial subordination (Walter Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, 206; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). In addition, border epistemologies have the potential to redefine the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity "from the cosmologies and epistemologies of the subaltern" (Grosfoguel 2009, 26), who are struggling

[24] Not the physical borders, within the nation-states, but borders of the modern/colonial world, epistemic and ontological borders.

for a world beyond modernity/coloniality. Grosfoguel (2009, 26) offered examples such as the redefinition of citizenship, democracy, human rights and economic relations, beyond definitions imposed by Eurocentrism, towards a decolonial liberation for a world beyond modernity/coloniality. The implications of border thinking lie in its epistemic potential to "decolonize dominant western structures, and recover subaltern knowledges" (Khoury and Khoury 2013, 7). Border thinking also speaks to the first steps of decolonisation strategies offered by Indigenous scholars such as Poka Laenui and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Laenui (2000) suggested that within a five-step decolonisation process, the first is to rediscover and recover histories, cultures, languages and identities. This means critically questioning the "captive mind" (S.H. Alatas 1974), so that the subaltern can produce knowledge on their own terms. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) also outlined how there needs to be deconstruction and reconstruction, which refers to destroying what was written wrongly, interrogating genetically and culturally deficient models that have pathologized the colonised Other, and recovering the histories and stories of Indigenous peoples.

Epistemic disobedience then is required within border thinking as there is no way out of coloniality of power from within Western categories of thought or epistemology. This is why Walter Mignolo (2007) outlined how critical theory, from the Frankfurt School, to poststructuralism and postmodernism, had Eurocentered limits as it was entrenched in the European experience and subjectivities that were unable to account for colonisation and the external wounds caused. Epistemic disobedience brings us to a different place and beginnings, where the focus was not on Greece but in the responses to colonisation of the Americas and the Africa slave trade. It brings the focus to spatial and intellectual sites of struggles against coloniality, rather than new temporality within the hegemony (Walter Mignolo 2011). It provides possibilities of critical re-thinking of the geo- and body-politics of knowledge, as it foregrounds other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and subjectivities.

With these discussions, it might seem that I am arguing that there cannot be a decolonial shift unless we centre epistemologies and cosmologies that are "pure, untouched" by the processes of modernity/coloniality and non-Western. However, we have to admit that we can never go back to the way it was before colonisation and imperialism. The reconstitution of knowledges must be done in confrontation with the foundations of Eurocentrism. A simple way to understand epistemic disobedience and delinking is to look at Gandhi's conception and practice of civil disobedience as well as Tuhiwai-Smith's academic work and grassroots praxis (Walter Mignolo 2021). For Gandhi, he used the concept of civil disobedience from Thoreau, which meant that he was thinking in the same Western framework or cosmology as Thoreau but at the same time, Gandhi was practicing epistemic disobedience. This meant that he was disobeying the epistemic foundations found in Western thought, by not implanting the same ideas of the nation state and communal organisation but instead reconstituting them from his own history and traditions. As for Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, she did not even begin from a Western epistemology but instead chose methods from Maori cosmology directly.

Delinking from Western epistemology, she reconstituted methodologies from her ancestors' way of living and in a language that have been actively suppressed by colonisation (Walter Mignolo 2021). These constitutes different forms of autonomous knowledge. The framework of autonomous knowledge (Leon Moosavi and Alatas 2023) complements or even stretches the concept of border thinking in that it addresses hegemonies within knowledge production from the Global South. Beyond Eurocentrism, autonomous knowledge ensures that border thinking interrogates and challenges other hegemonic orientations that can occur in responses from the colonial difference, such as traditionalism, ethnocentrism and more.

It is important to acknowledge that beyond academic discourse, the decolonial project perceives knowledge to also be in the living knowledge traditions of colonised peoples. Shilliam's work (2016b) is instrumental to help us understand that there is an ontological and/or epistemological thread that could be retrieved or revived despite the violences of coloniality. He emphasized how living knowledge traditions of colonised peoples are not totally destroyed and distorted in the face of hegemonic European knowledge traditions. Decoloniality as a methodology thus seeks to *cultivate* knowledge, instead of *produce* it. Knowledge *cultivation* admits that ways of thinking and being had a "tenacious thread of vitality that provides for the possibility of a retrieval of thought" (Shilliam 2015). Shilliam (ibid) highlighted that knowledge production denies the agency of (post)colonised peoples as knowledge is deemed to be consumed or an extension of someone else's knowledge (of themselves). Knowledge cultivation is a creative endeavour which allows knowledge to "turn over and oxygenate the past" – the practitioner to relive and revive living knowledge traditions.

In short, decoloniality are multiple projects of local particularities in the struggles against modernity/coloniality, against patriarchy, capitalism, and Eurocentrism. As there is no one who is totally outside of modernity/coloniality[25], border thinking requires that we move to the borders of the modernity/coloniality[26] to unveil the logic of coloniality and spotlight experiences from the colonial difference as well as articulate alternative, decolonial ways of knowing, thinking, and becoming, which allowing for the imagination of more just futures. This would result in a pluriverse informed by multiple ways of being and seeing from both the North and South, as opposed to a unipolar world imposed by Eurocentric modernity (Grosfoguel 2007).

[25] By recognizing that one cannot escape modernity/coloniality totally, decoloniality is critical against essentialism and forms of fundamentalism.
[26] Not participating or preserving modernity/coloniality. Mignolo describes it as "delinking" from modernity, not accepting political, economic, or epistemological foundations and forms of modernity/coloniality.

Post-script: some clarifications on theory

Weaknesses of the Latin American School of decoloniality

This thesis heavily depends on the Latin American School of decoloniality as well as Indigenous reflections on decolonisation. However, the story of coloniality does not have to be fundamentally tied to 1492 nor the Americas and the Atlantic Ocean. Iskander Abbasi, Islamic Liberation Theology (ILT) scholar (2023,111), argued that coloniality of power needs to be expanded by understanding coloniality as firstly, an extension of the civilising mission within the Crusades that viewed Muslims as its primary political enemies. Secondly, accounting for coloniality that travelled East and South via Vasco da Gama's route in Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia and lastly, the rise of coloniality in Muslim world, especially in relation to imperial Russia/Soviet Union and its internalisation in countries like China and India. His second point highlighted how while Columbus went West on his voyage, da Gama went East. The Europeans were not initially successful in overt colonial governance in the East but they established the socioeconomic and political foundations for formal mass colonisation in the East in later modernity (eighteenth to twentieth centuries) (Abbasi 2023, 114). Abbasi suggested these expansions to bring decolonial studies into dialogue with the Islamicate[27], similar to the works of scholars within Critical Muslim Studies (CMS). I am not examining how the Portuguese laid the foundations of modernity/coloniality in Southeast Asia, however, these expansions suggested by Abbasi allows for the Malay world, which is in Southeast Asia and also has a sizeable Muslim population, to naturally be part of the conversation that adds to how modernity/coloniality.

Is everything anti-colonial decolonial?

It must also be said that the anti-colonial, postcolonial and decolonial have significant and speak to each other in important ways – these terms can co-exist and serve different focuses without needing an elimination of one or the other. Why then have I selected decoloniality and not the other terms and traditions?

Decolonisation of the twentieth century lacked in truly creating a postcolonial or post-racial world, thus, decoloniality sought to dismantle, not only physical colonisation, but the colonial matrices of power or global coloniality. It is, therefore, important to understand how it is different, but could gain inspiration from the anti-colonialism of the twentieth century. Anti-colonialism is not homogenous, whether in form, ideology nor actors. Different anti-colonial movements are located within their own histories and have their own politics, divergences and fractures (Gani 2023). Within elite-driven projects that sought to replace direct colonial administrators (Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019), those

[27] Marshall Hodgson (1974, 59) used 'Islamicate' to describe cultural manifestations arising out of an Arabic and Persian literate tradition, which does not refer directly to Islam, but to the "social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims". Sayyid (2019) simply articulated that the Islamicate is not originally Islamic, it is inspired by Islam but not reducible to Islam.

projects did not produce truly "decolonial" thinking or praxis, and instead contributed to a "postcolonial neo-colonised world" or the consolidation of "coloniality". Even if these actors posited themselves as 'anti-colonial', these nationalist movements collaborated with the colonial administration to an extent to consolidate power post-independence. There were many who did not question the colonial matrix of power but attempted to control or redefine it. Fanon (2004, 120) defined the elites as those who would "prolong the heritage of the colonial economy, thinking and institutions".

The 'anti-colonial' conjures up images of the popular social movements that were in opposition ('anti') to imperialism and the violence of colonialism. We think of personalities like Cabral, Cesaire and Fanon; and popular social movements that resisted their colonisers such as the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale and the movements led by Gandhi in India. The 'anti-colonial' literally refers to the radical critical force of opposition against colonisation. The decolonial tradition, despite being conceptualised by Latin American and Afro-Carribean scholars, can be traced back to anti-colonial actors and ideologies questioning the colonial matrix of power and then introduce new ways of being and thinking from their own traditions and experiences. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) elucidates that "decoloniality is a broad church or family of all those initiatives formulated by the colonised, including intellectual-cum political-cum cultural movements such as Ethiopianism, Negritude, Garveyism, the Black Consciousness Movement, and many other". Decoloniality thus, is in deep conversation with anti-colonial actors and ideas that questioned modernity/coloniality and offered alternatives to modernity (instead of alternative modernities). However, decoloniality is different from anti-colonialism in that it not only explicitly conceptualises coloniality as a continuous and reiterative process and structure constitutive of modernity, but also interrogate spaces of radical alterity.

Postcolonial vs decolonial?

As touched upon briefly previously, the 'postcolonial' and 'decolonial' in many ways represent distinct dispositions but they do intersect and interact as they heavily focus on the effect of the experience of colonisation on the modern world system (Bhambra 2014). The decolonial project, together with Subaltern Studies and postcolonial feminists, are frequently engaged with issues of gender and sexuality, with some scholars directly mobilising the tradition of 'intersectional' analysis that is seminal to Black Feminist scholarship (Maria Lugones 2010; Icaza and Vázquez 2013; Patricia Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Combahee River Collective 2019). Where they depart, are when considering the conception of colonialism and coloniality, foundational epistemologies, and the practical implications of decolonisation.

The first key divergence of decoloniality is that it broadens its focus on European incursions upon the 'Americas' from the fifteenth century onwards as opposed to the later stages of colonisation, with the British empire in the nineteenth century. With this view of history, the concept of modernity/coloniality (instead of modernity alone) provides a broader conception of the realities of the

power structures present today. The focus on the later periods of colonisation explains for a lot of postcolonial works being in the English vernacular and the emphasis on the historiography in South Asia (Guha 1983; Spivak 1999; Gandhi 1998; Young 2001). Although I make this comment, I acknowledge that the counterpoint can be found in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) influential work on decolonising the mind that emphasises the importance of creating literature in one's indigenous languages. It is worth mentioning that wa Thiong'o was somewhat influenced by Māori activists in New Zealand. He gave the series of lectures that formed his book in University of Auckland in 1984 and this was when Māori activists had included the teaching of their indigenous language as part of their demands for reparative justice against the crime of British settler colonialism (Rutazibwa and Shilliam 2018, 6). This influence is noteworthy as it highlights the priorities or issues that arise from Indigenous peoples, compared to having the starting point from French poststructural scholars. Although my research also focuses on later periods of colonisation in Malaya, I am using the conceptions of modernity/coloniality that acknowledges later periods of colonisation to be part of coloniality.

The second divergence is that postcolonial theory can be epistemologically traced back to poststructuralism (as highlighted in subsection 'responses to Eurocentrism'), the postcolonial canon of Said (1991), Spivak (1998) and Bhabha (1994) are grounded in the work of poststructuralists like Foucault, Lacan and Derrida. The concept of body-politic of knowledge uncovers that postcolonialism is limited due to its reliance on postmodern approaches. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) have argued that postcolonial studies bring forward a change in content but not the terms of conversation, as they do not look beyond Euro-centred conceptualisations and knowledge productions. Decolonial trajectories presupposes delinking and shifting the geo- and body-politic of knowledge production away from the Europe. Tlostanova (2012, 35) stated that "one can reformulate Jacques Lacan's ideas and create on their basis the new concepts in the vein of Homi Bhabha, but one can also start not from Lacan but from Gloria Anzaldúa, from the Zapatistas, from the Caucasus cosmology, or from Nakshbandi Sufism". This is where decoloniality and postcoloniality differs – postcolonial theory is dependent on the epistemic frame of Eurocentric modernity whereas decoloniality argues that there is a difference in "how the world is inscribed in your skin rather than how the novelty of post-structuralism affects your mind" (ibid). For example, Fanon did not have to study the Black experience in the Caribbean, Fanon was thinking from the colonial wound of being a Black man. His political stance and being went hand in hand with knowledge production. Anti-colonial writers such as Fanon (2004), Memmi (2003) and Cesaire (2000) decried the violent impacts of colonial power and struggle to assert and reclaim the humanity of the colonised, often calling for the appeal of being seen as human beings, and being capable of creating knowledge, history and society. Although there are influences of thinkers and ideas from the West such as poststructuralism and Marxism in their thought, it was not their starting point. Tlostanova added that (2012, 35) "Gandhi, Fanon, and Anzaldúa did not "study" or "theorize" British imperialism in India, Black experience in the Caribbean, Berber and Arabic existentia in North Africa,

or Chicana trajectories in the U.S." It is a body-politic that is not "studying" the experience of coloniality but instead, "thinking" ethically and politically from the experience of colonisation and acting to undo coloniality hidden behind the façade of modernity. The "wretched" is able to think, theorise and act without the West as a starting point for reason and thought. The tracing of intellectual genealogy is pertinent as simply put, [the] "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 2018). Decoloniality cannot be a critical continuation within the same epistemology, rather it has to seek "a relocation of thinking and a critical awareness of the geopolitics of knowledge" (Walter Mignolo 2002).

Another main difference is that decoloniality is largely influenced by extra academic intellectual and practical work, seeking decolonisation of the different forms of colonial power structures, ways of knowing and ways of being. It does not stop at 'decolonsing' academia or understandings of history and colonisation. This aspect of praxis and liberation is best understood with Fanon's (1967, 224) reflection: "for the Negro who works on the sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle, and he will pursue it, not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery and hunger". Tuhiwai-Smith (2012, 24) added that deconstructing Western scholarship must be part of a larger intent because merely being critical does not improve people's current conditions or prevent someone from dying. This is important to consider as Indigenous scholars and communities suspect postcolonialism as "a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing privileges on non-indigenous academics because the field of 'post-colonial' discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous peoples, out ways of knowing and our current concerns". Decoloniality is a project of delinking while "postcolonial criticisms and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy" (Walter Mignolo 2007, 452). Overall, I choose decoloniality as a theoretical framework in this thesis without ignoring the significance of the anti-colonial and postcolonial traditions. Decoloniality is a flexible framework that subsumes both the anti-colonial and postcolonial, spotlighting the concept of modernity/coloniality and geo- and body-politics of knowledge.

Concluding Reflections

Despite having argued for the usefulness of decoloniality in this chapter, there are potential pitfalls from within this framework or from my own position. Firstly, in the conversation of decolonisation and critiquing modernity/coloniality, it is important to understand that decoloniality has existed for centuries, not only after these ideas became accessible to the Global North when translated into English. Despite my heavy use of Latin America Scholars, there are a plethora of thinkers and activists from the Global South that I have not referenced, nor accessed their work due to the language barriers and racialisation (Leon Moosavi 2020). There are collectives and communities globally interacting with or outside of the language of decoloniality that are still, in essence, decolonial. An example is the Critical Muslim Studies that do not necessarily popularly feature in conversations on

decolonising. However, they are very much present and active in critiquing coloniality and Eurocentric approaches to analyse the Islamicate.

Secondly, it is imperative that 'border thinking' is regarded with a critical lens as there is a potential to fall into nativism. Grosfoguel (2009) termed scholars who engage in nativism as "fundamentalists", those who argue that there is an essentialist pure space outside of modernity and more often than not, anti-modern. He argued that they are reproducing Eurocentrism, by responding to it within the binaries that are set by modernity. He asserted that the usefulness of border thinking comes into play here as it "redefines the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity from the cosmologies and epistemologies of the subaltern" (Grosfoguel 2009, 26). As elucidated earlier, not everything anti-colonial is decolonial and this is the same for *Utusan Melayu.* While it offers critiques to hegemonic narratives of modernity and providing alternatives, it internalised Eurocentrism in some ways as well.

Finally, I acknowledge that the forms of decolonial struggles that emerge from Singapore, now considered 'North in the Global South', are going to be different from the Indigenous Peoples in the Americas. These struggles will be challenging power in different spheres and levels and thus, different priorities and praxis. However, what they all share is a decolonial project that calls for an anti-capitalist, anti-racism, anti-patriarchal, anti-imperialist futures. In contradiction to the universals in Eurocentrism, the "pluriverse[28]" builds a decolonial universal that accommodates and allows the interaction of "multiple local particularities in the struggles against patriarchy, capitalism, coloniality and Eurocentric modernity from a diversity of decolonial epistemic/ethical historical projects" (Grosfoguel 2009, 33). I write this thesis with the pluriverse in mind. The next chapter will transition from the discussions and considerations in this chapter to take on the deconstructive impetus within decoloniality.

[28] The "pluriverse" put forward by Mignolo (2011) is a call for the need of a common critical language of decolonisation that is not monologi can imposed by force in the name of progress or civilisation (Grosfoguel 2009)

Chapter 3
Colonial history writing: Foundational narratives of modernity in the 'first' official history textbooks

"The leading characteristic of the Malay of every class is a disinclination to work." – Frank Swettenham (1907, 136)

With the theoretical framework outlined, in summary, the thesis seeks to investigate coloniality of knowledge production in Singapore. Overall, I argue that diversifying and dewesternising, as forms of critique against colonisation while still celebrating the rhetoric of modernity, do not effectively examine and dismantle logics of coloniality. Coloniality needs to be acknowledged as constitutive of modernity.

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine the practices and narratives that maintain the coloniality of knowledge. In the previous chapter, I identified narratives of modernity to be grand Eurocentric metanarratives of historical developments. In this chapter, I seek to highlight the colonial, Eurocentric foundational narratives of modernity found within the official state history that was created for Malaya. I first outline the context in which these textbooks were produced. Next, I analyse British colonial knowledge production, manifested in the production of official history textbooks and extract the foundational narratives of modernity found in these textbooks. I categorise these as:

(1) the British as the centre of Malayan history,
(2) the British were benevolent colonisers,
(3) the civilising mission was beneficial – the neoliberal and capitalist economic development as well as the 'introduction' of governance and law made Malaya successful, and
(4) the concept of nation-state as universal conceptualisation of space.

These foundational narratives will then be compared to current-day knowledge production in Singapore to examine how the narratives have changed or are being reproduced in the next chapter.

The textbooks that will be examined are:

English Schools

1. *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*, by Frank Swettenham, 1906, updated in 1929
2. *History of Malaya*, by Richard Winstedt, 1935

Malay Schools[29]

3. *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (A Book of Malay History), by R Winstedt, 1918
4. *Ilmu Alam Melayu* (Knowledge of the Malay World), by R Winstedt, 1918
5. *Sejarah Alam Melayu* (History of the Malay World), by Abdul Hadi Haji Hassan, 1920s

[29] Specifically, for the teaching of history in the teacher training colleges.

Aside from the narratives of modernity within the textbooks, this chapter also highlights the real material implications of body-politics of knowledge in knowledge production. Amongst the three authors, Abdul Hadi Haji Hassan was the only Malay author, who was not part of the British colonial administration. He was a Malay teacher in one of the teacher training colleges, Sultan Idris Training College (SITC). While he did not necessarily produce a 'decolonial textbook', his body-politics as a Malay layman resulted in some changes in the narratives within the history textbooks. This figure complicates the assumption that the narratives of modernity in the colonial history textbooks overlook the darker side of modernity.

Vernacular Schools in British Malaya

Although this chapter focuses on the foundational narratives of modernity in the colonial government's writing of Malayan history, this historical context on the education system in Malaya is important to consider. In this section, I illustrate the colonial practices that accompanied the creation of the foundational narratives of modernity. Formal education is an important location for processes of cultural legitimation and an important means of transmitting new forms of knowledge, cognitive style and theological explanations that could be linked with imperial and racial theories (Ndlovu 2018, 2). Despite being labelled as something progressive, beneficial and liberating, Western formal colonial education came to colonies around the world as part of imperial domination. Schools and curriculums set up by colonial masters were consistent with their colonial interests: the economic and political control of people as well as the 'benevolent' civilising mission. It is often said that despite the negative aspects of colonialism, formal schooling of indigenous or enslaved colonised societies benefitted in the long run because they eventually emerged from their primitivity, backwardness and ignorance to Enlightenment, civilisation, and progress in the modern world (Carnoy 1974, 4). Colonial schooling and education brought people out of feudalist and traditional hierarchy, and brought them into a capitalist hierarchy (Quijano 2000). This manifested in the vernacular school system in British Malaya.

Without going into too much detail on Malayan history, the British administration had organised Malaya into the Straits Settlements (SS), the Federated Malay States (FMS) and the Unfederated Malay States (UMS). The Straits Settlements included Melaka, Penang and Singapore. These states were under direct British control as Crown colonies. The FMS included four protected states, Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang. Protected states were supposedly granted local autonomy over most internal affairs, while still recognising the suzerainty of Britain. However, with the British residency system, Britain was very much involved in the development of the FMS as the Residents had to be involved in all state issues and administration, other than Malay religion and customs. The UMS were made up of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu. These five states lacked common institutions and were treated as standalone British protectorates (Andaya and Andaya 2017).

British colonisation had far-reaching implications in terms of the population growth and ethnic diversity in Malaya. Britain lifted immigration restrictions from China from 1820-1920 and encouraged indentured labour from India to work in the rubber plantations. The basic economic, ethnic, political and urban/rural cleavages that have persisted to this day were also established largely due to colonial educational policies, which allowed four parallel school systems to develop, along ethnic lines (Shanmugavelu et al. 2020).

The British educational system in Malaya was an adaptation of the British school system. The educational structure varied depending on locale but in general, the basic structure was six years of primary school, three years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary. The education system consisted of vernacular schools in four different languages: Malay, Chinese, English and Tamil. Malay, Chinese and Indian vernacular schools were only attended by students whose mother tongue was the language of instruction. The English-medium schools were mostly in urban areas, such as Singapore, and generally had a racially mixed student population, mainly attracting the Chinese, a smaller percentage of Indians and only a fraction of Malays, since barely 15 per cent of them lived in urban areas. Technical and Agricultural schools, which were also English-medium institutions, were only available in the FMS, which further divided the Straits Settlements from the Malay States (Small 1937). Malay children were expected to enter Malay schools by the age of seven and to sit through five years of education. After completing Standard III or above, a small number of Malay children could enter English schools.

The colonial government gave grants-in-aid to English and Malay vernacular schools, and only to selected Tamil schools. The Chinese language schools did not receive aid from the colonial state and was self-funded from the Chinese community and the Manchu government. Due to this, the Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools had their own curricula as they were not funded by the colonial government. In the early period of British colonisation, the curriculum in the Chinese vernacular schools was similar to the curriculum in China. The British were not initially concerned about the Chinese schools, however, when the Chinese schools became a source for anti-colonial and/or communist political movements, the British started paying more attention to Chinese schools (Shanmugavelu et al. 2020).

The Tamil schools, which also did not receive substantial funding, taught Indian culture and history that did not follow the centralised British curriculum (Blackburn and Wu 2019). The Indian schools' curriculum were adopted from India and taught Indian culture, history and geography, without teaching the students about Malaya (Shanmugavelu et al. 2020). In the later period of colonisation, the British realised that these schools were useful to retain the Indian workforce and labourers, when there was an increase in Tamil labourers working in estates and plantations (Raja 1999).

The English schools were under the most government control as these schools provided the manpower needed in the colonial administration (Blackburn 2017). The Malay schools were also fully funded by the colonial government, the reasons for which will be discussed below. In terms of history curriculum, the Malay language schools did not have a stipulated curriculum for history in its early years. It only followed a more uniform curriculum when R.O. Winstedt attained the position of Assistant Director of Education in charge of Malay schools and recommended some changes, which will be elaborated later (Salleh 1979).

History Curriculum in English Vernacular Schools

In a bid for greater uniformity in the colonial education system, the colonial state explicitly crafted an education code that all English, Malay and Tamil schools receiving grants-in-aid were required to follow (Blackburn and Wu 2019). With the 1899 Education Code, the history curriculum in the English language schools in Malaya was the same as the schools in England (Elcum 1905, 145). In the first two years of formal primary school, students learnt about the Romans, the reign of Henry VII and the beginning of the Tudor period. The Code specified that students should be introduced to history by learning about the lives of great men, such as King Alfred the Great, King Henry and others. The students continued through primary school learning about great men and other 'great' events, selected from the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 to the Wars of the Roses during the reign of Henry VII in 1487. In 1899, the history of Malaya and Singapore did not feature at all in the common history syllabus in English schools as the syllabus was merely a copy of the curriculum in England. Learning English history supported the purpose of the British to produce a loyal English-educated elite (Great Britain Board of Education 1905, 138-140).

The history curriculum remained unaltered in the imperial curriculum until the 1920s when there was an impetus for change. It was argued that students should learn their 'own' history as peoples of the British Empire, instilling a sense of belonging in the empire. The idea of imperial citizenship meant more than just belonging to the British Empire but having certain political rights within the empire. The 1928 Education Code (*Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1928*) stipulated a new history curriculum in Malaya and Singapore, which focused more on the empire as inclusive of its colonial subjects to promote imperial citizenship. It still adhered to the study of 'great men' in history, but they included Asian great men, while retaining the role of European great men in Asian history. The preamble to the Code (*Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1928*) was critical of past practices which taught English history, resulting in apathetic students and 'unintelligent cramming'. The learning of history was "stories, told simply, of the lives of men who have had some connection with local history", which included Buddha, Confucius, Alexander the Great (from which the Malay sultans claimed to be descendants of) and the lives of Europeans in Asia such as Ferdinand Magellan and Francis Drake. The histories of colonisers that were prominent in the 'development' of the Malay peninsula were included such as Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese leader that attacked Melaka,

St Francis Xavier, a prominent Portuguese Catholic missionary, Francis Light, 'founder' of Penang and Stamford Raffles, 'founder' of Singapore. The students would move on to learning the history of great men and women in World History and then a blend of Asian and Western civilisations. Secondary school history curriculum covered the formation of modern Europe and the growth of the British Empire. The history of England was not scrapped, instead, it focused on constitutional and economic developments rather than political events. The aim of this shift in the history curriculum was to create citizens of Empire that understood the British system of government and how the Empire was not only run, but how it was created and developed (Blackburn and Wu 2019, 29). The 1928 Education Code was drafted under the purview of R.O. Winstedt, the Director of Education in the SS and FMS from 1924 to 1931. The changes to the history syllabus reflected his interest in the history of Malaya and how the country had benefitted under British rule. This is significant as he was instrumental in writing the official textbooks on Malayan history. The 1936 Education Code did not differ much from the 1928 Code, but recommended adding Malayan history in primary school and changing the history of England to history of the British Empire in secondary school.

One of the texts used as teaching instruction on the history of the British empire was James A Williamson's, *The British Empire and the Commonwealth*, published in London. Williamson's book wanted the students to change their understanding of "colony", from settlements of white men, like in Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand to self-governing dominions of the Commonwealth. Williamson stated that the Colonial Office is:

> "essentially the guardian of peoples who have been too weak, ignorant and backward to fend for themselves in a world penetrated by the active rivalries of the more powerful […] to equip them for an assured position in the modern world, and to make them fit for political liberty as well as to advance their prosperity and standards of living." (Williamson 1948, 362-363)

Williamson added that:

"Malaya furnished a fine example of humane modern imperialism. There was no conquest. The princes retained their thrones but governed as enlightened public servants instead of irresponsible tyrants. Their people obtained liberty and security. Trade, wealth, and population increased; and all was done without bloodshed save in the petty campaign of 1874-5. Credit is due to the upright and public-spirited officers whom the modern colonial service has trained, a very different type from the incompetent place-hunters so prevalent in the 18th century." (Williamson 1948, 363)

Although I will not be analysing these textbooks on British imperial history, the narratives found within were similar to the narratives that I will extract from the textbooks on Malayan history: the benevolence of the British, the bringing of civilisation and modernity and the development of uncivilised, ignorant peoples. The changes to the history curriculum in the English schools presented a bid to 'decentre' British history by focusing on the British empire, and more specifically, Malaya. It is

pertinent to note that the colonial government intended those who attended English schools (the future state administrators) to internalise the civilising mission of British colonisation and how British colonisation was benevolent and non-violent.

History Curriculum in Malay Vernacular Schools

Dual-track system for Malay vernacular education: The masses and the traditional elite

Apart from dividing schools according to language (and by implication, race), British educational policy also served colonial interests. The dual track system for Malay schools sought to separate Malay nobility and royalty from that of the Malay masses. The British educational policy for the Malays were primarily designed to preserve the traditional feudal structure of Malay society, or at least, on the surface, without really attributing power to royalty (Y.S. Tan 2013). The dual system of education for the Malays co-opted Malay traditional elite through the provision of an elitist English education to prepare them for prepare them for government administration. On the other hand, the Malay masses, who were mostly rural peasantry were encouraged to go through Malay vernacular education, which had little upward mobility. British education policies sought to keep Malays where they were in the constructed colonial racial and gender hierarchy. In the case of Raffles, he supported the elitist form of education, which was also a strategy on the part of the British to co-opt the Malay traditional elites as they would be able to neutralise the challenge from the radical camp of the Malay educated elites.

For the Malay masses: Malay schools and teacher training colleges

After the opening of the first English school in Penang, the Malay schools followed suit a few years later. Two Malay schools opened in Singapore in 1856 – one at Teluk Belanga and the other at Kampung Gelam. In general, the Malay schools only continued through primary education during the colonial period. The only available post-primary Malay-medium education after that were the training colleges for Malay-school teachers such as the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) and Malay Women's Training College, and trade schools, which offered some special practical programmes in Malay. By 1920, across British Malaya, there were approximately 46000 students attending 757 Malay schools (Roff 1967, 128).

The biggest obstacles for Malay vernacular schools in British Malaya was the lack of trained teachers and attracting students to go to school. To fill the void of trained teachers, they set up teacher training colleges in the late nineteenth century. The most prominent college was the SITC, which was established in 1921 in Tanjung Malim, Perak. R.O. Winstedt, as the Assistant Director of Education, was instrumental in setting up SITC, introducing changes in the curriculum and this, creating the official history textbooks for teaching (Salleh 1979, 54).

These teacher training colleges were an important feature of the Malay vernacular education as it played a huge role in producing a Malay intelligentsia. The teacher training colleges, particularly the SITC, became centres for Malay literary activity and drew Malay students from across the peninsula. The SITC was a hub for the exchange of ideas and cultivated a common Malay consciousness (Noh 2014, 257). Outside of state-sanctioned curriculum, the Malay-educated teachers and students were exchanging ideas of Malay nationalism and anti-colonialism that they read about in newspapers like *Utusan Melayu.* Subsequently, the teachers and students from SITC also articulated in writing the various socio-economic problems present during the colonial period such as the erosion of Malay rights and the socio-economic hierarchies created based on race (Omar 1993). There was also an influx of Indonesian revolutionary literary works after 1945, which inspired the ideal of pan-Malayan nation and polity that included Malaya and Indonesia under *Melayu Raya.* The British intention to maintain Malay social order by exploiting the feudal relationships of the Malay traditional elites and the Malay masses backfired as colleges like SITC produced Malay-educated radical anti-colonial nationalists. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

For the Malay traditional elites: English school or Malay College

On the other hand, the provision of English education or special Malay colleges for the Malay nobility was mainly to serve British colonial interests of governing Malaya. The alliance and influence of the Sultanate was a useful tool to facilitate the work of the colonial government. It was ultimately a measure to control the Malay masses as well. In 1905, a residential English school was opened for the Malay nobility, with three teachers and eight students on a temporary basis. It was in a temporary premise in Kuala Kangsar, the royal town of Perak and it catered primarily to the sons of the Malay nobility (Johan 1984). As the school was a success and was supported by Sultan Idris, the Sultan of Perak, the school was rehoused in a new building in 1909 and officially called the Malay College. The Malay College, or unofficially known as the 'Eton of Malaya', was run similar to the administration of the English public school. Some of the Malay nobility eventually went on to fill in the Civil Service and administrative services in the government as well (Fernandez 1999).

William Roff (1967, 143) stated the difference between the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar and the SITC:

> "On the one hand, at Kuala Kangsar, there were the sons of the traditional ruling class and wealthy, undergoing training for entry into the English-speaking world of government and administration and occasionally the professions; on the other, at SITC, the sons of the peasantry and the poor, undergoing training for return to the Malay-speaking world of the rural village school."

Such an education policy to divide the Malays into the elite and agricultural class was also the result of the ethnic division of labour in British Malaya. In the late nineteenth century, a great immigrant influx from China, India and other parts of the world caused food shortages in British Malaya.

Immigration patterns were such as the British opened borders to supply Chinese labourers in newly founded tin mines and Indian rubber plantation workers. To improve the situation, the British encouraged the Malay populace to concentrate on producing food (Soda 2020, 22). Resident of Perak, Frank Swettenham, who laid down the education policy in the FMS, wrote in 1891 in his report on Perak for 1890 that:

> "I do not think it is at all desirable to give the children of an agricultural population an indifferent knowledge of a language that to all but the very few would only unfit them for the duties of life, and make them discontented with anything like manual labour" (Barlow 1995, 374; Federated Malay States 1905, 9).

Swettenham argued that instead of learning English, learning values, such as punctuality and obedience, which were gained by regular attendance at school would be better for the Malays. These values made "better citizens and more useful members of the community" – the creation of "more intelligent fisherman or peasant" (Office 1920, 13). Cheeseman (1948) stated that the colonial aim of the vernacular Malay education, was the mere removal of illiteracy at the very minimum. The British intended to maintain the Malay rural class and perpetuate the separation of communities by colonially created races as well as widen the gap between the elite group and the ordinary people in Malaya (*Annual Departmental Report, Straits Settlements* 1903, 78).

The education system was clearly a form of social control aimed at maintaining the racial and class hierarchies that suited the British interests, preparing the traditional elites to fill up administrative and judicial roles of the state as well as the preservation of the rural peasantry (Small 1937, 43). The purpose of the Malay vernacular school was to maintain the Malay agricultural way of life. This ensured that the labour divisions within their structured racial and socio-economic hierarchies, created by colonisation, were well-defined and efficiently working with labourers to carry out agriculture and fishing activities more effectively (Saad 1990, 7). Education policy aimed to also train lower administrative officers like clerks, support office staff and provide jobs in construction of roads and railways, and work in the rubber plantations. Inevitably, this sought to maintain the status quo and prevent any instability and unrest.

The dual education system was also a means to prevent the 'over-education' of the Malay masses that might lead to the rise of political consciousness. On top of separating the different races, the British were consistent in its divide and rule policy with regards to socio-economic class as well, which ultimately aimed at strengthening the political position of the British in Malaya. Contrary to the purposes and expectations of the British, education of the Malays was one of the main factors for the development of Malay nationalism – from the elites and the more radical faction. However, to a certain extent, colonial education did manage to coopt the traditional elites to adopt a pro-British stand and stand in opposition to the more radical Malay nationalists/anti-colonialists.

History curriculum: the 1917 Winstedt Report

When R.O. Winstedt was appointed as the Assistant Director of Education in charge of Malay schools, he standardised the Malay vernacular education. Winstedt was sent to Java and the Philippines in order to survey vernacular and industrial education there and improve on Malay vernacular education in Malaya. In 1917, he wrote up a report that shaped the British education policy on Malay vernacular schools in 1920s onwards, where he stated that upon comparison with the education in Java and the Philippines, Malay vernacular education in British Malaya needed significant improvement (No.22 of 1917: C120). This report significantly exposed the existence of coloniality despite the different colonisers and contexts, i.e. the United States of America in Philippines and the Dutch in Java. There is a "shared culture" of colonisation (Nandy 1989, xi) where colonisers share knowledge of colonisation and in this instance, Winstedt examined the colonial schooling system in Dutch Java and American Philippines to affirm what the British were doing well in Malaya and what they were lacking (No.22 of 1917: C111).

The two main points in his report was firstly, the need for standardisation of Malay vernacular education and secondly, the emphasis on practical education and on the training of manual and domestic works in the Malay schools. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the first point alone. Winstedt called for the creation of a central teachers' training college to increase uniformity and efficiency. His advice materialised when the teacher training colleges in Melaka and Matang merged to form the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) at Tanjung Malim, Perak. Simultaneously, he also recommended the standardisation of new school textbooks (No. 22 of 1917: C118). Winstedt stated:

> "Remembering that modern education is designed to develop the mind and not to deaden it with half-understood detail, I consider that the Dutch omission to teach the *kampong* boy history[30] is sound and should be followed by us. It is useless to try to teach him European history: to teach him the fairy tales that stand for history in Malay chronicles is futile, and for teaching him scientifically the history of his own land, our books are founded on evidence too debatable and arrive at conclusions calculated too often to wound his susceptibilities" [*italics in original*] (No. 22 of 1917: C97).

Comparing this suggestion with the history curriculum of the English schools, the British were clear that those who do not attend English school do not need to be taught the history of England and the British Empire. That was the duty of the newly created elites under colonial administration. For the Malay populace, it was recommended to learn "the history of his own land", not from Malay historical literature as it was too unscientific and considered as "fairy tales", but from a newly created "scientific" history (No. 22 of 1917: C99).

[30] Winstedt was referring to historical literature.

In the early years, the instruction of history in Malay schools were intertwined with the teaching of classical Malay literature like *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. With the recommendation for Malay history to be more scientific, Winstedt commissioned new textbooks in Malay. It was not until 1918 that *tawarikh* (history) as a subject was introduced into Training Colleges for teachers. Winstedt himself (with the assistance of Daing Abdul Hamid Tengku Muhammad Salleh) wrote the Malay language textbook *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (A Book of Malay History) and *Ilmu Alam Melayu* (Knowledge of the Malay world). In the later 1920s, this textbook was replaced by the three volume *Sejarah Alam Melayu* written by Abdul Hadi Haji Hassan. *Sejarah Alam Melayu* was the history textbook for the Malay School Series, an initiative of the Malay Translation Bureau (MTB), with the approval of Winstedt, then Director of Education for the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlement. Volume I began with prehistory and ended with the rise of the Majapahit Kingdom in Java. Volume II continued the story of the Majapahit Empire up to the emergence of the Johor Kingdom just after the fall of the Melaka Sultanate in 1511. Volume III spoke about the foreign influences on Malaya, including the Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and the English. Two more volumes were added later on by Buyong Adil, however this thesis will not be analysing Buyong's texts as they were an extension of Abdul Hadi's. *Sejarah Alam Melayu* was used as a standard history textbook in Malay Schools and teacher training colleges (Khoo 1979, 305).

Foundational narratives of modernity within colonial history textbooks

In this sub-section, I move towards the thematic analysis of the textbooks to spotlight the narratives of modernity that are apparent in these history textbooks. These foundational narratives of Singapore's history will then be compared against contemporary narratives of history found in the Bicentennial in the next chapter.

The textbooks that will be examined are below:

<u>English Schools</u>

1. *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*, by Frank Swettenham (Governor of the SS and high commissioner of the FMS), 1906, updated in 1929
2. *History of Malaya*, by Richard Winstedt (Director of Education for SS and FMS), 1935

<u>Malay Schools</u>[31]

3. *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (A Book of Malay History), by R Winstedt, 1918
4. *Ilmu Alam Melayu* (Knowledge of the Malay World), by R Winstedt, 1918
5. *Sejarah Alam Melayu* (History of the Malay World), by Abdul Hadi Haji Hassan, 1920s

Two more volumes were added later on by Buyong Adil, however this chapter will not be analysing Buyong's texts as they were an extension of Abdul Hadi's.

[31] Specifically, for the teaching of history in the teacher training colleges.

Analysing the contents of the textbooks, I have extracted four foundational narratives of modernity:

(1) the British as the centre of Malayan history,
(2) the British were benign colonisers, a necessary experience needed for modernisation,
(3) the civilising mission was beneficial – the neoliberal and capitalist economic development as well as the 'introduction' of governance and law made Malaya successful, and
(4) the concept of nation-state as universal conceptualisation of space.

I will highlight how these narratives sit within Eurocentrism, told from the position of ego-politics of knowledge, and explore what the implications are.

Body-politic of knowledge

Before diving into content analysis, it is worth considering the body-politics of the authors. The body-politics of knowledge asks who is allowed to speak and who is able to produce legitimate knowledge? The Eurocentric "I" can claim universality and a God-eyed view of knowledge, reaffirming that Western methods or epistemology produce legitimate knowledge – the epistemology of zero-point. This aspect of analysis is important to consider as being socially located on the oppressed side of power relations, does not automatically mean that one is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location. This point is particularly critical in the next chapter when approaching the Singapore post-colonial state, as an author. The official history textbooks were written by Frank Swettenham, R.O. Winstedt (who was very much influenced by his teacher and predecessor, R.J. Wilkinson) and Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hassan. Daing Abdul Hamid assisted Winstedt in writing the Malay text *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*. The two Englishmen, Swettenham and Winstedt, involved in the writing of the text were all considered "scholar-administrators" who essentially created the colonial education system in Malaya. The Malays and their histories were, in this case, considered objects of study and not considered agents of themselves, or having expert knowledge about themselves and their conditions.

Frank Swettenham served more than three years in the Malayan civil service, retiring in 1904. He was appointed as Residents to the Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang between 1874 and 1896, playing a significant role in the development of the Residential System. He held a brief position administering formal education in the Federated Malay States in the late 1800s. He was the only governor to have spent his entire civil service career in Malaya and the Straits Settlements (Barlow 1995, 529). Whilst he was an Assistant Resident in Selangor, Swettenham travelled extensively, using multiple means and routes of transport. During this time, he spent time with the Malays and so acquired a "comprehensive" knowledge of the territory and its inhabitants (Wicks 1979, 28). In Selangor and Perak, he was credited for opening up trade and agriculture and the building of roads and railways. He encouraged the focus on mining and agriculture, contributed greatly to immigration in Malaya, partly making up the complex multi-racial society we see in Malaysia and

Singapore today. In 1876, he returned to Singapore to fill the position of Assistant Colonial Secretary for Native States for five years. In this position, he dealt with all official correspondence to and from the Protected Malay States. As a colonial official, he explicitly looked up to pioneers like Stamford Raffles and worked hard to achieve Raffles' vision for Singapore. As an administrator, he believed that the Malays would be able to progress in attainment of wealth and good governance with the help and guidance of the British. He asserted that the Malays looked at the British Government "as their father – as one who can confer upon them [Malaya] by just government, all those things which they lack under Malay rule whilst holding complete power to enforce obedience and punish wrong" (Swettenham 1875, 207). His interest in the people of Malaya can be seen in the many records, personal accounts and journals that he wrote during the time he spent in Malaya. Amongst the most well-known is *Malay Sketches*, where he wrote short stories and essays about his life in Malaya, highlighting different aspects of Malay lifestyle, customs and traditions. Swettenham played a crucial role in formulating the nature of the modern Malay education system and the Straits administration had come to regard Swettenham as *the* expert on Malay life and affairs (Wicks 1979, 29).

R.O. Winstedt's role was discussed at length earlier as he was instrumental in shaping the Malay vernacular education with the 1917 report. He joined the Federated Malay States Civil Service in 1902 and was posted to Perak, where he met British Resident Ernest Birch and his Secretary, R. J. Wilkinson. Wilkinson wrote that "Sir Ernest held the view that knowledge of native life and customs was as important to an officer as a knowledge of the vernacular itself" (Barrett 1967). With this, Birch was able gain support from the Government in England to help Wilkinson prepare for the 'Papers on Malay Subjects'. Winstedt was credited by Wilkinson for having helped him in the writing of this. In 1917, Winstedt suggested that Wilkinson's ''Papers on Malay Subjects', should be used as a textbook for Malay training colleges until a "scientific" history textbook in Malay became available. Winstedt's Malay textbooks came out a year later to replace Wilkinson's papers. Before being appointed as Assistant Director of Education, SS and FMS, Winstedt wrote books covering Malay folk literature, circumstances of Malay Life, arts and crafts and fishing, hunting and trapping respectively. In this position, he was driven to improve the system of Malay education. As stated previously, he replaced two teacher-training colleges with the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) at Tanjong Malim, centralising teacher training and the Malay School curriculum. He prepared the education textbooks and miscellaneous articles for journals, covering history, folk-lore, ethnology, philology, literature, and bibliography. Toward his retirement in 1935, he returned to England and took up an appointment as Lecturer in Malay at what was then called the School of Oriental Studies (Sutherland 2017).

Despite British colonisation not being outrightly violent in Malaya, it is imperative to position Swettenham and Winstedt in the social position of the coloniser. Despite their 'love' and respect for Malay peoples, culture and customs, they were within an administration that was seeking to further their interests of Western progress and civilisation. The purpose of their knowledge production was to

recreate and reframe the Malay peoples, societies, economics, politics and histories in a way that the colonial administration could understand and better control for their own interests, be it the civilising mission or the creation of a free global market. These scholar-administrators were afforded mastery or expertise on the Malay world after a few years of observation and habitation exactly because they were British, working in the colonial government. In addition to that, as administrators who have spent some time in Malaya, they were easily afforded the assumption of objectivity and neutrality in writing about Malaya. The scholar from the West, using "scientific" methods and epistemologies were afforded the privilege of producing official history textbooks, which displaced the historical Malay literature, the illiterate story tellers within villages as well as the average Malay person as sources of knowledge about themselves. In *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*, Winstedt literally spoke as if he was Malay. He spoke in the native voice to pray, at the end of his textbook, for the peace of British Malaya. He ended his work with "Amin! Amin! Ya rabbal 'alamin!" (Winstedt 1921 (1918)). In addition, in *Ilmu Alam Melayu*, he assumed the position of the Malay native again:

> "[i]t had been said that in ancient times, our Malaya/Malay land was inhabited only by wild races, namely, the Semang and the Sakai. We Malays came later, and these races retreated to inlands and mountains[32]" (Winstedt 1926 (1918), 18).

His epistemic position as a scholar-administrator allowed him to speak for the colonised, in terms of speaking about Malay history and literally, assuming the voice of the Malay. Speaking for the Malay has two implications, Winstedt sought to legitimise his writings by being part of the community, proving that he recognised that he was speaking from the "outside". Secondly, he wanted his audience, the Malay person, to read his works and feel a sense of ownership for the history that Winstedt had wrote. Swettenham did not assume the voice of the native, but he wrote from an insider perspective, because he was someone who was intimately involved with the development of Malaya.

Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hassan was the only author of the official history textbooks who was not part of the colonial administration. He was born in Melaka in 1900 and attended the Malay schools in Melaka. In 1917, Abdul Hadi was chosen to go through the teacher training the Malay College in Melaka and he stayed there till 1919 (Adam 1991). When the Malay College closed in 1922 to make way for SITC, Abdul Hadi continued as a teacher in SITC. He was a teacher of *Tawarikh* (history) and the Malay Language. There was a lack of textbooks to refer to so Wilkinson's *History of Malaya* and Winstedt's *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* were used (Adam 1991). SITC was where teachers from all over the Malay world, Brunei, Singapore and even Sarawak, gathered to be trained in teaching. It played a huge role in building a "Malayan" identity, rather than community or state-based identities. SITC was said to be the birthplace of Malay nationalism as within the 7 years that Abdul Hadi taught in SITC,

[32] "Al-kesah, maka ada-lah pada zaman perba kala, bahawa Tanah Melayu kita ini telah di-diami oleh orang bangsa liar sahaja ia-itu orang Semang dan orang Sakai: maka tetekala datang orang kita Melayu, akan bangsa-bangsa itu pun undor-lah ka-darat dan ka-gunong gunong".

many of his students, such as Ibrahim Haji Yaacob and Harun Aminurashid, went on to be leaders, playing a critical role in the struggle for freedom (*merdeka*). Despite teaching history from these official texts, he was also influenced by books and writings from Indonesia. Buyong Adil, his former student and subsequently, teacher, who also continued the fourth and fifth volumes of *Sejarah Alam Melayu* said:

> "Cikgu Abdul Hadi used a lot of sources from Indonesia as history books references, until a large section of his works are influenced by the concept of "Nusantara[33]" and from a narrow way of thinking, students are suddenly exposed to a national consciousness that encompasses a wider region, sharing Nusantaran heroes (not without reason) as themselves." (A. Hussain 1982)

While Abdul Hadi was teaching history at SITC, he not only taught from the textbooks provided, but actively cultivated a "Malay" consciousness amongst his students (Salleh 1979, 140-141). Abdul Hadi was the "first Malay to attempt to write a historiography of the Malay Peninsula as a whole" (Maier 1988, 148). His works made Malay students more aware of the socio-economic and political problems the Malays faced and how they were being denied the means to fully participate in the foreign-dominated society of Malay. Despite playing a crucial role in promoting a new consciousness of a "Malay" in the wider Malay world, it can be argued that Abdul Hadi was also the "first Malay intellectual who was given the task of imposing British concepts of history on Malay teachers through his textbooks for vernacular schools" (ibid., 127).

For Abdul Hadi, it would be easy to conclude that as he was a product of colonial Britain, he would have uncritically absorbed the discourses and epistemologies set up by the British. He was trained in SITC, an institution set up by the British colonial government, wrote under the approval and mentorship of these colonial scholar-administrators, specifically Winstedt, and used material from the British authors on Malaya. On the surface, it could be easy to place Abdul Hadi as someone in the socially located oppressed side but thinks and writes epistemically like those in the hegemonic position by virtue of his using materials written by colonial officers and getting approval for publication from British-run institutions. The question with Abdul Hadi, and many other Malay intellectuals at that time, was whether there were any 'Malay' agency in the concepts and epistemologies in those histories and to what extent does Abdul Hadi absorb British ideas of race, space and time. To a certain extent, being a Malay man, who grew up in British Malaya, it would be unfair to take away his agency as someone who was colonised. His subjectivity and position on the power hierarchy inevitably placed him, exactly where the British viewed him – a Malay teacher. He was a Malay, whom the British believed needed guidance and enlightenment to progress. As we shall see in his writings, to a certain extent, due to his social position as a Malay, he was able to identify some of the logics of coloniality behind the narratives

[33] Nusantara refers to the Malay Archipelago. It is derived from two Old Javanese world, *nusa* which means "island" and *antara*, which means "between" (Friend 2003, 601).

of modernity. However, at the same time, he also uncritically used concepts and elements of the colonial discourse in his work *Sejarah Alam Melayu*. He occupied an interesting position as he had to write in a "scientific" way to be accepted as a modern author of history but as a teacher, he had adapted the conception of the "Malay" to nurture students and leaders, would think of themselves as worthy of self-determination. In a way, Abdul Hadi retained the language of nationalism, while at the same time, rejecting and expanding colonially imposed frontiers, which risks still being trapped within the colonial matrix (Gani 2019).

Narrative #1: The British as the centre of Malayan history

In chapter 2, it was discussed that Eurocentrism entailed the geographical centring of Europe, which centres the West in history and human development. The historical avatar of Eurocentrism assumes Europe to be the principal subject of World History and this becomes "universal history". The first narrative of modernity extracted from the textbooks was the centrality of Europe or the British within the writing of Malayan history. The centring of Europe in Malayan history was also a result of the epistemic shift towards a more "scientific" history. These two themes will be expanded below.

Centring of Europe

As stated in the 1899 Education Code (Blackburn and Wu 2019, 14), there was a blatant adaptation of the history curriculum in England and later on, the history of the British empire for English schools in Malaya – a clear geographical centring of Europe. This was partly due to fact that there were no English texts that covered the 'local' history of Malaya and Singapore. The history curriculum sought to diversify in 1920s so in addition to learning about great men and women in England, "World History" was added, covering a blend of "Asian" and Western civilisations. For example, great men from Asian cultural backgrounds included Asoka, Kublai Khan and Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty of India. The later years of World History would revert to the growth of empires and modern European nations (Blackburn and Wu 2019, 22). The 1928 Education Code introduced thereafter, more Asian history into the English school history curriculum, but English history remained the core of the English school history syllabus.

By the 1930s, history teachers in English Schools drew on the two history books by Swettenham and Winstedt, that decentred English history and focused on local history. I argue that even though the two English texts were diversified in its focus on "local" history, it was still Eurocentric as Swettenham's focus was still the English administration of the Malay Peninsula. Swettenham began his book, *British Malaya*, with chapters on the history of the Straits Settlements, namely Melaka, Penang and Singapore, which covered the development of these states just before the arrival of the East India Company (EIC). He continued describing the establishment of the FMS and UMS. In the preface, Swettenham (1907, 12) stated that it is "popular belief that Englishmen are born sailors; probably it would be more true to say that they are born administrators." The textbook was entirely Euro-centric as

the history of British colonial administration in Malaya was centred throughout. Malaya was an 'experiment' (p. preface), a colony that was ripe for the British to develop.

On the surface, the rest of the texts took a step further than Swettenham. In Winstedt's English textbook *History of Malaya*, he expanded the scope of history of Malaya and portrayed the British colonial period as one phase, among many, in the history of the Malay Peninsula. The Malay school history textbooks also did not centre European history or the colonisers' role in the wider history of Malaya. They expanded the scope of history of Malaya and portrayed the British colonial period as a phase in the history of the Malay Peninsula. As Abdul Hadi had three volumes to lay out Malayan history, he elaborated on the multiple phases and power shifts within the Malay states, before writing about European colonisation in the latter half of the third volume. Swettenham's textbook centred the arrival of the British and their colonial administration, whereas the other textbooks saw British colonisation as part of the different phases within a (linear) history. Despite these texts not being geographically Eurocentric in their conception of history, I elaborate in the next sections that the content of these works still centred the West by maintaining Western civilisational thinking. As discussed in chapter 2, this refers to the cultural avatar of Eurocentrism. The next two narratives of modernity will emphasise that relegating the British to a phase in a larger history did not necessarily mean that Europe was successfully decentred in history. Civilisational thinking was still centred, and this retained the belief that the British were benevolent colonisers.

The creation of a "scientific" history

The creation of a more scientific history in the form of the textbooks as stated in the 1917 Winstedt Report, represented a shift towards methodological Eurocentrism. This shift allowed the geographical centring of Europe to become manifest. The call for more scientific history manifested in the new textbooks created for the Malay schools and training colleges. These textbooks were claimed to have been written based on reliable evidence and facts as opposed to Malay historical literature, which were considered full of myths and fairy tales. Not considering the history in Malay literature caused a kind of blind spot that enabled the British scholar-administrators to start from their own 'point-zero'.

The 1917 Winstedt Report introduced the subject *tawarikh* (history) for the first time in 1918, in the Malay College in Melaka. While English schools were already following the history curriculum in England, the Malay schools did not have a systematic or consolidated history curriculum. Before that, the Malay schools had *Sejarah dan Hikayat* (history and historical literature) as part of the curriculum but the emphasis had been on literature:

> "Literature in the Malay Nusantara concept includes everything that uses words or languages in a creative way, creative in a very broad sense. There is no boundary between mythical fiction and ahistorical description for example, and there is sometimes no boundary between an enumeration of

the *adat* law and a love poem. Some of the most serious theosophical expositions have been put into beautiful poetry, in the *syair* form, because poetry is much more easily retained by memory and much more pleasant to hear." (Hussein 1974, 12)

Syair is today understood as poetry, but it could also be history in verse form, as Hussein mentioned. *Hikayat* (historical literature) was told or written in a grandiose and magniloquent style, differing from the emphasis on accurate dates and "objective" truth. Many of the authors of *hikayat* are unknown, but there is sufficient evidence to justify the conclusion that the traditional historians were court scribes, protocol officers or persons of rank, including royalty. Most historical works were to preserve the genealogy of the relevant ruling authority (Khoo 1979, 299). The term *tawarikh* was thus, officially designated as the Malay term for History as it sought to be distinguished from *hikayat* (historical literature). This meant that a more scientific history, not in its literature and folklore form, was to be brought to the level of the masses.

In addition, it is significant to note that most of the evidence within the textbooks was based on English historiography, historical records written in Javanese, Arabic, Portuguese and Dutch, as well as statistical data from the census. Instead of referring to Malay historical literature, these textbooks also had a pattern of citing its predecessors, Winstedt cites Wilkinson, Wilkinson and Winstedt are quoted by Abdul Hadi.

British Malaya by Swettenham retained the same positivist methodology:

"The best recognised authority on the early history of the Malays is a book styled Sejarah Melayu, the Malay annals. […] The book, as it now appears, is so manifestly untrustworthy in details that it is difficult to place much reliance upon the general statements contained in it. Like the ramblings of the insane, who jumble up fact with fiction, there is truth in this record; but as there is very little supporting testimony, and small means of winnowing the wheat from the chaff, it is impossible to do more than quote the annalist those statements to which early European writers seem to have given a somewhat large credence." (Swettenham 1907, 12)

In Winstedt's *History of Malaya*, he referred to the early name of Singapore, "Temasik", to be found in "folk-tales […] in the *Malay Annals*" (Winstedt 1935, 32) and later on stated that "the history of ancient Singapore in those same annals is unfortunately only a hotch-potch of myths and tradition" (p.34). With regards to the mythology behind the royal line of Sang Nila Utama[34], the *Malay Annals* outlined the different myths behind the Prince as well as how he was related to Alexander the Great (Iskandar). Winstedt commented at how Malay historians had slipped Iskandar into the Melaka royal genealogy, between the Hindu period and the historical rule of Melaka. He lamented, "so much for the

[34] The Prince from Palembang, that had landed in Temasik and subsequently, started the Melaka royal line

olla-podrida[35] of the *Malay Annals*", referring to how the *Malay Annals* was a mix and match of random stories, with no historical science or basis.

The same goes for the Malay textbooks. In *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*, Winstedt was skeptical when he mentioned that "although there have been tales of the ancient, they were useless as the tales were about deities and magicians and their purpose were to make the tales more interesting, and were not acceptable nor valuable according to historical estimation[36]"(Winstedt 1921 (1918), 16). He later added that the origins of the Malay rulers in the *Malay Annals* was inaccurate: "And how is the evidence related? Therefore, it is obvious that the story written in the Sejarah Melayu [*Malay Annals*] is wrong[37]!" (ibid, p, 29). Malay historical literature is definitely not above critique and fact-checking, however, due to Winstedt's adherence to positivism, the *Malay Annals* was completely disregarded as a collection of myths and not studied with the consideration that it deserved. The *Malay Annals* as a pre-colonial court text was side-lined, which meant that the oral narrations and stories that circulated amongst the peoples, which came from this collection, were not even considered as knowledge or history.

In order to have been published as a history textbook, Abdul Hadi followed the steps of his predecessors, specifically Winstedt, and used sources in other languages to crosscheck the description of historical event in Malay sources. He showed skepticism about *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* and what it says about the "*orang liar*" (Wild People), "we cannot depend on it [Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa], because most of it is not rational (unfathomable to our minds)[38]" (Abdul-Hadi 1947 (1925), 15). However, he did still include some explanations from Malay historical literature, without dismissing them as myths or fairy tales and used it to highlight how a certain event or historical figure was remembered by the Malays. For example, in Volume II, he related how Sultan Mahmud Shah II is remembered in the *Malay Annals* to be a strange man, easily influenced by the devils. He sliced a pregnant woman's belly open, for eating a small piece of *Nangka* fruit, which belonged to the king. One of the men of the court, whose name is Megat Seri Rama, was related to the woman who was killed and in revenge, killed the Sultan. This was one of the few stories that was related by Abdul Hadi, with the intention of showing the disorder happening in the centre of Malay authorities and in a way, critique feudalism, not necessarily to justify colonisation.

[35] Olla Podrida is a seasoned stew of meat and vegetables usually including sausage and chickpeas, that is slowly simmered. It is a traditional Spanish and Latin American dish.
[36] "Maka sunggoh pun ada hikayat mencheritakan hal zaman purba kala itu, tetapi tiada-lah berapa guna-nya: kerana segala yang di-riwayatkan dari hal dewa-dewa dan orang kesaktian yang tersebut kesah-nya di-dalam hikayat-hikayat itu sa-mata-mata-lah nampak-nya cherita menyedapkan telingga sahaja, bukan-nya dari-pada perkara yang di-terima dan di-hargakan pada nilayan tawarikh"
[37] "Dan apa saksi-nya ia-itu berhubong? Maka nyata-Iah salah-nya cherita yang terkarang di-dalam Sejarah Melayu itu"
[38] "Dalam pada itu pun tiada-lah boleh kita berpegang pada-nya, kerana kebanyakan tiada munasabah pada 'akal kita."

As these historical narrations were sidelined in pursuit of a 'scientific' history, it created space for a 'point-zero' that allowed the British to centre the British in Malayan history. On top of allowing the centring of Europe, the 'point-zero' effectively excluded certain types of indigenous knowledges as sites of legitimate knowledge production. Despite the textbooks centring Europe and adopting methodological Eurocentrism, Abdul Hadi complicates this pattern as he included explanations from Malay historical literature that sat alongside the other more 'scientific' retelling of history.

Narrative #2: The British were benevolent colonisers

As most of the textbooks were written by scholars-administrators, they reflected the belief that the British were benevolent in their rule. Setting Western civilisation as the universal standard of development and progress inevitably allowed European colonisers to justify their "exploration" and colonisation. Swettenham's *British Malaya* elucidated:

> "the efforts which have raised the Malays to a condition of comfort and happiness never before known in their history, and have conferred benefits on Chinese, Indians and British alike, while opening a new and valuable market to British manufacturers" (1907, preface).

In the chapter "Evolution of the Residential System", he described how the British Residents were initially:

> "not to interfere more frequently or to a greater extent than is necessary with the minor details of government; but their special objects should be, the maintenance of peace and law, the initiation of a sound system of taxation, with the consequent development of the resources of the country, and the supervision of the collection of the revenue" (p.217).

Essentially, the British laid out the Residents to be "advisers, not as rulers" (p.218). Until 1874, British policy towards the Malay States (excluding the Straits Settlements) was one of non-intervention. This policy aimed to protect the China-India trade route through the Straits of Melaka without acquiring territorial responsibilities in the Malay Peninsula. Despite this, with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, Malaya was brought into British's sphere of influence and the need to ensure order throughout the Malay states was imperative for economic growth. With unrestricted immigration from China, Chinese immigrants ventured into the Western Malay States in search of tin and these tin mining labourers developed into a major disruptive force in the Malay States, leading to major civil conflicts involving both the Malay Chiefs and Chinese miners. Swettenham related this development in his book:

> "I have said that the protected Malay States depended mainly on the tin mines for their revenue, and it was the first care of the Government to foster the industry by every legitimate means. […] Since then other Europeans have formed companies of the same purposes; but it was the Chinese who began the work, who have continued it ever since, and whose efforts have succeeded in producing more than half of the world's tin supply. Their energy and enterprise have made the Malay states

what they are today, and it would be impossible to overstate the obligation which the Malay government and people are under to these hard-working, capable and law-abiding aliens. They were already miners and the traders, and in some instances the planters and the fishermen, before the white man had found his way to the Peninsula. In all the early days it was Chinese energy and industry which supplied the fund to begin the construction of roads and other public works, and to pay for all the other costs of administration. Then they were, and still they are, the pioneers of mining" (added underline for emphasis, p.231).

He contrasted the Chinese with the Malay Chiefs, saying that "the part played by the Malay has been already told: it was mainly negative" (p.232). They were resisting this development as well as increased British involvement, showed "their objection to the interference of Europeans by sulking and indirectly thwarting the wishes of the Government" (p.221). This brought to the forefront the need for British control, as a precondition to protect and allow for the flourishing of this local commerce. The narrative of the civilising mission was also apparent in Swettenham's belief that the Malays needed help to develop whether from the British or the Chinese immigrants – this narrative was reproduced in the 2019 Bicentennial.

In addition, under the treaty of 1874, the Sultan had to accept a British Resident "whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom" (Hussin 2007, 761). Swettenham explicitly disagreed with the initial roles of British Residents for the Malay States (excluding the Straits Settlements). The Residents were charged to create conditions for an ordered public but at the same time instructed not to interferes too much:

"For one white man to maintain the law – something unwritten and unknown – and preserve the peace in a foreign state of which he knew very little, initiate a sound system of taxation and get it observed, develop the resources of the country, supervise the collection of revenue so as to provide means to meet all the costs of administration, and yet "not interfere more frequently or to a greater extent than is necessary with the minor details of government"[39] was surely an impossible task" (p.217).

Swettenham's above disagreement is an example of a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism, where Swettenham understood the negative aspects of colonisation but still maintained the narrative of modernity, which was the need to develop Malaya economically and politically (Baxstrom 2008). This fitted the image of a benevolent coloniser.

Winstedt's *History of Malaya* reiterated the need for British intervention by foregrounding British colonisation with an overview of the pre-colonial Malay empires. Specifically, he highlighted

[39] Swettenham quoted a circular that was sent to newly installed British Residents in 1876 by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Caravan. The circular warned them about the limits of their powers in relation to the everyday governance of the "protected" states (Barlow 1995, 202).

the Johor Empire and the weaknesses of the Johor royalty, portraying its leaders as irrational, believing in dreams, fairies and plagued by family feuds, tyranny and greed (Winstedt 1935, 135-172). To Winstedt, the anarchic Malay kingdoms justified British intervention. In *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*, he did the same foregrounding but this time with the previous European colonisers. The final section of the book focused on colonial domination of Malays beginning from the 14th century with the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and British. According to Winstedt, the Portuguese were interested in the spread of Christianity in Malaya and amassing profits by force. The Dutch, instead, focused on trade instead of religion. British colonisation was portrayed as spreading good governance and management of trade, which ensured security and orderliness, and the advancement of civilisation for the people. He ended this account of history with a prayer in Malay:

> "At the end, till then, every state was sheltered under the flags of the British rule, hopefully Allah will now add peace, prosperity and ease to the sons of the soil forever. Amen! Amen! [in Arabic] Oh Lord of the Worlds[40]!" (Winstedt 1921 (1918), 80)

Abdul Hadi (1930, 89) also did praise the bravery of the European nations at the beginning of the "Age of Exploration", however his narrative differed in that he acknowledged that their colonial interventions were beneficial to Europe, not Malaya, in trade and expansion of power, features of modernity/coloniality that the other two authors failed to highlight:

> "The work of finding pathways or new places was initiated by the European peoples at that time (referring to the 1500s), and this is a story that is strange to us. Because of these peoples' bravery to sail in small ships without maps or guidance that could point them to corals; especially as they did not know any places to stopover to stock up on food and drinks. Furthermore, the new pathways or places that were found by them, are not places that are easily accessible. How long did they float, being blown by the wind and waves in the sea, while suffering multiple difficulties and how many lives were sacrificed. Despite that, new pathways and places that were found by the Europeans were immensely beneficial to their peoples, especially in the world of trade[41]" (p.79).

He (1930, 89) also stated that port cities like Goa were "forcefully stolen" (*dirampas*).

[40] Pada akhirnya dari semenjak itu, bernaunglah segala negeri itu dibawah panji-panji kerajaan Inggeris, mudah-mudahan Allah kiranya menambahkan aman Sentosa dan maamore kesenangan bagi bumiputeranya selama-lamanya. Amin! Amin! Ya rabbal 'alamin!

[41] Sa-nya ada-lah pekerjaan bagi menchari jalan atau tempat-tempat baharu yang telah di-lakukan oleh bangsa-bangsa Eropah pada zaman itu, ia-lah suatu chereta yang menghairankan kapada kita. Kerana berani-nya bangsa-bangsa itu keluar berlayar dalam kapal-kapal yang kechil dengan tiada berpeta dan pedoman yang boleh menunjokkan pada mereka batu-batu karang; istimewa pula dengan tiada mengetahui di-mana tempat-tempat persinggahan yang boleh mengambil ayer dan makanan. Dan lagi jalan-jalan atau tempat-tempat baharu yang telah diperolehi oleh mereka itu, bukan-nya-lah pula dengan mudah sahaja di-dapati mereka: ia-itu beberapa lama mereka terapong-apong di-hayunkan oleh angin dan gelombang di-laut dengan menderita beberepak adzab sengsara dan juga beberapa banyak jiwa yang telah menjadi kurbannya. Sunggoh pun demikian itu, tetapi jalan-jalan atau tempat-tempat baharu yang telah diperolehi oleh bangsa-bangsa Eropah itu teramatlah besar fa'edahnya kepada bangsa-bangsa mereka terutama dalam dunia perniagaan.

Unlike the other authors, partly due to his body-politics and being able to write across three volumes, Abdul Hadi highlighted the competition between the different European powers that were involved in colonisation. He mentioned how even prior to formation of the EIC, the Europeans were competing to monopolise trade, specifically giving the example of conflicts between Spain and England with regards to their participation in the African slave trade in the sixteenth century (p.240). As mentioned earlier, he also stated how trade primarily benefitted the EIC instead of the colonised states itself. In a section on "the decline on EIC's power" (the EIC dissolved formally in 1858), he stated that it was due to their mismanagement in colonies in India that resulted in resistance to the EIC. The second reason he stated was the destruction of lives and the properties of Man, "because of the violence that was done by the EIC, it led to the loss of thousands of lives and multiple countries being seized by the Company forcefully[42]" (p. 302). The third reason was due to their sole concern of obtaining profits: "War and conflict that was started by the EIC, was all so that the Company could chase profits. This profit would only add to the riches of the Company, and do not benefit the country [it was taken from]"[43] (p. 302). Although he was not commenting on British colonisation as a whole and only focused on the EIC, I found that he was the only author that did not justify colonisation to be beneficial for Malay lands. Abdul Hadi explicitly stated how European expansion only profited the Europeans and brought destruction to their colonies – detailing the darker side of modernity.

Overall, these textbooks elucidated how British colonisation can be decentred from the overall retelling of Malayan history as the main historical actor and yet, still maintain the narrative of the civilising mission – retaining the historical and cultural avatars of Eurocentrism. In addition to centring British colonisation in the history of Malaya, Swettenham's textbook espoused the benevolence of British colonisation. The other textbooks by Winstedt and Abdul Hadi positioned the British as a specific period within a longer history of Malaya, decentring the British in Malayan history. However, Winstedt's English and Malay textbooks both justified colonisation and highlighted how it was beneficial for the Malay peninsula. Again, only Abdul Hadi complicated this by explicitly stating the destruction that colonisation brought. In the conclusion of this chapter, I argue that this is due to his body-politics of knowledge, as we shall see how despite internalising some colonial conceptions and epistemologies, Abdul Hadi was able to highlight a less glorifying version of modernity.

[42] Disebabkan peperangan yang dilakukan oleh Kompeni Inggeris itu, sehingga berjuta-juta jiwa manusia yang hilang dan beberepa buah negeri yang dirampas oleh Kompeni itu dengan aniaya.
[43] Peperangan dan pergadohan yang dilakukan oleh Kompeni Inggeris itu pula, ialah oleh Kompeni itu hendak mengejar kuntungan. Akan keuntungan ini semata-mata bagi kekayaan Kompeni itu, iaitu tiada mendatangkan fa'edah kepada negeri.

Narrative #3: The civilising mission benefitted Malaya

This narrative of modernity is an extension of the previous narrative – if the British were beneficial colonisers, then colonisation was a means towards Malaya attaining progress and development based on the Enlightenment standard of civilisation.

In the discussion on cultural avatars of Eurocentrism, the civilising mission of bringing good governance and economic development encapsulates civilisational thinking. Civilisational thinking assigns civilisation to the Enlightenment values of rationality, secularism, liberal democratic tolerant social values, in contrast to other civilisations, which are relegated to primitivity. Civilisational thinking is supported by a progressivist framework of history, where history follows "scientific" understanding of the past and thus, time is linear. History then reflects the gradual progress from primitivity to civilisation. Progress can be 'measured' in terms of technological advancement and spiritual salvation (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 57). The pursuit of progress by any means necessary is a key feature of modernity. Civilisational thinking and a progressive view of history were present in all the five textbooks.

In *British Malaya*, Swettenham perpetuated the exceptionalism of Singapore within the Malay Peninsula precisely because he adopted civilisational thinking. As compared to other Malay states, Singapore was closer to the standard of civilisation defined by the West because of her rapid economic growth. Claiming that it began from 'point zero', it was brought into civilisation with the patronage of the British colonial administration:

> "Then uninhabited, island of Singapore. So the ancient Singapura disappeared, struck down violently, betrayed and sacked in a night, and the survivors journeyed north-west and founded Malacca, drawing thither much of the trade and prosperity of their earlier home. Now again, after 600 years, Singapore rises from its ashes and draws to itself the trade to the position and circumstances of Singapore, the fact need cause no surprise. […] Sir Stamford Raffles came, nursed the ashes, fanned them with foresight, with infinite knowledge, with tact and above all, with firm determination. […] Almost at once the place blazed into life and fame; and today Singapore, counted by the tonnage of her shipping, is the 8th largest port in the world…" (Swettenham 1907, 31).

Due to its economic success and growth, Swettenham named Singapore "the Gate of the Farther East, a naval base of the highest importance, a great commercial centre and the most prosperous of British Crown Colonies" (p.72).

In the chapter on Singapore, he stated,

> "There were about 150 inhabitants on the island of Singapore, a few of them were aborigines and the rest people who had accompanied the Dato Temenggong when he settled there 8 years ago. The Malay lived in boats and miserable huts on the left bank of the Singapore River, and they are

supposed to have made a livelihood by piracy the place was quite uncultivated and covered by jungle, though Raffles, in an exuberance of enthusiasm, wrote that he could trace the fortifications of the ancient citadel, destroyed about six hundred years earlier. (p.81)".

I compare the above to how Abdul Hadi (1930, 301) wrote about Singapore:

"During the early 19th century of the Gregorian calendar, the city of Singapore was opened by the British. The trade of the EIC in Malay islands became even bigger and more successful, because that city became the centre […] With this, there was big profits obtained by the EIC from their trade and produces obtained from its colonies and states that are subjected to them[44]".

Comparing the two narratives, Swettenham obviously allocated praise and the "success story" narrative to Singapore, praise which was not allocated to mainland Malaya. He praised the administration of Singapore as it was closer to meeting the Eurocentric standard of civilisation. On the other hand, Abdul Hadi stated that Singapore was a colony, a means for the EIC to gain more from trade in Southeast Asia. He noted that colonisation was economically beneficial for the coloniser, rather than the colonised. This contrast is precisely what Mignolo (2007, 466) was trying to illustrate about telling the partial stories of modernity as opposed to recognising both modernity and coloniality. Swettenham told the story of Singapore's success story, a narrative of modernity, while Abdul Hadi offered an illustration of modernity/coloniality.

Aside from Swettenham's more obvious assertions of the civilising mission being beneficial for Malaya, I observe that Winstedt's and Abdul Hadi's textbooks internalised civilisational thinking by reflecting history as the gradual progress from primitivity to civilisation. In Chapter 4 it will be clear that even though overall, the Bicentennial commemorations reproduced the narrative that the civilising mission was beneficial, the Bicentennial exhibition organised by the Malay Heritage Centre was critical in that they did not reproduce this civilisational thinking and spotlighted the knowledge and civilisation of the different communities in the Malay peninsula. I address civilisational thinking from Winstedt and Abdul Hadi below to show how despite being more critical of colonisation than the two British administrators, Abdul Hadi had still internalised colonial categories of race and civilisation – differentiating "primitive" peoples from the "civilised" using the criteria of progress based on their nomadic or permanent habitation and their mode of production (Soda 2001, 217).

In *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*, Winstedt divided the inhabitants of Malaya into four races: the Semang, Sakai, the Jakun (proto-Malay) and the Malay. He then compared the Malays to the Semang

[44] Istimewa pula pada awal kurun Masehi yang kesembilan-belas bandar Singapura di buka oleh orang-orang Inggeris, apatah lagi. Semakin bertambah-tambah besar dan majulah perniagaan Kimpeni Inggeris di Pulau-pulau Melayu, kerana bandar itulah yang menjadi pusat di-antara tempat-tempat yang tersebut itu. […] Bahkan amatlah banyak keuntungan yang diperolehi oleh Kompeni Inggeris daripada perniagaannya dan lain lagi beberapa banyak hasil dan ufti yang diterimanya daripada jajahan-jajahan dan negeri-negeri yang tertakluk kepadanya.

people, which he described as Negritos in *The History of Malaya,* stating that the Malays were higher on the racial hierarchy of coloniality:

> "The reason why it is said that they [Semang] have originally lived in Malay Peninsula (referring to Malay Land and the Islands) is because if the Malays had already lived here before them, how could weaker and more stupid races come after them? It is the because the Malays are indeed more intelligent and progressive as well as more able to resist the attacks by enemies as opposed to the Semang people , who are wild and always afraid of other human beings[45]"(Winstedt 1921 (1918), 1-2).

> "None of these wild peoples had permanent villages, or long-term homes. None of them knows how to sink a well and to crop a padi field, unlike the people who had left the boundary of the wilderness[46]" (ibid., 4).

In *A History of Malaya*, Winstedt reiterated this by differentiating the primitive tribes with the "civilised Malay":

> "Omitting Indians, Chinese and other immigrants of historical times, the inhabitants of Malaya are of four races: the Negrito, the Sakai, the Jakun (or proto-Malay) and the civilised Malay through anthropology has not left the Sakai pure and finds even the Negrito composite" (Winstedt 1935, 1).

Abdul Hadi also accepted this hierarchy and classification of human beings based on progress and wrote in *Sejarah Alam Melayu,*

> "It can also be said that those wild people began to stay in the Malay Lands, because they were a nation that was stupid, in addition scared of other nations[47]"(Abdul-Hadi 1947 (1925), 2).

> "If we look into different aspects and appearances of their [Jakun] ancestors, there are differences from the Wild People (*Orang Liar)* that were mentioned before. This is because they are the ancestors of the Malays who have built villages, crop padi field and know about metal work[48]" (ibid., 25)

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[45] "Maka sebab pun di-katakan mereka itu-lah yang asli mendiami Tanah (dan juga Pulau Pulau) Melayu ini, ia-lah kerana jikalau sa-kira-nya orang Melayu telah sedia ada mendiami di-sini terdahulu dari-pada mereka itu, betapa pula dapat dan boleh di-datangi kemudian oleh bangsa-bangsa yang lemah lagi bebal itu? Kerana orang Melayu ini tentu-lah terlebeh cherdek dan maju serta terlebeh pandai berikhtiar melawan serangan musoh dari-pada orang bangsa Semang yang liar dan sentiasa takut akan manusia itu." (Kitab Tawarikh Melayu)

[46] Maka tiada-Iah pernah orang-orang liar itu berkampong kekal, atau berumah yang tetap, dan tiada-Iah ia tahu mengorek tali ayer dan berbuat sawah padi saperti manusia yang telah keluar dari-pada sempadan keliaran, ada-nya.

[47] Shahadan maka sebab pun dikatakan orang-orang liar itu mula-mula mendiami Tanah Melayu ini, kerana mereka itu suatu bangsa yang bodoh lagi menakuti pula kepada bangsa-bangsa yang lain

[48] Sunggoh pun demikian jika kita tilek pada beberapa keadaan dan susok baka mereka itu, ada-Iah berlainan juga daripada Orang Liar yang telah lalu kesah-nya itu. Kerana sa-sunggohnya ada-Iah nenek moyang orang Melayu itu berusaha pada membuat kampong halaman dan bersawah padi serta tahu bertukang besi.

Despite understanding the colonial difference of the coloniser and the colonised, as stated earlier, Abdul Hadi adopted civilisational thinking in differentiating the Wild Malays (*Melayu Liar)* from the Tame Malays (*Melayu Jinak)*, basing his classification on how isolated or connected these communities were with external peoples and civilisations.

All the textbooks, excluding Swettenham's (which solely focused on the efforts of the British in Malaya), were structured according to the linear progression of 'lesser civilisations' or even primitivity, to 'higher civilisations'. Winstedt and Abdul Hadi's books started with the history of the *Orang Asli*, the primitive tribes, laying out the different Malays that were inhabiting the land. It moved on to the arrival of princes from Sumatra, the Hindu period, the Malay Empire of Malacca, the arrival of Islam, and then the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch and the British. The linear chronology of the various cultural stages highlighted the supposedly universal progressive model of social evolution. Despite Abdul Hadi's recognition of colonialism, recognising that economic development in Malaya meant the exploitation and colonisation of lands to benefit Europe, he failed to recognise that in adopting this linear view of history, he also divided Malay history into terms of progress and a form of evolution from primitivity and various forms of civilisations, culminating in British colonisation. This implied that the British colonisation allowed Malaya to reach a higher level of civilisation. This civilisational thinking, which is reproduced in the pursuit of capitalist development, leaves the Indigenous communities in Malaysia vulnerable. Most of the forests that they depend on for their livelihoods are owned by the Malaysian government and the rapid development of Malaysia in the last few decades, have resulted in intensive logging, expansion of palm oil plantations and other large scale agricultural crops that have increasingly displaced Indigenous tribes (Radu 2019).

Narrative #4: Nation-state as universal conception of space

This foundational narrative of modernity concerns the 'natural' formation of state borders. Before the Bicentennial, the post-colonial Singapore state often separated itself from the wider Malay peninsula, fuelling its self-perception of 'exceptionalism' (Barr 2020a). Singapore pride itself as the only country within the region that went from "Third world to First world", leaving its neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia behind. This was mainly attributed to its hard work and principles of meritocracy, stressing the adherence to (East) "Asian values" in development[49]. As will be elaborated in Chapter 4, the symbolism of Raffles in Singapore also allowed for the creation of the 'point zero', that there was no history in Singapore before British colonisation. This not only concretised national borders, but erased Singapore's links with the wider Malay world. The Bicentennial was more critical in that it sought to acknowledge the history of Singapore before Raffles. However, it will be clear in Chapter 4 that despite this, the question of indigeneity of the Malays is still not discussed by the post-colonial state. In this section, I excavate the foundational narrative of the nation-state and how borders

[49] For more details on Singapore's exceptionalism, see Lily Zubaidah Rahim (2009).

were colonially created and carved – how did the British conceptualise space and indigeneity in the Malay world.

Space, which refers to the relationship between people and the land, people and the sea, and the fluidity of territories as opposed to borders, have been radically transformed in the spatial image of the West, with the advent of modernity/coloniality (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 53). This means that the land and sea under colonisation were viewed as something that can be tamed or developed to bring profits. This was mentioned earlier, where Swettenham referred to how the Chinese managed to "develop the hidden riches of an almost unknown and jungle-covered country" (Swettenham 1907, 232).

The modern nation-state and its newly formed boundaries were a special transformation, manifested through treaties between the colonisers. According to historians Andaya and Andaya (2017, 20), the earliest use of the term *Melayu* (Malay) was referring to somewhere in Palembang, Sumatra. In the later period of 1400 to 1511, *Melayu* was applied to those within the royal lineage from Bukit Si Guntang in Srivijaya or Palembang as well as those who were the subjects of the rulers (ibid, p. 45), during the Melaka sultanate. As Malayness was linked with royalty, there was no definite territorial identification belonging to 'Malays' from pre-colonial sources. Even till British colonisation, the Malay kingdoms and different ethnic groups were seen to be moving across land and sea, which includes modern-day Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. The colonial period standardised the territorial boundaries of the 'Malay' (Soda, 2001, 211). When the Portuguese arrived in Melaka in 1511, Europeans had been in the region since then, and they had established bases in places such as Batavia (modern Jakarta), Bencoolen (in West Sumatra), and later, Penang and Singapore. Eventually, when they expanded to cover the whole Archipelago, they divided the region largely along the lines of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, with Indonesia under Dutch rule and Malaya under British rule (Andaya and Andaya 2017, 125). The Johor Sultanate, which had once extended across the southern Peninsula as well as the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, was then divided between the British and the Dutch. The Netherlands ceded all its factories in India to Britain, and ceded Melaka and all its dependencies to Britain. In return, Britain ceded Bencoolen and all its possessions in Sumatra to the Netherlands. The treaty ensured that neither party could sign any treaty with any ruler or state in the other's sovereignty. The treaty effectively brought Malaya and Singapore under the control of the British, and most of what is Indonesia today was under Dutch rule.

With these political changes, Milner (2008) reflected how in the late nineteenth century, the word *kerajaan*, which mostly referred to the royal rule, now began to refer to "government". The older word *negeri*, once referring to a settlement of peoples rather than a political entity, was now employed for "state" (Milner 2008, 117). Soda Noaki (2001, 214) summarised that the Malay territories were referred to in the textbooks he studied in three tiers: the Malay States (*negeri-negeri Melayu*), Malaya (*tanah Melayu*) and the Malay world (*alam Melayu*). Within the Malay World, the colonial

administrators referred to the Malay states (*negeri*) and Malaya (*tanah Melayu*) as delineated territorial entities. Malaya was then further divided into the SS, FMS and UMS, as described early in this chapter, to suit the administrative and economic interests of British colonisation.

All textbooks conceptualised the 'Malay' as indigenous to the land and have not limited the Malays to mainland Malaya. Although Swettenham had a focus on mainland Malaya, as it was the territories that encompassed the British protectorates and colonies, he conceptualised the 'Malay' as the Muslim inhabitants of the Peninsula or of Sumatran origin or the broader conception including all of the indigenous groups of the Archipelago (Vlieland 1932, 75). As stated by Hirschman (1986), the Straits Settlement censuses of 1871 and 1881 separately listed the Aborigines of the Peninsula, Achinese, Boyanese, Bugis, Dyaks, Javanese, Jawi Pekan, Malays and Manilamen. It was only in 1891 that they were arranged as subcategories under "Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago". In *British Malaya*, Swettenham said:

> "The origin of the Malay race is still a matter of doubt, but there are good reasons for believing that Malays are the descendants of people who crossed from the south of India to Sumatra, mixed with a people already inhabiting that island, and gradually spread themselves over the central and most fertile States – Palembang, Jambi, Indragiri, Menangkabau, and Kampar. From Sumatra, they gradually worked their way to Java, to Singapore and the Malay Peninsula, to Borneo, Celebes, the other islands of the Archipelago, and even to the Philippines, Sulu, the Caroline Islands, and perhaps to Formosa" (Swettenham 1907, 144).

Similarly, Winstedt's *Ilmu Alam Melayu* attributed indigeneity to the Malays and wrote about a Malay World (*alam Melayu*) that was broader than mainland Malaya (*tanah Melayu*). In this text, he understood the Malay world (*alam Melayu)* as 'mainland' Malaya (*tanah Melayu*), the British Borneo territories, the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines. Malaya was made up of the smaller Malay states (*negeri-negeri Melayu*). He wrote:

> "Those mentioned [Proto-Malays] are originally pure Malays, but they have come to attain language and customs because they had mixed with other races/nations such as the Hindus, and others. Until now, their race has filled and inhabitated the whole Malay peninsula, namely, Percha Island, the land of Java, the Lesser Sunda Islands, the coast of Bugis land, the beaches of Borneo and the Philippine Islands" (Winstedt 1926 (1918), 10-11).

In *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu,* Winstedt was consistent in including the wide range of peoples under "Malay":

> "Only recently did the people of Percha Island become Malay, as we know today; and they had lived closely with other races such as the Hindu race and earlier races that stayed in Sumatera Island, the

Borneo Islands and other islands. Therefore, the Malay race since ancient times have become a race that includes multiple peoples, just like the British." (Winstedt 1921 (1918), 7)

Abdul Hadi adopts the broad interpretation of Winstedt and stated:

"Indeed, from the mixing of other races (especially the Hindus) and the original ancestors of the Malays, it developed into the Malay race we see today, that is, those who are the inhabitants of the whole Malay world[50]." (Abdul-Hadi 1947 (1925), 27)

Thus, the Malay race, as conceptualised by the colonial government in their census and popularised by Winstedt and Abdul Hadi, was not one that was seeking to create a nationally or racially "pure" group. The conceptualisation of the 'Malay' extended Malay identity to indigenous groups to other parts of the Malay Archipelago, not only what is known as Malaysia and Singapore today, but extending to Philippines, Borneo and parts of Indonesia. All the textbooks wrote about the Malay Archipelago in a way that referred to the wider Malay World, then mainland Malaya and within that the Malay states.

Despite expanding the category of the 'Malay' to the wider Malay world, all five textbooks focused their history-writing on *tanah Melayu* (Malaya), which established the foundations of the delineated territorial states that we recognise in the Malay Archipelago today. Within the English works of Swettenham and Winstedt, the focus of history was on mainland Malaya as it was the territories that encompassed the British protectorates and colonies, areas which they were concerned about. In the ninth through eleventh chapters of *Ilmu Alam Melayu*, Winstedt wrote about the political units of the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States and how the *negeri-negeri* were organised.

Abdul Hadi also adopted this view of the three-tiered Malay world and dedicated four chapters to deal with the history of Malaya. However, compared to Swettenham and Winstedt, he was the only author that covered the history of the Malay world (*alam Melayu*) outside of Malaya, including Sumatra and Java. This might be due to the fact that his history book was published into different volumes and that Abdul Hadi was influenced by works from Indonesia. It is significant to consider that Abdul Hadi's textbook broadened the scope of Malay history (Soda, 2011, 214) as the anti-colonialists that that came out of SITC, were also students of Abdul Hadi. Abdul Hadi's students, Harun Aminurashid and Ibrahim Haji Yaacob, as well as other nationalists, were instrumental in the development of the pan-Malay concept of *Melayu Raya* (A. Hussain 1982). They had developed *Melayu Raya* during the interwar period, used to signify a pan-Malay nation, incorporating the Malay Peninsula, Java, Sumatra and the

[50] Sa-sunggoh-nya daripada perchamporan lain-lain bangsa (terutama orang Hindu) dengan beneh pancharan nenek moyang orang Melayu itu-Iah telah jadi-nya bangsa Melayu yang ada sekarang ini, ia-itu yang memenohi jadi pendudok-pendudok merata-rata 'Alam Melayu.

other Indonesian Islands[51]. I consider this to be a form of epistemic delinking as despite inheriting colonial categories of race (the 'Malay'), *Melayu Raya* went beyond the delineated colonial territorial borders of Malaya and Indonesia, imagining a polity that encompassed all Malays. I also contrast this expanded understanding of *Melayu Raya* to the post-colonial Singapore state narrative that not only asserted Singapore as a separate independent state, in terms of sovereignty and identity, from the wider Malay world, but also sidelined the question of indigeneity to maintain stability in a multi-cultural state. These discussions and negotiations were not reflected in the retelling of Singapore's history, as I will illustrate in the next few chapters.

Overall, the standardisation of the territorial boundaries of Malaya and Singapore was rooted in the British colonial period. However, it is interesting to note that the broader conceptions of the 'Malay' and the recognition of Malay indigeneity found in all the textbooks, were influential in the development of Malay nationalism but completely diverged from in the narratives of the Bicentennial. The solidification of Singapore's boundary as a nation state and its 'exceptionalism', was more apparent in the Bicentennial. It is also interesting to note that the Malay intellectuals and nationalists who adopted pan-Malay solidarity and identity acknowledged that the concept of the "Malay" and the land it encompassed were essentially colonial products. They reappropriated these conceptions of Malay identity and the sovereignty over lands that were associated with this identity for their liberation against the British colonial administration (Hussein 1993). I will go into the contradictions of this reappropriation in Chapter 5, with the discussion of Malay nationalism in *Utusan Melayu*. However, as compared to the narratives coming out of the 2019 Singapore Bicentennial, these developments were completely overlooked and instead, there was a sense of concretising Singapore's national borders.

Conclusion: Foundations of colonial logics in history textbooks

This chapter highlighted the purpose of colonial education through illustrating the foundations of the colonial education system in Malaya and its history curriculum. I argue that the colonial education system preserved colonial interest by controlling the different races within Malaya and ensuring that it sustained the labour distribution in the colonial economic system.

In addition, this chapter highlighted the foundational grand Eurocentric metanarratives of historical developments in Malaya, which I described as the narratives of modernity. I excavated four foundational narratives of modernity found in the textbooks: the British were at the centre of Malayan history, the British were benevolent colonisers, the civilising mission was good for Malaya and lastly, the territorial boundaries in Malaya were transformed. The first three narratives of modernity reaffirmed that the creation of history served as a justification for development and British colonisation of Malay lands and societies, even despite attempting to decentre Britain and diversifying by including a Malay

[51] Interchangeable with *Indonesia Raya*.

author. The last narrative of modernity delineated territories in the Malay peninsula, mainly dividing Malaya and Indonesia. This, coupled with the recognition of Malay indigeneity, was conducive towards the development of pan-Malay nationalism, and anti-colonialism. These foundational narratives will be compared to current-day knowledge production by the post-colonial Singapore state during the Bicentennial commemorations. This comparison is an effort towards deconstructing history and identifying partial stories of modernity.

Finally, it is important to note that including Abdul Hadi as an author did make a difference in content. Body-politic of knowledge allows us to understand how despite having to fit into the 'scientific' writing of history, Abdul Hadi was able to highlight some of the logics of coloniality that were hidden by the narratives of modernity. He highlighted how the British and the civilising mission served to benefit the British and was disruptive towards the colonised. Abdul Hadi did not try to justify the need for colonisation. Abdul Hadi also offered a case of what it means to epistemically delink. He considered Malaya beyond its delineated territorial entities and planted the seed for the conception of 'Melayu Raya' to be developed by his students (Salleh 1979). However, he still used Eurocentric epistemology, similar to Swettenham and Winstedt, in adopting a view of history as a linear progression of civilisation as well as the colonial constructs of racial categorisation, which supported the narrative that colonisation was beneficial for Malaya. The difference in content between the textbooks for the English schools and those for the Malays schools was very minor but I can conclude that the Malay textbooks were more extensive in Malayan history as opposed to Swettenham's text, which was merely looking at the history of British administration in Malaya. Overall, the geopolitics of knowledge is still from the side of modernity – the ego-politics of knowledge – although it scratched the surface with Abdul Hadi, who highlighted some logics of coloniality.

Chapter 4
Current-day history making: The 2019 Bicentennial commemorations

The Straits Times editorial writer, Asad Latif, in his 2018 editorial stated that:

> "Raffles incorporated Singapore into emerging patterns of economic globalisation that help to define its destiny even today. While Singapura had been a part of Asian networks of trade long before Raffles had been born, he inserted it firmly into a global geography of trade and power that would transform the island into a world city […] Raffles' colonialism was decidedly benign by the standards of murder and plunder practiced in the United States or Australia or the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, the Belgian Congo and apartheid South Africa. He left behind, not a history of physical extermination and territorial dispossession, but an entrepot that seized economic opportunities abroad while governed by the rule of law and constitutional gradualism at home" (2018).

This narrative of Raffles and British colonisation is representative of the official narratives of history as represented in contemporary national commemorations (such as the 2019 Bicentennial). The narratives reflect the remembering of a "benign" or "benevolent" colonisation, one that propelled Singapore into "success" and "modernity". Similar to the narratives of modernity found in the colonial textbooks, the post-colonial Singaporean state believes that it benefitted economically from the experience of British colonisation and its global status today is proof of it.

In this chapter, I focus on the narratives found in the exhibitions organised in Singapore for the Bicentennial commemoration in 2019. There was a variety of events, either organised by the Singapore government, grassroots organisations or privately run events. I will not be focusing on the grassroots or privately run events during the Bicentennial as the official exhibitions, such as the statues and the museum exhibitions, were the most pervasive and accessible to the public, being free of charge and publicised widely over social media. Due to space constraints within this thesis, I will not endeavour to examine the public's internalisation of colonial logics found within these exhibitions. Rather, I am merely focusing on the Singaporean post-colonial state's narrative on colonial history to be able to contrast it with the colonial state's narrative of history in the previous chapter. The exhibitions had a critical potential as it was a space to bring up the darker side of colonialism in the region and introduce indigenous sources or artifacts that told a different history. This chapter serves as the catalyst that inspired this whole thesis – I question how knowledge is still "colonised" by arguing that current-day official narratives and history writing in Singapore contain narratives that reinforce the pursuit of modernity, while erasing the darker side, the logics of coloniality. These unchallenged narratives, that do not acknowledge how logics of coloniality are constituted within, are why Singapore still remembers British colonisation so positively. The foundational narratives extracted from the colonial textbooks were: (1) the British were the centre of Malayan history, (2) the British were benevolent colonisers, (3) the civilising mission was beneficial, and (4) the formation of Malaya as a coherent national border.

The narratives that I extracted from the 2019 exhibitions are similar for (1) to (3). I divided foundational narrative (4) into two, to highlight the solidification of Singapore's borders. This resulted in five main themes within the Bicentennial exhibitions which were:

(1) the British, specifically Raffles, 'founded' modern-day Singapore,
(2) the British were benevolent colonisers, a necessary experience needed for Singapore's modernisation,
(3) the civilising mission was beneficial, the neoliberal and capitalist economic development as well as the 'introduction' of governance and law has brought Singapore its status today,
(4) Singapore is an independent nation-state separate from the rest of the region (adds to the myth of exceptionalism[52]), and lastly,
(5) Singapore did not have links with the Malay world, overlooking its broader history as part of a vast maritime network of ports, riverine systems and islands that constituted the Johor-Riau Sultanate (Joraimi 2021, 122). This final narrative overlooks the indigeneity of Malays and posits everyone as migrants or settlers.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: I first lay out the genealogy of the commemorations and then move on to the content analyses of the different exhibitions, such as the statues and the museum exhibitions. I argue that the Singaporean state treatment of the Bicentennial and the historical narratives produced were varied: there were times where the efforts to revise history fell short, merely diversifying and dewesternising. This is where I compare contemporary narratives with the foundational narratives of modernity, that I have excavated from the textbooks. As elaborated in the previous chapter, history-writing narrated from the British colonial perspective offered partial stories of modernity, producing knowledge from the position of imperial difference. I argued in chapter 2 that only by occupying a colonial difference, can one be able to acknowledge a fuller story of modernity/coloniality.

In my estimation, even though Singapore as a country went through the experience of colonisation, the post-colonial Singapore state does not speak fully from the position of colonial difference. The post-colonial Singaporean state interestingly straddles the position of imperial and colonial difference, seeking to preserve the interests of the government in moving towards development and market-based capitalism as well as silencing opposition or resistance voices, while acknowledging some of the obvious silences behind the narratives of modernity. I argue that the foundational narratives continue to be present in current history-writing in some way. More significantly, this comparison elucidates that even without the presence of physical colonial powers and institutions, the local agency of 'free' and independent peoples can still reproduce coloniality, when uncritically accepting modernity.

[52] Singapore was the only country that became "Third world to First world", leaving its neighbours behind. This was due to its hard work and principles of meritocracy, stressing the adherence to (East) "Asian values" in development.

The genealogy of the 2019 Bicentennial commemoration: 1919 and 1969

It is impossible to speak about commemorations in Singapore without the discussion of the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles as it is deeply intertwined with the history of commemorations. Alongside the analysis of the contents within the Museum exhibitions, this section highlights the colonial legacy of the Bicentennial commemorations and the Raffles statue. I continue to examine narratives of modernity found in the museum exhibitions in the next section.

The Bicentennial commemoration in Singapore was the third time in Singapore's history that the arrival of Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819 had been marked officially – in 1919, 1969 and recently, 2019. The commemoration of a Bicentennial served as a continuation of Centenary Day on 6th February 1919, commemorating 100 years of 'Singapore's founding', a literal, physical manifestation of the continuation of the British colonial legacy in Singapore. It was said that the Bicentennial commemoration would not focus only on the British but would be "engaging… different communities to piece together the story of this shared journey through history" (Bicentennial 2018). Despite its attempts to create a dewesternising narrative, it replicated the 1919 Centenary Day, which also saw celebrations held by each major ethnic group, such as the Arab, Tamil, Muslim, Eurasian and Jewish communities.

The Centenary Day in 1919 organised by the British, commemorated 100 years since the arrival of Raffles who "with wonder foresight founded this Settlement then a mangrove swamp with some 150 inhabitants" (The Straits Times 1919). A committee was formed to develop commemorations of the centenary of Singapore's founding. It was led by colonial administrator W. George Maxwell, along with other representatives from the different ethnic groups. The committee proposed the establishment of a college to commemorate the founding of Singapore. Raffles college was only then set up in 1928. In 1949, it merged with the King Edward VII College of Medicine to form the University of Malaya, which became known as the University of Singapore in 1962 and then the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1980 (National Heritage Board 2015). The event triggered a renewed opportunity for institutionalised colonial knowledge production via the college.

Another significant event proposed for the Centenary was the relocation of the Raffles statue, which was originally installed on Jubilee Day on 27 June 1887 at the Padang. It was relocated to Empress Place during Singapore's centenary celebration on 6 February 1919. The statue was an eight-foot bronze figure of Raffles, made by Thomas Woolner. It was eventually nicknamed *orang besi* (metal man in Malay) by the locals. The statue, which was originally at the Padang, was made to symbolise and commemorate the founding of Singapore and the entry of the British into Malaya. The statue was relocated at Empress Place as the authorities wanted the statue to be at a more dignified location as at the Padang, the statue was often struck by flying footballs or used as a seat for a better view of the football matches there (1919).

Figure 2: Statue of Sir Stamford Raffles installed at the Padang in 1887 for Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee Day (Photo by National Archives of Singapore)

A polymarble copy of the original bronze statue was unveiled in 1972, and this copy now stands on the north of Boat Quay bank of the Singapore River, marking what is believed to be Raffles' landing site. First Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's economic advisor was a Dutch man named Albert Winsemius (1960-84), who during his visit to Singapore in 1960 led a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) mission to advise Singapore on industrialisation. In Winsemius' first report in 1961, he laid two preconditions to Singapore's success, which was firstly, to eliminate the communists who are preventing economic progress and secondly, to not remove the statue of Raffles. Lee was aware of the symbolism between the preservation of the Raffles statue and Singapore's commitment to Western capitalism and neoliberalism. He said in a tribute to Winsemius, "investors [from America and Europe] wanted to see what a new socialist government in Singapore was going to do with the statue of Raffles" (1996). This signalled the continued acceptance of the Euro-American dominated capitalist system that had emerged as the hegemonic economic system with the 500 years of modernity/coloniality. The preservation of the Raffles statue "would be a symbol of public acceptance of the British heritage and could have a positive effect" (K.Y. Lee 2000, 67). Moving the Raffles' statue to the heart of the economic district in Singapore added another layer of post-colonial Singapore's commitment to capitalism. The advice that Lee was given by Winsemius and the official intended symbolism of the Raffles statue pointed to the blatant coloniality present in preserving the delusion of a positive British colonial legacy, the promise of development with industrialisation and accommodating capitalist economic structures and principles. The additional instruction from

international institutions such as the UN that influenced developments of post-colonial nations added to the continued coloniality. The decision to keep the statue represented a colonial baggage that Singapore still carries from both the British and the Dutch, who were key colonial powers in the *Nusantara*[53] region. Without addressing the traumas of the past, Singapore is stuck living in an illusion of freedom in the future.

These developments are important to note as the values and symbolism behind the Raffles statue are the national values and goals that the contemporary Singapore state are maintaining today – statues are never merely symbolic(Rao 2016). As we shall see in this chapter, the Bicentennial commemorations merely added more diverse perspectives that critiqued British colonisation in an attempt to decentre Raffles but still privileged the modernity that he symbolised. Interestingly, the difference between the local population not caring for a statue and allowing stray footballs to hit it and to sit on it to get a better view of football matches and, the UN advisor attaching symbolic meaning of development and economic growth to the statue, was a stark juxtaposition of how the people thought (or did not think) about Raffles and how the state wanted him to be remembered.

Figure 3: Statue of Sir Stamford Raffles at the north of Boat Quay bank, the heart of the economic district in Singapore (Photo by author)

In 1969 the newly instated Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew gave a speech at the National Day cum 150th (sesquicentennial) anniversary banquet, hosted by Singapore International Chamber of

[53] Nusantara refers to the Malay Archipelago. It is derived from two Old Javanese world, *nusa* which means "island" and *antara*, which means "between" (Friend 2003, 601)

Commerce, on 6th February. Lee started off his speech by emphasizing that without the "wisdom and the foresight of the Englishman (Raffles)", the Chamber and everyone else would not be in Singapore today. I find it significant that Lee also mentioned specifically that this Chinese cuisine banquet could have been in other major metropolitan centres of the world, but it was held here, specifically in Singapore, in the heart of the Malay peninsula. He (1969) attributed this to Raffles' vision and explicitly said:

> "Decolonisation is usually supposed to mean the orderly dismantling of an empire. Conversely, viewed from the position of the subject peoples, it should mean a restoration to freedom and nationhood. But several hundred years of empire have created civilised communities where none previously existed. When Stamford Raffles came here 150 years ago, there was no organised human society in Singapore, unless a fishing village can be called a society. [Early migrants and their descendant have] … built modern Singapore… the contribution they made in converting a fishing village into a humming centre for commerce, communication, and industry".

This was revealing of the direction Singapore was taking with regards to the official retelling of history after 1965. Unlike many other post-colonial thinkers and nations, Lee expected decolonisation to be "orderly". He also stated that empire was beneficial for Singapore as it created "civilised communities" – from an unorganised, backward, mangrove swamp or fishing village to a thriving city-port centre. Lee ascertained that the 150th anniversary was not a time to hark back to a romanticised past but a time to learn from history and move forward in the future, conceding that nostalgia is "not without its therapeutic value". This Singaporean narrative of "obscure fishing village to metropolis" was attributed to Raffles' legacy (and the British by default) from then on.

Figure 4: This is the plaque beneath the statue of Raffles at Boat Quay. This is written in four different languages, English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin, to symbolise the different races in Singapore. The text reads "On this historic site, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles first landed in Singapore on 28th January 1819 and with genius and perception changed the destiny of Singapore from an obscure fishing village to a great seaport and modern metropolis" (Photo by author)

The 150th anniversary was symbolic as it defined Singapore's national identity. 1969 was the 10th anniversary of the attainment of statehood in 1959, when Singapore saw their first general election that formed the first fully elected cabinet. The People's Action Party (PAP), the most left-wing political party at that time, were so popular, they won 43 out of 51 parliamentary seats in Singapore (The Straits Times 1959). During its inception, the PAP was socialist leaning and anti-colonial such that the Raffles statue was set to be removed. The reputation of the PAP today is one that is vastly different, as it is the major conservative centre-right political party in Singapore. From 1965 to 1981, the PAP, under the leadership of Lee, went on to be the sole governing party in Singapore's parliament. Until today in 2023, PAP's hegemony has not been threatened as they have always occupied 80% of Parliament seats (Oliver and Ostwald 2018). With regards to the Raffles statue, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr S. Rajaratnam, said in 1969 that Raffles had escaped a sad fate and "now we have polished him up… We have passed that stage [of anti-colonialism] – only Raffles remains" (The Straits Times 1969). The PAP and Rajaratnam were convinced that setting Raffles as the founder of Singapore would prevent ethnic claims to sovereignty and indigeneity, which can act as a 'neutralising' effect. He persisted that there would be no dissent if "a neutral" Englishman was set as the founder of Singapore instead of the first Malay, Chinese, Indian or Indonesian. With the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Raffles, instead of the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of attaining statehood, the Singapore state made its choice in how it wanted to remember colonisation, displacing 1959 (when Singapore attained full self-governance) was displaced by 1819 (the arrival of Raffles) (Hong 2021a, 87). The significance of attaining independence from the coloniser was overshadowed by the coloniser's arrival itself – setting the narrative that Singapore only exists as it is today, all due to the benevolent and wise hand of the British.

2019 Bicentennial commemorations

With the beginning of the 2019 Bicentennial, current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong[54] explicitly said in his 2018 New Year's Day message, "we should commemorate this bicentennial appropriately, just as we marked the 150th anniversary in 1969" (2021). However, in comparison to the 1969 programme, 2019 Bicentennial was a full-fledged, all-out public relations exercise to let ordinary citizens be involved in the remembering of history. It was described as an "update of the PAP, state-led rendition of the place that 1819 occupied in Singapore history, suited to the age of information technology and cultural consumerism in the globalised city-state, post-Lee Kuan Yew" (Hong 2021a, 91).

In preparation for the year-long activities, the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO) was set up by the Prime Minister's Office, with the guidance of a Ministerial Steering Committee. It was headed by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, with co-chairs, Minister for Manpower Josephine Teo and

[54] Son of the first PM Lee Kuan Yew.

Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee (The Straits Times 2018). Despite Desmond Lee's assertion that "it cannot be a top-down commemoration" and stressed for grassroots organisations engagement, the organisation of the commemorations was foundationally top-down (Sa'at, Joraimi, and Sai 2021), indicative of the government's concern for how history was re-told and their need to control political and racial sensitivities.

In summary, the 2019 Bicentennial had two goals: the SBO sought to firstly, look at Raffles critically and secondly, look beyond 200 years of history and instead, look at 700 years of Singapore history. The SBO were cautious not to look at history with "rose-tinted" lens or perpetuate the "great man" historical narrative. The organisers also stressed that they wanted to be responsible to history and highlight "not-so shining elements of colonial life, such a 'squalor and segregation'" (Sin 2017). The executive director, Gene Tan, said that the Bicentennial was a "prequel to the SG50 celebrations[55]" and it "serves to examine and situate the 2015 celebrations in a broader context in time and space" (Zaccheus 2018). A healthy dialogue emerged online and on the newspaper forums between Singaporeans about whether there should even be a commemoration and how it should be framed. Some echoed Lee in 1969, that this was a time to reflect on how far Singapore has come since the British arrived, while others argued that colonisation was a humiliating period, and that first PM Lee was the true founder of modern Singapore, not Raffles[56]. There were a small group of Singaporeans who also started a Facebook group named "Raffles Must Fall", inspired by the Rhodes Must Fall protest movement in the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The protests were originally directed towards the removal of the statue that commemorates Cecil Rhodes; it grew to be a campaign towards decolonising education. "Raffles Must Fall" brought about connections that resulted in the publishing of *Raffles Renounced*, informal teach-outs and conversations that were critical towards the Bicentennial itself and the official historical narratives that Singapore has been subscribing to. Despite the Bicentennial commemorations being a continuation of colonial commemorations, there seemed to be more discursive space in responding to the official state narratives of history.

I argue that Singaporean state treatment of the Bicentennial and the historical narratives produced were varied: there were times where the efforts to revise history fell short, merely diversifying and dewesternising, and at others, effectively addressing the obvious silences in the narratives of modernity. I divide the structure of the next section into two: firstly, the Bicentennial efforts to critique British colonisation, which includes diversifying and dewesternising and secondly, the more critical efforts to address logics of coloniality hidden within the narratives of modernity. In many ways, the diversifying and dewesternising efforts offered different contents (alternative modernity), not different logics (alternatives *to* modernity). Instead of identifying modernity/coloniality, there were instances

[55] SG50 celebrations were to celebrate 50 years of Singapore's development post-Separation from Malaysia in 1965.
[56] These observations are made over posts I saw circulating Facebook and Instagram.

that only considered modernity and in the shadow, the negative aspects of colonialism like the exploitation of land and immigrants and the appropriation of land and knowledge, which seem to be 'corrected' by a non-European, Singaporean modernity – dewesternising (Walter Mignolo 2007, 466). These critiques did not necessarily acknowledge how coloniality is being reproduced within Singapore's shaping of modernity: exploitation of land and immigrants as well as the erasure of knoweldges still exists but in different forms[57]. Because of this, the Bicentennial was deemed a "performance or semblance of critical thinking about colonialism" (S.M. Sai 2021, 106). On the other hand, there were efforts towards revealing the darker side of modernity and exposing logics of coloniality. I will explore how the organising institutions had different levels of criticality and if the considerations of coloniality were merely an exercise (and appropriation) of criticality or if it had wider implications on the Singaporean state's commitment to looking for alternatives to modernity.

Bicentennial Exhibitions

As part of the wider aims of the Bicentennial, the exhibitions claimed to challenge assumptions long held by the official state narrative of Singapore's history, by placing Raffles within the larger context of colonisation and to look beyond 1819. This aim brought about two implications: firstly, the decentring and demythicising of Raffles meant moving away from the 'great men' lens when looking at history and secondly, putting on the *longue durée* lens, meant that Singapore's history began 700 years ago, instead of 200 years. Decentring Raffles allowed for a more nuanced look at colonialism, especially British colonisation. Some of the exhibitions discussed the coloniality of knowledge production and the economic pursuits of the East India Company (EIC) and the United East Indies Companies (VOC). It also meant engaging with different indigenous texts, sources, and perspectives. The *longue durée* lens (Borschberg 2017), the broader focus of 700 years, resulted in the acknowledgement of Singapore as part of the larger maritime Malay world, and that it was not a "sleepy fishing village" that began after British colonisation (Tham 2019, 35). The implications of looking beyond 1819 were also to ensure that history was no longer understood as a linear story of the British colony and its successor institutions.

I was able to physically visit all the exhibitions stated below. Due to COVID-19, some of the exhibitions were extended and some were accessible online so I was able to engage with the exhibitions even after 2019 and collated notes on their contents.

I will first give a brief overview of the exhibitions and then go further into the contents. The thematic analysis will be divided into, firstly, narratives that were only diversifying and dewesternising and secondly, exhibitions that acknowledged modernity/coloniality. I analyse the contents of the following Bicentennial exhibitions:

[57] These will be explored further in Chapter 6.

1. Statues put up alongside Raffles for the 2019 Bicentennial commemorations, set up by the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO), 2019
2. The Bicentennial Experience, Fort Canning, set up by SBO, 1 October 2019 to 31 December 2019
3. An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s-1819, set up by National Museum of Singapore (NMS), 21 September 2019 to 29 March 2020
4. On Paper: Singapore before 1867, set up by National Library Board (NLB), 27 September 2019 to 22 March 2020
5. *Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera & Sebingkai Cermin*[58]: Reflecting & refracting Singapura, set up by Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), 12 October 2019 to 21 June 2020

With regards to body-politics of knowledge, the Singaporean state, as represented by different ministries and the statutory boards, is in a position of power. The state was the main knowledge producer during the commemorations, however, specifically, the exhibitions were curated and set up by different ministries and statutory boards within the Singaporean government. This resulted in different approaches and set ups. These exhibitions were reliable insights for the state's voice as these statutory boards function under their respective ministries and thus, they must remain within the purview of the government's policy objectives (Woo 2015). As illustrated in figure 4 below, the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO) was directly under the Prime Minister's Office, which would be closest to official state position. The National Museum of Singapore (NMS) and Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) are museums and heritage institutions managed by the National Heritage Board, which is a statutory board, under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. National Library Board (NLB) is a statutory board under the purview of Ministry of Communications and Information. Despite their autonomy from Singapore's civil service, stat boards are still policymaking units in their own way, developed by the government to achieve certain policy objectives (Woo 2015). Thus, the SBO represented a direct position from the Singapore government, and the other three institutions were representative of the government's voice, although I do argue that they do have slightly more autonomy. The statutory boards were able to be more collaborative in their curation, for example, NMS' curatorial team involved historians Dr Peter Borschberg and Dr Barbara Andaya, as well as Faris Joraimi, author and editor of "Raffles Renounced", for their Bicentennial exhibition "An Old New World". NLB's exhibition "On Paper" engaged Dr Azhar Ibrahim, lecturer at the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore, who specialises in Malay-Indonesian literature and ideologies of development. Dr Azhar held a lecture on the two anti-colonial Malay poems that were part of the "On Paper" exhibition. With more autonomy, the contents of the exhibitions by NMS, MHC and NLB were able to expose instances of coloniality, as opposed to the exhibitions set up by the SBO. The different

[58] The exhibition title translates to "A Lion, a Prince and a Mirror".

levels of autonomy held by these organising institutions are important to note as it affected the level of criticality in the respective exhibitions.

I argue that the Bicentennial Experience and the Raffles statues, organised by the SBO, was the most attended and accessible exhibition (in terms of use of multimedia and location) and also the least critical. The SBO exhibitions were mostly outdoors and visual. The statues were at Boat Quay, in the city centre of Singapore. The Bicentennial Experience was a multimedia experience located at Fort Canning Park, with the use of technology and live actors. The other exhibitions were at the National Museum of Singapore, the Central Library and the Malay Heritage Centre. The locations of SBO exhibitions were more 'public' in the sense that they were not located within buildings or institutions and located outdoors in public spaces. They were all free exhibitions, but I deem the SBO exhibitions the least critical as it retained the five narratives of modernity and superficially added other voices alongside Raffles and the British, without critiquing or questioning the assumptions of hegemonic narratives. The most critical, which was the MHC exhibition, was limited to the "Malay Heritage Centre", rather than the National Museum of Singapore[59]. By limiting the exhibition within MHC (instead of NMS for example), it limited critical approaches to the Malay community rather than exposing the wider national audience that this is also part of their history as Singaporeans. The NMS and NLB also did relatively well to address some of the narratives of modernity as the curated sources curated spoke against the national myths that have been espoused for years.

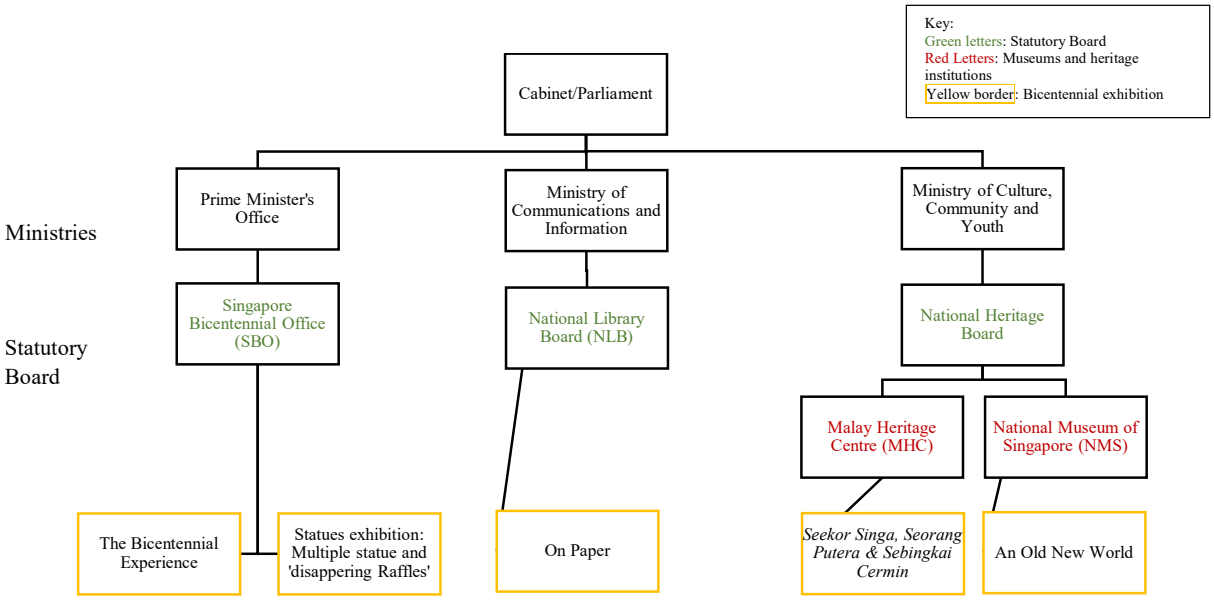

Figure 5: Overview of the Singaporean state institutions involved with the 2019 Singapore Bicentennial (Graphic by author)

[59] In Singapore, there are dedicated Heritage Centres for each 'race' within the CMIO model (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others). There is the Chinese Heritage Centre and the Indian Heritage Centre that focus on the respective communities histories and culture. The National Museum of Singapore serves as the 'national' museum, one that covers stories regarding Singapore as a whole, not certain populations or communities.

1. "Only Raffles Remains": the statues

A few days before 2019, to usher in the year-long Bicentennial project, the white Raffles statue was covered with dark grey paint to blend in with the background behind it. Local artist Teng Kai Weng intended the Raffles statue to 'disappear' when viewed from designated spots, creating an optical illusion. The statue was intended to prompt Singaporeans to look beyond Raffles for the Bicentennial and reflect on the many other men and women who made significant contributions to the development of Singapore (Liu 2019). The SBO stated that this artistic statement set the tone for the rest of the Bicentennial programmes, which was that our history is longer than 200 years, it was a 700-year story that dates to 1299. The statue returned to its whiteness after six days.

Figure 6: The "disappearing" statue of Sir Stamford Raffles near the Singapore River (Photos by Channel News Asia) (CNA 2019a)

About three weeks into January 2019, four new white marble statues were erected alongside the Raffles statue – Sang Nila Utama, the prince from Palembang and the other founder of Singapore in 1299; Munshi Abdullah Abu Kadir, influential Malay teacher and writer, more often known as Raffles' scribe; Tan Tock Seng, a Chinese philanthropist; and Naraina Pillai, an Indian social entrepreneur and businessman, who followed Raffles from Penang. This conveniently fit into the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) racial model that Singapore had been proudly upholding. Integration and the maintenance of peaceful racial harmony is often said to be successful in Singapore due to this ethnic classification of its citizens (Shanmugam 2019). The additions were relocated along various points along the river and left there throughout 2019, only to be removed at the end of the year, while "only Raffles remains".

Figure 7: Four other pioneers stand with Raffles for the Bicentennial. The statues are of (left to right) Sang Nila Utama, Munshi Abdullah, Tan Tock Seng, Sir Stamford Raffles and Naraina Pillai (Photo by Channel News Asia) (CNA 2019b)

Museum Exhibitions

In addition to the statues, there have been a variety of other events for the commemoration. Compared to the statues, the exhibitions had more discursive space to bring up the darker side of colonialism in the region as there was more research that could be included and the potential to engage with indigenous sources or artifacts that told a different history. In my opinion, only the exhibitions at the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), "*Seekor Singa…"* and the National Museum of Singapore (NMS), "An Old New World" explicitly highlighted the coloniality that have been hidden behind the narratives of modernity.

2. The Bicentennial Experience by SBO

The Bicentennial Experience at Fort Canning organised by the SBO was the "centrepiece event of the Singapore Bicentennial" and it was an immersive multimedia sensory experience that allowed the audience to witness key moments in Singapore's history starting from 1299. It was reported that over 760,000 people visited the exhibition, with 95 per cent of whom were locals[60] (T. Goh 2020). The exhibition was structured into two parts, the *Time Traveller*, an hour-long indoor cinematic show that showed Singapore's transformation over 700 years and secondly, the *Pathfinder*, an outdoor trail featuring eight interactive pavilions and installations. The hour-long indoor play constituted of five acts. I would describe the experience as watching a 4D movie, complete with live actors for the first act. The first act, covered 1299-1613, showcasing powerful Malay civilisations fighting to gain dominance over Southeast Asia's maritime routes, when Singapore was a port city. Singapore was the centre of focus, from being the seat of the Kingdom of Singapura in the 14th century to being part of the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century and acting as a naval base and gateway to the Johor Sultanate in the 17th

[60] There were around three million Singaporeans in 2020 (Department of Statistics Singapore 2020)

century. The Malay traditional martial arts, Silat, was featured in this act. Act 2 featured the arrival of Raffles (from 1819). They portrayed Raffles and Farquhar landing and turning the island into a key British trading port. This act introduced historical figures like Tan Tock Seng and Syed Omar Aljunied. Act 2 highlighted Singapore as a colonial port linking trade to Europe, beyond the region. The development of this port brought new "economic opportunities" that attracted waves of migrants "who flocked to the newly opened port, turning Singapore into a more cosmopolitan town".

Figure 8: The Bicentennial Experience at Fort Canning. The picture on the left shows Act 3, depicting the graphics spinning and, on the right, Act 5, where the audience walks through the 'rain enclosure' to experience Singapore's first rainy National Day Parade in 1965, with an umbrella (Photo by TODAY, Mediacorp)

Act 3 depicted Singapore blossoming into a dynamic port city. The graphics during this act spun rapidly highlighting the fast changes in technological inventions, expansion of physical infrastructure and industries and the proliferation of new ideas of identity and belonging. Act 4 covered 1942-1945, the Japanese Occupation during World War II. Act 5 skipped ahead to Singapore's Separation from Malaysia and its nation-building journey.

3. An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s-1819 by NMS

The exhibition "Old New World" was curated by the National Museum of Singapore (NMS). As per the title, the "Old World" had existed and thrived for centuries, long before the arrival of the Europeans and the "New World", from the perspective of the colonisers, that the East Indies was ripe for discovering and harvesting (Tham 2019, 35). Beyond the title, the exhibition was organised to ensure that the violences within Eurocentric knowledge production were highlighted. There were themes within the different zones of the exhibitions: Zone 1: Mapping Our World, Zone 2: Setting Sail, Zone 3: Spices and Tea for the Market, Zone 4: Local and Scientific knowledge, Zone 5: New Landscapes and Portraits and Zone 6: Prelude to the founding. As the exhibition began with recognition of the *Orang Laut*, the exhibition ended with an *Orang Laut* eyewitness account of the founding of Singapore.

Figure 9: A section of "An Old New World Exhibition" at National Museum of Singapore (Photo by GSM Project)

4. On Paper: Singapore before 1867 by National Library Board (NLB)

Another exhibition was "On Paper: Singapore before 1867" by the National Library Board (NLB), Singapore. The exhibition showcased over 150 paper-based records that recounted Singapore's early history – the sources ranged from maps to anti-colonial Malay poetry. NLB would traditionally approach institutions in the United Kingdom for research materials but for this exhibition, they have used collections in Europe, China, India and those of our neighbouring countries (H. Tan 2019b, 9).

Figure 10: "On Paper" Exhibition at the National Library in Singapore (Photo by National Library Board)

5. Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera & Sebingkai Cermin: Reflecting & refracting Singapura by MHC

The last exhibition was the exhibition entitled "*Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera & Sebingkai Cermin* (A Lion, A Prince and A Mirror): Reflecting & Refracting Singapura", organised by the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). The exhibition highlighted the lens of various indigenous and Malay world perspectives, juxtaposed against European colonial sources – "reflecting and refracting". "Seekor Singa…" was the only exhibition that explicitly centred "indigenous historical sources to provide counterpoints to Western perspectives and narratives of the Malay world". The sources included early non-European maps of the world and mediums of histories such as folktales, myths and legends, archaeological and indigenous documentary evidence of Singapore's significance between the 14th and 18th centuries. MHC intended to privilege voices from the colonial difference, using indigenous sources

such as Malay manuscripts that depicted the arrival of the Europeans as a minor event as well as artefacts that highlighted indigenous and colonial conceptions of space and their relations to nature, specifically forests.

Figure 11: One of the prints in the "Seekor Singa…" exhibition, depicting an imagined scene of a British official and a Malay ruler travelling on the back of an elephant into Singapore after the signing the 1824 Anglo Dutch Treaty. MHC commented that the British and the Malays were depicted as equals when 'the terms of the treaty was anything but equal' (Illustrated by R. Canto Woodville)

Partial critiques of British colonisation: diversifying and dewesternising

Colonial knowledge production in the textbooks offered partial stories of modernity, such as how the British were benevolent colonisers, the civilising mission was beneficial for Malaya and the creation of borders. I argued that these narratives were told from the position of imperial difference, where histories were silenced, and modernity was celebrated without the consideration of coloniality. In this section, I stress that the Bicentennial offered other partial stories of modernity (diversifying) and critiques of British modernity/colonisation, instead of modernity/coloniality. The partial stories of modernity allowed Singapore to celebrate the modernity that granted it material development, economic success and political stability and limited the negative aspects of colonisation[61] to the past.

As discussed in chapter 2, decolonising is not the same as diversifying or dewesternising. Systematically including indigenous and marginalised sources and histories into the retelling of history is insufficient and can be identified as institutional tokenism, which only serve to reinforce colonial power hierarchies, shrouded by the cloak of diversifying. Dewesternising is recognising the cons of Western modernity and selectively retaining Eurocentric modernities to create alternative or non-

[61] Some examples are the continued exploitation of land and labour, and the erasure of knowledges. This will be explored further in Chapter 6.

European modernities. To decolonise history means to actively unlearn hegemonic narratives that are rooted in coloniality and to engage in epistemic and aesthetic disobedience (Walter Mignolo 2009).

Diversifying: Adding more diverse actors without interrogating Eurocentrism

With the example of Abdul Hadi, I do not deny that diversifying can potentially confront and dismantle Eurocentrism. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, diversifying can include other voices or narratives without necessarily interrogating Eurocentrism. This was most obvious with the statue exhibitions. The efforts to add other historical figures of different races, without displacing Raffles' position in history, were either awkward attempts to desacralise Raffles (the Singaporean way: not knowing how far to go before getting in trouble with the authorities) or they were gestures to attain press attention for the rest of the year's Bicentennial events. It was clear though, that they were attempts to move beyond perpetuating the "great man" historical narrative. The 'Great Man theory' claims that the lives of great men shaped history, not social and economic forces (Carlyle 1841, 127). Du Bois (1946, 16) voiced Carlyle's theory more critically, pointing to the coloniality of knowledge production in this school of thought in history:

> "National heroes were created by lopping off their sins and canonizing their virtues, so that Gladstone had no connection with slavery, Chinese Gordon did not get drunk, William Pitt was a great patriot and not an international thief. Education was so arranged that the young learned not necessarily the truth, but that aspect and interpretation of the truth which the rulers of the world wished them to know and follow".

Singapore's official history narrative has been predominantly following this school of thought, as evident by the history curriculum laid out in the previous chapter. The Bicentennial aimed to revise this approach to history, disagreeing with the narrative that Raffles was the sole founding father, and centring a broader cast of contributors to the building of Singapore (diversifying). The four new statues did not truly reflect a reversal of Du Bois' statement as the legacy of Raffles and British colonisation was not deconstructed. The modernity that was brought about with the advent of colonisation is still privileged and celebrated, as we see the Raffles statue the only one still standing today. This is significant because while the Bicentennial made efforts to decentre Raffles by stressing that he was a British coloniser and that there were other pioneers of modern Singapore (the other statues), Raffles' statue remains the only one standing precisely because Singapore still values what he symbolises – Eurocentric standards of civilisation, development and capitalism. His philosophy on governance, his adherence to the civilising mission and his role in institutionalising racial hierarchies (S.H. Alatas 1971, 1977), were not thoroughly interrogated or spotlighted at the national level. Statues are never 'merely symbolic' and have material consequences (Rao 2016) – these material consequences will be outlined in Chapter 6.

On top of the failure to fully interrogate Raffles' legacy, I find it symbolic that the statues were put up in the exact mould of Raffles, which was in white, marble polycast. The other figures added new contents to the same Western episteme, as elaborated in Chapter 2. I argue that the multiple statue exhibition was a means towards diversifying the cast of "great men" in history rather than fully critiquing Raffles' legacy. The statues served as a tokenistic gesture towards diversifying, but not decolonising Singapore's history.

Diversifying was also found in the museum exhibitions, such as the Bicentennial Experience, where it focused on the roles of other figures besides Raffles, within the EIC. The Bicentennial Experience, out of five acts, dedicated one act alone to the arrival of Raffles and the British. Similar to the textbooks, it relegated British colonisation to a phase within a larger history. With the longue durée lens, the first act was dedicated to regional politics within the Malay World, countering the narrative that Singapore's history began with the British. In Act 2, Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar were depicted as main EIC men who were making decisions for the development of Singapore. Instead of speaking about Raffles, the narrative was shifted to how Raffles and Farquhar had differing ideas for Singapore's development and attributed the Singapore's growth as a freeport to both of them, instead of Raffles alone. The narration to an animated Act goes:

> "Raffles and Farquhar changed the destiny of the region. And the vision Raffles has of Singapore as a great commercial emporium begins to take shape. Over the next four years, it will be Farquhar, who shapes the growth of Singapore, from clearing mangrove swamps, to constructing power ducts for water supply to building roads and bridges. He is also credited with ridding a town of rats. Farquhar's strategy to invite skilled and enterprising trades works, as the Chinese and Malays from Melaka turn up with ducks, chickens, and vegetables to sell. While his efforts to clean up and build a new town win the respect of the migrant settlers, Farquhar diverges from Raffles instructions, leading to an eventual falling out between them."

The act narrated how Raffles excluded Faruqhar from the development committee, that produced the Jackson Plan. The documents from this Plan were exhibited in the "On Paper" NLB exhibition and contributed to the division of peoples into homogenised races that we know today, the Chinese, Malay, Indians and Others, into different neighbourhoods in Singapore.

While decentring Raffles, Faruqhar was still credited for "cleaning up" Singapore and the act ended with how this was a "golden era" for Singapore, a little island of opportunity. The narrator concluded that "the horizon looks brighter and even more promising". British colonisation was not understood as a destructive global, regional and local process but understood as beneficial to the creation of Singapore as a nation state and its thriving neoliberal economy, with some negative aspects. This still upheld narratives (2) and (3), that British colonisation was beneficial, and the civilising mission was necessary for development. There was no mention of the context of the British coming into

the region (i.e. colonisation) and how Southeast Asia was amongst the last colonies, which meant that the British brought 'expertise' and lessons from other colonies. As it was a multimedia experience that sought to retell 700 years of history within an hour, I did not expect the different acts to go into too much detail. However, I did notice that even the wider regional developments under British colonisation were not even considered, solidifying Singapore's exceptionalism and concretising the borders of the island from the wider peninsula, narratives (4) and (5). Malay history of Singapore was mentioned in the first act, but the national narratives in the next four acts worked towards concretising Singapore's identity as a nation-state.

In addition, the diversifying effort to include Farquhar, attributed his "clearing up" of mangrove swamps for development as a "contribution". After the British, this practice was continued in post-colonial Singapore. The estimated 63.4sq km of mangroves in 1953 reduced to 8.1sq km in 2018 (Mohan 2020). In 2020, Singapore's mangroves make up a small part of its total land area – about one per cent. It has been realised with the current challenges of climate change, that mangroves are important banks that "stores carbon and actively takes in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere" (Mohan 2020). It is now only realised that the mangroves need to be protected and restored as "nature-based" solutions to climate change. Clearing the lands for economic development was the result of pursuing a colonial capitalist economy and the creation of a "great commercial emporium". The fact that the post-colonial Singaporean government retained this practice and logic, points to how coloniality is reproduced material within the island. The SBO's efforts to diversify narratives of modernity did meet the two aims of the Bicentennial to decentre Raffles and recognise Singapore's history before the British. Similar to the textbooks adding Asian history and local history to the history curriculum in Chapter 3, the Bicentennial intended to decentre the British (in this case, Raffles) by diversifying the actors in Singapore's history. However, as elaborated, the coloniality that constituted the modernity that Singapore pursues was not examined or even acknowledged.

Dewesternising: Pursuing a 'Singaporean' modernity

This act of recognising the negative aspects of colonisation, while selectively retaining and pursuing aspects of Eurocentric modernity is exactly what dewesternising seeks to explain. As elaborated in the theoretical chapter in Chapter 2, I took on the conceptions of dewesternisation that have been elaborated by decolonial scholars (Walter Mignolo 2012; Grosfoguel 2011) as the political and economic delinking from the decisions and interests of the West but still retaining practices of capitalism and the idea of development. In short, dewesternisation meant countering obvious Western modernisation paradigms but internalising maintaining selective aspects of modernity/coloniality. In terms of narratives of modernity, dewesternising would mean avoiding glorifying the West and stating the negative aspects of European modernity, such as colonisation, but still internalising narratives of modernity, such as the civilising mission and the idea of economic development, because of the blindspot that coloniality is constitutive of modernity.

Dewesternising will allow me to explain how a statue like Raffles, which is "'merely symbolic' has material consequences" (Rao 2016). Aside from adding multiple figures as statues, the SBO also collaborated with artist Teng Kai Wei to create an effect that looked like Raffles was disappearing into the background of the skyscrapers (see figure 5). Despite the SBO's intentions to show that the Bicentennial would be looking beyond Raffles, my interpretation of this exhibition was explicitly describing modernity/coloniality – how coloniality is the "darker side" of modernity and is often hidden or not seen but still present. Just as how the physical statue of Raffles remains but it is now hidden by the artistic illusion, Singapore holds on tightly to the goals of the civilising mission, symbolised by Raffles, without acknowledging the coloniality that is hidden.

Similarly, the Bicentennial Experience sought to look beyond Raffles by recognising the positive aspects of modernity that the British had introduced to Singapore while also highlighting the negative aspects of British colonisation, such as the experience of immigrants and labour conditions. The Bicentennial Experience opened Act 3 with the narration "steam engines lead the way for Singapore's age of industrialisation and modernity", without the recognition of steamboats being a key instrument of imperialism and global colonial expansion. The narration added that:

> "with the strategic position and hardworking dock coolies, Singapore becomes the perfect global port. People come from all over, adding their unique cultures to the melting pot. It's a dynamic era for diversity."

This emphasised the third and fourth narratives of modernity, that the civilising mission was beneficial for Singapore, by facilitating industrialisation, civilisation and diversity and that Singapore was exceptional, a special island within the region with a different destiny. The description of the "hardworking dock coolies" was consistent with the SBO's wider efforts to acknowledge the contribution of immigrants. The SBO posted on their Facebook page (Bicentennial) remembering the contributions of samsui women[62] and Indian convict labour, echoing the sentiment of ex-PM Lee in 1969, where they mentioned the pioneer migrants who had worked hard to build modern Singapore. This is also similar to how , in Chapter 3, Swettenham attributed development of Malaya to the hard-working Chinese immigrants (Swettenham 1907) – the twin celebration of Western colonialism and immigrant settlers (Rahim 2009, 18). In seeking to steer away from celebrating the West in bringing modernity to Singapore, the SBO shifted their focus to the immigrant workers whose communities make up the Singaporean population today. Lily Zubaidah (2009, 13) confirmed that this celebration of hardworking and enterprising immigrants has been consistent in Singapore's post-colonial history

[62] Samsui women refers to a group of Chinese female immigrants who came to Malaya and Singapore between the 1920s and 1940s in search of construction and industrial jobs. Samsui women did manual labour similar to coolies but were more independent

writing and the implications of this is that indigenous communities' histories are not being remembered on the national level.

I argue that the celebration of immigrant communities, the post-colonial national adherence to the political and economic ideology of 'Asian Values'[63] and the inability to move away from the veneration of British colonisation, signal an internalisation of the civilising mission where indigenous communities are portrayed and treated as impediments to progress, burden to be shouldered and a threat to national unity (Rahim 2009, 13). The transformation of the island into an international financial hub and First World economy (attainment of an 'Eastern' civilisation) was attributed to the contributions of the British and the immigrant communities that came to Malaya. This narrative of "economic success, political stability and social cohesion and physical rejuvenation assists the authoritarian state [referring to a PAP-run Singapore] in maintaining consent and legitimacy" (Rahim 2009, 14).

In order to be more nuanced and critical of colonisation, the Bicentennial Experience contrasted the glowing recounts of Singapore's growth with the poor labour conditions of coolies and how the use of opium and other social ills were high, such as gambling and prostitution. The narrator explicitly said "beneath the shimmer and shine, lurk darkness and disquiet". These were mentioned alongside figures that tried to better the situation, such as Lim Boon Keng starting a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts and Tan Jiak Kim opening a medical school to deal with malnutrition of the labourers. The act also highlighted examples of anti-colonial activity in Singapore such as the riot in 1876 against colonial profiteering and 1915's Singapore mutiny. There was an adequate recognition of the negative sides to colonisation, but I argue that these considerations were not too critical as the Bicentennial Experience presented how individuals dealt with the symptoms of coloniality, by "giving back to the community". The acts which highlighted the examples of Lim and Tan, were in reality mitigating the negative effects of colonialism. In addition, the context of the immigrant labourers was not mentioned. The story of coloniality such as colonial capitalism, migration flows and treatment of these immigrants, as well as the creation of racial hierarchies and prejudices, during the colonial period were not illustrated as constitutive to the 'contributions' of the British. The labour class, intersecting with race and gender, was created to serve colonial capitalism, to create "modern" and "developed" Singapore, not with their interests at heart but to serve the oppressive global colonial enterprise that ultimately benefits the colonial metropole (S.H. Alatas 1977). In the next section, it will be clear that only the "Seekor Singa…" exhibition highlighted this point.

In a bid to separate modernity from being "Western" or "British", the Bicentennial Experience recognised the contributions of immigrants to Singapore. However, I observed that those who protested structural and systemic changes like the leftist groups, labour movements and communist groups across

[63] As discussed in Chapter 2, 'Asian' refers to East Asian in general or Confucianist values that are compatible with capitalism, as opposed to looking towards Malay/Muslim culture and values

Malaya and other instances of anti-colonial activity (Malay voices) were not highlighted at all, not only in the Bicentennial Experience but other exhibitions as well. In Act 3 of Bicentennial Experience, *Utusan Melayu* was mentioned alongside the contribution of Eunos Abdullah, within the context of "Singapore's links to the world get stronger, connectivity and communication more important". The narrator acknowledged the importance of newspapers and mentioned Eunos Abdullah, as "the first editor of the *Utusan Melayu* and a major champion for Malay education". What I found unsettling about this retelling of history, was that while the SBO recognised the importance of *Utusan Melayu* and the Malay newspaper publishing industry within Singapore's history (enough to mention it in the exhibition), it completely depoliticised and erased the historical context and contents of the paper. Eunos Abdullah was not only a "major champion for Malay education", he was the first president of *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* (KMS, Singapore Malay National Organisation), a Malay nationalist organisation that called for the advancement of the Malays. While he was editor of *Utusan Melayu* in 1907, he wrote a lot discussing the idea of Malay *bangsa* (race), Malayness and Malay identity. Very much part of the development of early Malay nationalism, he invoked the concept of *bumiputera* (sons of the soils) and hinted at the need for self-government (Milner 2002). The historical context of Malay nationalism in Singapore will be explored in the next chapter in more detail. *Utusan Melayu*'s anti-colonial character from 1946-70s was also not mentioned. *Utusan* was brought up to merely describe how Singapore was connected to the rest of the world. I found these erasures unsettling because firstly, how *Utusan* was used and described in the Bicentennial Experience was representative of the erasures of the history of Malay nationalism in Singapore's national history, due to the state's insecurity with regards to Malay nationalist claims to sovereignty and secondly, anti-colonial leftist ideas are completely not featured in Singapore's post-colonial history writing. Basically, ideas that did not align with the political ideology and vision of the PAP were purposefully forgotten and the contributions of 'acceptable' figures remembered.

As a whole, compared to the other exhibitions, the Bicentennial Experience paid more emphasis on Singapore's modern history, urging the local audience to consider how Singapore has developed and industrialised into a global thriving port. Dewesternising is clear in the SBO's efforts of spotlighting negative aspects of colonisation but still celebrating modernity and Singapore's success in pursuing their own version. The implication of retaining foundational beliefs about great development and attainment of modern civilisation through the experience of colonisation is that it legitimises the current government. In an interview with historian Michael Barr (2020b), he stated that Singapore's official national history followed the story of the dominant power, be it the British, the PAP led by Lee Kuan Yew or the PAP today. There is an inherent tendency in national histories to tell the story of winners and the contemporary Singapore government is no exception. The implication of preserving the narrative that British colonisation was beneficial, permits the PAP to chart a linear progression from Raffles to Lee Kuan Yew and Singapore's successes. The PAP is then positioned as the natural

successors to the British as they are the post-colonial elite that pursued or, as some say, surpassed the civilising mission of the West. The post-colonial Singapore state treats the experience of colonisation as a process that was "both good and bad" because on some level, the state believes that the experience of colonisation was also "an imposition of certain forms of necessary modern rationality – town planning, good governance, a commitment to free trade — that the postcolonial nation-state would realise in the fullness of time" (Holden 2019, 639).

On the surface, the exhibitions by the SBO disputed narrative (1), that the British founded modern Singapore as it mentioned the contribution of others in building Singapore. However, upon further interrogation, due to its maintenance of the other narratives of modernity, logics of coloniality remain hidden and unacknowledged. The post-colonial Singapore state 'used' aspects of the British's legacy, which was "taken as a neutral or indeed universal culture, even as culture was downplayed on the island – as the source of its postcolonial identity and state formation" (Wee 2007, 8). More importantly, despite acknowledgements of the negative aspects of British colonisation, coloniality is still being reproduced. Singapore's pursuit of sustainable urbanisation through digital technologies and embracing becoming a 'smart city' is deeply imbricated in processes of exploitation and maintenance of unequal racial hierarchies (coloniality) that maintains the "necessary infrastructure of this imaginary" (Dutta 2021, 1303). This local reproduction of coloniality will be explored on a deeper level in Chapter 6.

Acknowledging modernity/coloniality

The discussions above have clearly shown how the statues and the Bicentennial Experience, both exhibitions set up by the SBO, were lacking in their critique of colonisation, and merely diversifying and dewesternising. The other exhibitions made commendable efforts to highlight modernity/coloniality, by exposing the logics of coloniality. "*Seekor Singa…*" by MHC was the most critical in this aspect, highlighting silences of indigenous peoples and problematising British colonisation. "An Old New World" by NMS was also quite critical to a lesser extent. Lastly, the "On Paper" exhibition by NLB did not actively highlight modernity/coloniality in their object descriptions compared to the other two exhibitions. However, in my opinion, the objects that were chosen for the exhibition themselves were able to speak and unveil some aspects of coloniality that were hidden under the narratives of modernity. I will also highlight how there were some absences in the NLB exhibition that were addressed in the MHC exhibition.

As the narratives within the exhibitions spoke directly to the foundational narratives extracted in the previous chapter and uncovered some logics of coloniality, I will engage with them directly in this section of thematic analysis. Narrative (1), which referred to how the British, especially Raffles, 'founded' modern-day Singapore, will not be discussed for these three exhibitions as this was already

discussed in the previous section on how the other narratives were still maintained within the SBO exhibitions.

Narrative #2: The British were benevolent colonisers

This narrative of modernity allowed the European colonisers to justify their "exploration" and civilising mission as they believed that they were serving the people of Malaya by protecting trade routes, encouraging economic growth or bestowing on the Malays knowledge of good governance and the advancement of civilisation for the people (Swettenham 1907, 231; Winstedt 1921 (1918), 80). Only Abdul Hadi (1930) linked the 'benign' British in Malaya to the violence of their colonisation elsewhere through the establishment of the EIC, such as in Goa, and recognised that instead of benevolence, the British were more concerned with preserving their colonial interests.

While Swettenham and Winstedt offered stories that were celebrating modernity, the three Bicentennial exhibitions, to a certain extent, brought in narratives that emerged from the "memories, wounds, humiliations, disavowal" (Walter Mignolo 2007) of the colonised consciousness. The "On Paper" exhibition did not speak directly from the colonial difference but allowed the exhibited historical documents to paint a different story of the British. Documents such as the record of the 1824 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance and the Straits Settlements (SS) Letter Patent of 1867, were presented. These documents were significant in highlighting the context of British and Dutch presences in the region. The 1824 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was signed by John Crawfurd, the second Resident of Singapore and Sultan Husain and Temenggong Abdul Rahman. NLB stated in the object description, "unlike Stamford Raffles' 1819 agreement with the Sultan and Temenggong, which only permitted British EIC to set up a trading post on the island, the treaty marked the culmination of efforts by the British to wrest complete control of Singapore". The SS Letter Patent of 1867, allowed the public to understand the wider context of British colonisation. The Patent was the approval of transfer of the administration of the SS from Calcutta, the capital of British India, to the Colonial Office in London, which made the SS a colony in its own right. NLB did not explicitly elaborate in the object descriptions but in my opinion, these documents situated the British colonial administration as not purely having benevolent intentions but had economic interests in the region, with colonies all over the world.

"An Old New World" fared better in explicitly highlighting modernity/coloniality as it succeeded in redefining what "colonial violence" meant. The hegemonic narratives about modernity that we have highlighted portray the British colonial experience in Malaya one that was decidedly more benign than the genocide, slavery, and displacement of peoples in other European colonies. The NMS exhibition focused on the story of the extraction of resources and appropriation of knowledge that accompanied modernity. The exhibition title was a play on the "Old World" that existed and thrived for centuries and its interconnectedness with the arrival of the Europeans and the "New World", from the

perspective of the colonisers, that the East Indies was ripe for discovering and harvesting (Tham 2019, 35). In a sense, the title elucidated the exhibition's intention to highlight modernity/coloniality.

I will highlight how this exhibition directly countered the narrative of modernity of the benign nature of British colonisation that erased the violences of colonisation. The object descriptions often explained the silences within colonial sources. Within Zone 1, subversively, the museum opened the exhibition with maps of the world and the region placed side by side with the tools related to the *Orang Laut*. The exhibition description stated that cartography produced by Europe were largely based on the information collected over the years of colonial expeditions, crediting no other source of information, and these geographical and regional maritime knowledge was largely extracted from indigenous peoples. The exhibition contextualised this reality of modernity/coloniality by adding that the European cartographers often had a member of the *Orang Laut* to help them navigate the difficult waters in the Peninsula (Tham 2019, 37). The *Orang Laut* were nomadic boat-dwelling communities who thus had vast navigating knowledge of the Malay Archipelago. This is similar to the "*Seekor Singa…*" exhibition that stated that "when the Dutch and the British arrived in their 18th century, they were required to refer to these indigenous sources in order to navigate the region". "An Old New World" also highlighted the Herman Moll 18th century map of Asia and explicitly mentioned that the "knowledge is inextricably linked to power" as it highlighted which natural resources can be bought and obtained from which areas in Southeast Asia. In this zone, maps from other scholars such as Ottoman sources were also considered.

In Zone 2 and 3, "An Old New World" exhibition presented native vessels, which were used to further the interests of the companies, reaching the East Indies. It also placed the ships in the context of trade for tea and spices in the region. In a non-direct and non-explicit way, the exhibition highlighted the growth of the EIC and VOC as extensions of colonial capitalism – the growth of multinational corporations. Significantly, the exhibition covered events in Malaysia, Indonesia and the interactions between the Dutch and the British in the region, which have never been focused on previously. The physical violence – in terms of power and economic displacement – that came with colonisation was highlighted through illustrations of battles and massacres, as well as the displays of arms. This section of the exhibition also talked about how these multinational corporations were insisting on monopolising the markets in the East Indies.

Zone 4 spoke directly to colonial extraction and exploitation of indigenous knowledge (this is how I choose to describe it, the museum did not explicitly state it a such). The colonial expansions were accompanied by a boom in 'explorations' and 'discoveries' in nature, framed by the Enlightenment in Europe. A lot of the flora and fauna were named (aside from their native names, in Latin) and classified. There were a lot of displays of the different works of the European naturalists, but the exhibition served to recognise that these naturalists could only publish their works and classifications with the help of local knowledge to navigate the unknown interiors in the exhibitions. One example would be the

watercolour depicting the Swedish naturalist Claes Fredrik Hornstedt examining natural history specimens in Java, where he spent a year between 1783 and 1784. In the drawing was a slave named Ali who he named in replacement of his long Javanese name. Ali was tasked to assist Hornstedt in his collection and examination of the specimens.

Zone 5 highlighted the White gaze on its colonial subjects (again this is how I describe it, the museum did not state this) by showcasing the Orientalist drawings and descriptions of the different peoples that the Europeans encounter in the Malay world. Zone 6 was the prelude to the founding of Singapore, highlighting the various colonial activity in the region, the battles that were fought and the treaties that were a signed.

By looking beyond the Raffles and the British, this exhibition did particularly well in highlighting the silences behind the history of colonisation – as referred to in Chapter 2, critiquing the partial stories of modernity to tell the fuller story of modernity/coloniality. In this case, the act of diversifying, approaching indigenous sources, was a means towards representing modernity/coloniality to enlighten the public about the realities and violences of colonisation. The fact that the exhibition, organised by official government bodies, the National Museum of Singapore and the National Heritage Board, acknowledged that knowledge is linked to power was an encouraging step towards critical historiography. Although they did not explicitly state that erasure, extractions and expropriation were the violences of colonisation, the exhibition presented relevant sources that subtly pushed the public to look beyond the surface of the narratives of modernity that has been foundational in Singapore's history-writing.

The MHC exhibition did not attribute benevolence to the British. In fact, the exhibition went a step further to prove that the arrival of Europeans in the Malay world was not as significant as the post-colonial Singapore state remembers it to be. Early contact with the Portuguese showed that indigenous communities had very little opinion or impression of arrivals from the West. Malay manuscripts "depict the arrival of the Europeans as a minor event within the expanded history of the Malay world", referring to the Europeans not as their nationalities but broad cultural identities like "rum" (Roman) or "orang puteh" (white people). From having little opinion of the Portuguese, to the arrival of the Dutch and then the British, the Malays definitely did not view the British as "benevolent". The "On Paper" exhibition displayed the letters between Hastings and Raffles, explaining how a trading post was established in Singapore. "On Paper" added that it was unfortunate that there are not many records available to tell the story from the perspective of Sultan Husain or the Temenggong. In contrast, the MHC exhibition displayed correspondence letters between the Malay rulers and Farquhar, from the Library of Congress in United States, that showed how they felt while signing the treaty – coerced and confused about the whole situation. The letter written by Temenggong Abdul Rahman to the Yang Dipertuan Muda of Riau, Raja Jafar, in February 1819,

"I was simply forced to submit to this proceeding, of which I had no notice or knowledge. When Mr Raffles came, I was simply told that he intended to settle at Singapore, and I had no power to prevent him."

Similarly in his letter to the Raja Muda of Melaka, he said that "we were powerless to say anything and could neither send word to Malacca at that moment nor to Riau". This brought in a perspective that is often untold in Singapore's history. The official, hegemonic narrative claimed the benevolence of the British as the narrative often stressed Raffles' vision of creating a trading port in Southeast Asia that could link the trade within the region to the Western world. On the contrary, as we shall see in the next few sub-sections, the MHC offered a fuller story of modernity/coloniality – spotlighting the existence of histories, knowledges and civilisations before the British as well as redefining colonial violence to mean the dispossession of peoples, erasure of peoples, knowledges and epistemologies, extraction of knowledge and resources and expropriation of land for profit.

Narrative #3: The civilising mission was beneficial

The civilising mission in the textbooks highlighted how Singapore, and Malaya in general, benefitted from British colonisation, growing from a relatively deserted island to a great commercial centre (Swettenham 1907; Winstedt 1921 (1918)). This narrative of modernity was also echoed by ex-PM Lee, as mentioned in previous discussions. In addition, the civilisational thinking also appeared in the way history was being written, differentiating 'primitive' peoples from the 'civilised' and the linear progression of history, an evolution from primitivity to civilisation (Winstedt 1926 (1918); Abdul-Hadi 1947 (1925)).

The three exhibitions did well in going beyond methodological Eurocentrism to include Malay literary texts that described the pre-colonial and colonial condition, as sources of knowledge. These alternative sources of knowledge allowed the exhibitions to argue against the narrative that the civilising mission was beneficial. "On Paper" showcased a pair of *syair* (rhymed poem) that spoke on the injustice towards indigenous groups and the inequality of indentured labour under colonialism. Discovered at the *Bibliotheque Nationale* in Paris in the 1980s, both poems date back to the early years of colonial rule. The poems are entitled *Syair Dagang Berjual Beli* (On Trading and Selling) and *Syair Potong Gaji* (On Wage Cuts), written by Tuan Simi, a scribe and translator that had worked for several British personalities, including Raffles. The author voiced his grievances against the "EIC's practices that affected the lives and wellbeing of local traders and workers". The first *syair* spoke about the unfairness faced by Bugis and Malay merchants trying to sell their wares at the port of Singapore, mostly imposed by the new company rulers and their network of Chinese and Indian middleman. It brought an insight into the darker side of colonisation, with a critique of colonial capitalism and how colonial practices displaced the indigenous economic practices and customs. *Syair Potong Gaji* illustrated the wage cuts the Malay coolies from Bencoolen received while working under the EIC. There was a line in the poem

that said "our value is the weight of spit[64]", describing how the Malays occupying the lower class in the context of colonial economy felt displaced and marginalised. Again, NLB did not add their own interpretations or analysis in the object description and left the source to speak for itself. It is clear here how privileging knowledge production from the colonial difference allow us to identify fuller stories of modernity and instead, acknowledge modernity/coloniality by highlighting the power structures and racial and labour hierarchies that emerged during modernity/coloniality. The narrative that the civilising mission is beneficial for Singapore and the Malays was actively disputed within both *syair*.

"*Seekor Singa…"* showcased multiple *hikayats*, that offered an insight into pre-colonial history writing. The *hikayats* highlighted the political structures and hierarchies of the Malays, the customs and social organisations of villages and, the epistemologies of astronomy and time of the different communities in the Malay world (for example, the Javanese) that were differing from the Eurocentric notions that are universalised today. The MHC exhibition was different from the other exhibitions in this way as it showcased epistemologies of indigenous peoples with regards to the material and the spiritual world, that were displaced due to the universalisation of Eurocentric epistemology. In the exhibition description, MHC wrote, "the age of Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries popularised ideas of self-determination and scepticism in parts of Europe. As a result, religion and magic were often seen as regressive practices that belonged in the past… European administrators applied the same lens to indigenous practices that they encountered in the Malay world". The exhibition actively acknowledged the erasure of indigenous epistemologies and knowledges with the advent of the Enlightenment and the civilising mission. This actively dismantled and discredited the third narrative of modernity, that the civilising mission was beneficial for Malaya, by demonstrating how Eurocentrism relegated indigenous knowledges and practices as primitive.

While all the other exhibitions shied away from critiquing development and industrialisation, especially the Bicentennial Experience, which celebrated these processes, the MHC exhibition explicitly critiqued the civilising mission and questioned the naturalised rhetoric of development. It stated that "many native landscapes and socio-economic structures were transformed to serve the needs of global commerce and trade which were desired by early European "maritime mega-corporations". The colonialists' tendency to want to "civilise" indigenous populations they deemed as "primitive" contributed to the notion of the "white man's burden"". The description added that the civilising mission inevitably reproduced "the bias of many European colonial officers and ethnographers who placed Western civilisation at the apex of human civilisation and who considered indigenous knowledge and cultural practices to be at a lesser stage of human development". The gallery also highlighted examples of indigenous attitudes towards the environment and contrasted it with how the colonial administration's influences over nature. In relation to the civilising mission, European interest in the

[64] "*harganya kami itu seperti setimbang ludah"*

environment was always to serve an "imperialist purpose", which brought detriment to indigenous ways of engaging with the environment as well as introducing unsustainable environmental practices (such as deforestation of large forest areas) for the sake of development. The exhibition highlighted how the West often depicted the Malay world as "heavily-forested and undeveloped, often without context of the existing relations between indigenous societies and nature" which "serve to heighten the domestic [Britain's] interest in colonial colonies".

The exhibition argued against the narrative of modernity that the civilising mission was beneficial in two ways, firstly, by using Malay textual evidence, the exhibition highlighted that pre-colonial knowledges was displaced and dismissed with the advent of modernity/coloniality. Secondly, the exhibition illuminated how existing native landscapes and socio-economic structures were transformed to serve the needs of global commerce, which benefitted the colonial powers and a handful of native elites. This revealed the darker side of modernity, where the British entered the Malay World with a civilising mission and their "benevolence" laced with white supremacy and Enlightenment ideals that situated colonised countries as underdeveloped and in need of European civilisation.

Narrative #4: Concretisation of Singapore's borders

Within the colonial textbooks, this narrative referred to the formation of modern borders within the Malay World. In the post-colonial Singapore state's history writing, I expanded this narrative into two: (4) the concretisation of Singapore's borders as an independent nation-state within the Malay Archipelago and (5) Singapore did not have links with the wider Malay world, overlooking its broader history as part of a vast maritime network of ports. The fourth narrative of modernity positions the formation of Singapore as an independent nation-state as a natural progression within the linear history of British colonisation and the formation of modern states. The textbooks highlighted how the British organised and conceptualised territories in the Malay World, by dividing it into three conceptions: Malay World, Malaya and Malay states. British colonial administration in the region also laid the foundations that shaped territorial borders today – ruling Singapore as crown colony[65].

Only the "*Seekor singa…"* exhibition problematised Singapore's borders by explicitly arguing that current nation state borders were created. The exhibition stated that "the geographical boundaries of the Malay world were informed by its own political logic – one where kingdoms, territories and people regularly shifted, in accordance with the waxing and waning of political influences within the Malay court". It did "not always exist as discrete and separate political territories". It highlighted how the Dutch and British were responsible for the eventual dividing of the Archipelago along colonial boundaries. Other exhibitions, such as "On Paper" and "An Old New World" did present the treaties

[65] In 1867, the Straits Settlements (Melaka, Penang and Singapore) was ruled as a crown colony. With the Malayan Union in 1946, Singapore became a new crown colony while Melaka and Penang formed the Malayan Union with the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States, as British protectorates.

that shaped current state boundaries within the Malay peninsula but the exhibitions did not explicitly problematise modern state borders. MHC displaced 1819 as key historical date, and asserted that "this gallery will highlight some of these exchanges in order to show how 1819 marked less a 'founding' of a new territory than an attempt by the British to enter and navigate an existing territory [already] governed by its own sets of traditions and customs".

The exhibition explained that as geographical boundaries were not fixed, the Dutch and the British in the 18th century had to rely on indigenous knowledge to navigate the region. An example of a display was the *kitab pelayaran* (book of sailing), that was owned by a Bajau sailor based in Sabah, with instructions on the days that are suitable for sailing. It was an example of indigenous seafaring knowledge that existed. Another navigational guide from South Sulawesi and Bugis seafarers were also included in the exhibition. This not only offered alternative, indigenous knowledge on seafaring and navigation, but it also broadened the conversation beyond Singapore and engaged with communities from the wider Malay World. The exhibition stated that "contrary to popular understandings of Singapore as an isolated sleepy fishing village, Singapore had always been deeply connected to the rest of the region even before arrival of the British". This will be explored in the next narrative. Compared to the other exhibitions, "Seekor Singa..." was the only exhibition that explicitly highlighted how the current borders were a modern/colonial creation. The exhibition displaced British colonisation as a foundational event or process towards Singapore's formation and development and asserted that Singapore did not exist independently from the region. The other exhibitions worked within the post-1965 Singapore borders.

Narrative #5: Singapore did not have links with the Malay world

This last narrative of modernity (5) is an extension of the previous narrative (4), as the concretisation of nation-state borders led post-colonial Singapore state to overlook its links and broader history with the wider peninsula. The 'point-zero' history, or the national myth that pre-colonial Singapore was a swampy mudflat and sleepy fishing village, was used to propel the post-colonial state narrative. This was used as a powerful tool to project Singapore as a land of immigrants (Rahim 2009, 24). Interestingly, post-colonial history writing in Singapore marks a break, not continuity, with the colonial historical textbooks, which had recognised Singapore as part of the wider Malay World, as well as the indigeneity of the Malays. The concretisation of Singapore's national borders and overlooking the links Singapore had with the wider Malay world resist and erase the conception that Malays are indigenous to the *Nusantara* Malay World. Lily Zubaidah (2009, 24) asserted that "National Day parades and in national songs, all Singaporeans are referred to as immigrants from 'faraway lands' even though Johor and many of the Indonesian islands south of Singapore are a swim or short *sampan* (boat) ride away". This erases Malay histories as part of Singapore's histories as well as worldviews on belonging to the wider Peninsula. Aside from questions of self-determination and ownership, I argue

that the erasure of indigeneity has exacerbated the minority status and marginality of the Malays in Singapore (Mutalib 2012; Rahim 2009; Saharudin 2016).

With the Bicentennial commemorations, the Singapore state did not intend to acknowledge Malay indigeneity but instead, adopted the *longue durée* lens to push for the recognition of Singapore links to the wider Malay world. All the exhibitions, including the statues and the Bicentennial Experience, countered the point-zero narrative and acknowledged Singapore as part of a wider network of maritime port and empires. All the exhibitions referred to the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) and its stories as a source that informed Singapore's history. *Sejarah Melayu* is a document that dates back to the 15th century Malay world and covers a romanticised history of the origin, evolution and demise of the Melakan Sultanate, a great Malay maritime empire at that time. It is a great resource that documented Singapore's relationship with the wider Malay World.

I mentioned in the previous chapter that the *Sejarah Melayu* was sidelined in writing the history textbooks as it was considered unscientific. Therefore, it was commendable that the Bicentennial referred to its stories as a source of historical knowledge. The first act in the Bicentennial Experience highlighted the power struggles between Malay empires, and this was based on the *Sejarah Melayu*. The statue of the Palembang Prince, Sang Nila Utama, who founded Singapore in 1299, was also from the *Sejarah Melayu.* The exhibition "On Paper" began with the *Sejarah Melayu,* acknowledging that this was evidence of Singapore's significance in the Malay world since the 14th century. Singapore was a cosmopolitan port and a naval base, and it was where Sang Nila Utama (or Sri Tri Buana) first assumed his position as king. This is significant as *Sejarah Melayu* was often claimed to be a book of myth that cannot be considered a historical source, as seen in Chapter 3. Other than stating the importance of the text and the social history that it provided, the exhibition also laid out how despite discrediting the validity of *Sejarah Melayu*, the British colonisers used excerpts of the text to justify their colonialism over anarchical Malay rule. To support their discourse of incompetent Malay kings, examples given were the fall of the Melakan court at the hands of the Portuguese and the fleeing of Iskander Shah from Singapore to Melaka when the Majapahit forces were attacking.

In addition to using *Sejarah Melayu*, the *longue durée* lens also shifted the focus to indigenous histories and artefacts before the arrival of the British, and inevitably, these sources assert that Singapore was part of the wider Malay World. The exhibition "An Old New World" displayed items found in the vessels of the VOC, items of trade found in the region pre-British as well as models of vessels and Asian ships. Besides long-distance ships like the Chinese junks, there were also ships that were Malay, Javanese, Bugis and Filipino models. The ships are examples of the "extensive maritime connections in the region", which acknowledged the networks and influences within the Malay world before the arrival of the British. There was a section dedicated to the tools and role of the *Orang Laut* in the region. Artefacts such as the gold coin was showcased to highlight how in the 17th century, "Singapore was part

of the Johore Sultanate and an important trading port and part of a regional trading network". It was highlighted that the coin features the Sultan's name and his designation *Khalifatul Muminin* (Ruler of the Faithful), which offers insight to the political structures and religious influences within Malay polities. Beyond the *Sejarah Melayu*, the MHC exhibition used "indigenous historical sources to provide counterpoints to Western perspectives and narratives of the Malay world" and proceeded to present the different "Malay" voices and epistemologies such as Sabahan, Javanese, Bugis, Boyan, Minangkabau and more, encompassing the wider Malay World, as defined by all the colonial textbooks. These exhibitions highlighted how Singapore did not exist as an independent boundary and was a part of the wider Malay World.

Acknowledging links to the wider Malay World also meant that Singapore's experience of colonisation cannot be separated from the global colonial enterprise, let alone the colonial incursions within the region. Showcases such as the Portuguese-Dutch Battle Map in "Old New World" meant looking at colonial history beyond the British and considered the role of Singapore during the Portuguese and Dutch colonisation of Southeast Asia – "the Portuguese and Dutch came to Southeast Asia for trade and clashed over the control of lucrative maritime routes like the Malacca Straits and the Straits of Singapore. Caught in the middle of this competition for power were the Johoreans, who formed alliances with both countries to further their own interests". "On Paper" mentioned other colonial powers within the region before the British. There was a chart by Portuguese cartographer Andre Pereira dos Reis from the year 1654. The maps were found in Netherlands and Portugal. The map displayed older names of places in Singapore, such as *Tanjung Tauhid* (literally translates to Oneness of God Cape), referring to Changi Point today. Besides learning about local names for Singapore, Pereira dos Reis was one of the two mapmakers to place the toponym *Xebandaria* (Shahbandaria), which means harbour-master's compound, which highlighted the existence of a functioning port on the island. This goes against the "point zero" rhetoric that Singapore's history started with the British. As mentioned earlier, "On Paper" also showcased the 1824 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. The object description highlighted the British perception of the Sultan and the Temenggong as "unreliable partners who would impede Singapore's development". Despite this, the rule of Singapore was referred to as "sovereign rights […] which [the Sultans] had inherited from their ancestors". NLB did not add their own interpretations to these statements, but to me, they were enough to highlight the colonial ambitions of the British and point to the indigeneity of Malays in Singapore, implying that Singapore is part of the wider Malay world. However, aside from acknowledging that Singapore has links with the wider Malay world, the "On Paper" and "An Old New World" exhibition did not explicitly imply Malay indigeneity.

Conclusion

I conclude that the post-colonial Singapore state did make efforts within the Bicentennial commemorations to be critical of the Eurocentric, foundational narratives of modernity extracted from

the colonial textbooks. However, the overall purpose of the Bicentennial remained to be a nation-building exercise, forefronting how colonisation had its positive and negative aspects, and how the post-colonial Singapore state still managed to appropriate and excel in modernity. The SBO exhibitions were the most publicly and visually accessible, and yet, the least critical. Due to SBO's proximity to the Prime Minister's Office, knowledge was still produced from the ego-politics of knowledge that told partial celebratory stories of modernity even though the negative aspects of colonisation were explored. The other exhibitions from NMS, NLB and MHC were more critical partly due to slightly more autonomy in its organisation. They endeavoured to narrate fuller stories of modernity/coloniality and accessed sources that were from the colonial difference, highlighting indigenous silences and problematising British colonisation.

As one of the goals of the Bicentennial was to demythicise or decentre Raffles, there was an effort to have a nuanced view of colonisation and question the coloniality in knowledge production. However, in a way, despite mentioning more varied perspectives of history, the narrative that the civilising mission was, and continues to be, beneficial for Singapore was never contested during the commemorations, except in the MHC exhibition. Even though some of the violences of colonisation were brought up, the Bicentennial commemorations overall served as a nation-building exercise to continue maintaining and producing a Singapore that is modern and successful. The legitimacy of the post-colonial leadership in Singapore was and still is based on the fact that they seized the advantages left by the British empire and used them to benefit the wider society, creating a peaceful, multi-cultural thriving metropole (Vasagar 2018). Because of the overarching celebration of the civilising mission, the decolonial practice of exposing the logics of coloniality can be appropriated and instead presented in a way that highlights the negative sides of colonisation, while retaining the positives, which relegates this to a dewesternising exercise. Modernity and coloniality are made to seem like parallel processes instead of constitutive of each other. In not "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" (Pan Jie 2018), the national exercise of the Bicentennial commemorations relegated these colonial crimes and silences to the past. In chapter 6, I will elaborate on how the pursuit of modernity in Singapore maintains and reproduces global colonialities within the island.

As articulated in chapter 2, the act of consulting knowledge produced from a colonial difference allowed the exhibitions to access "an-other frame of consciousness that perceives and senses the world that cannot be subsumed by […] the empire", which does not warranty it being "'better' and being 'good' because of the simple fact of belonging to the memories of colonies" (Walter Mignolo 2007, 464). It painted a fuller picture of modernity/coloniality, as illustrated by the more critical exhibitions. The critical interventions during the Bicentennial were ineffective or remain stubbornly unassimilated within the government as evident by recent announcements of an island-wide travelling exhibition titled "From Mudflats to Metropolis", chronicling Singapore's urban transformation over the years (Ministry of National Development 2023). This exhibition will be showcased in public spaces in Singapore from

September to November 2023, organised by the Ministry of National Development and statutory boards such as Housing & Development Board and National Parks. Despite the Bicentennial exercise, the organs of the Singapore state are still maintaining the narrative popularised by first PM Lee , "mudflat to metropolis" (K.Y. Lee 1965), which is similar to the point zero narrative in the plaque under the Raffles Statue.

Beyond merely engaging with knowledge from the colonial difference for "nuance", knowledge from the colonial difference illustrate modernity/coloniality and ways of delinking or epistemic disobedience. Despite being more open to indigenous sources of knowledge during the Bicentennial, the voices who protested structural and systemic changes, like the leftist groups, labour movements and communist groups across Malaya and other instances of anti-colonial activity were not highlighted at all. In the next chapter, I will be focusing on border thinking by using an example of alternative peoples' history (*sejarah rakyat*) within the *Utusan Melayu* newspaper. I will analyse critiques, alternatives or silences on modernity within the newspaper. Any attempt to credit the British for bringing about economic opportunities and growth as well as governance by law and gradualism ignore and silences the critiques from a colonial difference that existed in the *Utusan Melayu.*

Chapter 5
Knowledge from the colonial wound: *Utusan Melayu*

"Selagi hidup berjiwa hamba, Pasti tetap terjejah abadi; Kalau hidup ingin merdeka, Tiada tercapai hanya berkata[66]" – Usman Awang (2016b)

The two-part decolonial framework that guides this thesis to interrogate knowledge production in Singapore includes: (1) critiquing dominant, hegemonic Eurocentric narratives and identify descriptions of modernity/coloniality and (2) engaging in border thinking and the 'creative mind', through the excavation of local knowledges and praxis that are responding to modernity/coloniality. In chapter 3 and 4, I interrogated the hegemonic narratives of modernity found in sites of knowledge production by both the colonial and post-colonial Singaporean state. I examined knowledge production about the experience of colonisation within two different sites and time periods – the first official history textbooks written in the colonial period in the late 1800s to early 1900s and the museum exhibitions during the Bicentennial celebrations in 2019. Although they were different forms of knowledge sources within the archives, I excavated four to five main narratives of modernity that feature in the colonial and post-colonial state narratives in Singapore and examined to what extent are these narratives reproduced or critiqued in the state's narrative of Singapore history.

In this chapter, I seek epistemic justice by engaging with the contents of Malay newspaper *Utusan Melayu*, from the period of 1946 to 1948. As elaborated in chapter 2, epistemic justice calls for reinstating epistemic authority to knowledge production from the colonial difference and validating what the sources consider "what counts as a problem, what constitutes the problems and what are the means of redress" (Shilliam 2016a, 255) in spite of their flaws. This thesis argues that epistemic justice can only occur when we go beyond diversifying and dewesternising and engage with knowledge production from the colonial difference. This not only offers a critique on the partial stories of modernity by elucidating modernity/coloniality but also the potential for border thinking. In chapter 2, I elaborated on the concept of border thinking and the critique from a colonial difference. In short, the epistemic imperial difference, or the ego-politics of knowledge refers to the epistemic location of those who participated in building the modern/colonial world. The colonial difference, or geo-politics of knowledge, refers to those who have been left out of the discussion. The acknowledgement of the modernity/coloniality complex allows us to recognise coloniality as an epistemic location as well, which is thinking from the colonial difference (Walter Mignolo 2002, 63). This means that hegemonic histories of modernity are not only rejected but also challenged (Icaza 2017). Border epistemologies not only have the potential to highlight coloniality, uncovering the underbelly of modernity, but it also refers to knowledge formation from the position of colonial difference in response to modernity/coloniality. This

[66] "As long as your soul is enslaved, you remain eternally colonised; If you wish to live free, you will not achieve anything with words alone".

means that it has the potential to redefine the rhetoric of modernity from a colonial difference (epistemic disobedience) and/or reconstitute indigenous ways of being and thinking (delinking), beyond Western categories of thought or Eurocentric epistemology. In this chapter, I consider *Utusan Melayu* as a source of border thinking as it was representative of Malay anti-colonialism in Singapore (Awang 2016a) and was responding to the lived experience within modernity/coloniality.

The chapter begins by outlining the political development of the newspaper as well as the historical context of 1946-1948. Then, I delve into thematic analysis to consider the critiques of modernity found within *Utusan*. This chapter directly challenges the narratives of modernity that have been interrogated in the previous chapters. On top of a source that illustrates a fuller picture of modernity/coloniality, I approach *Utusan* as a potential source for border thinking, without disregarding the fact that there might be internalisations or reproductions of modern/colonial constructs and concepts, such as race for example. As a source of border thinking, I seek to uncover epistemological shifts that *Utusan* offered beyond the colonial matrix of power, considering the Malay newspaper as epistemic authority that redefined or offered alternatives to modernity. As elucidated in Chapter 2, knowledge producers from the colonial difference are not 'studying' the experience of coloniality but thinking politically from the experience of colonisation and acting to undo coloniality that is hidden behind the façade of modernity. Overall, this chapter covers part 2 of the decolonial framework, and my effort to "centr(e) our concerns and worldviews" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, 41).

Selection of case study: *Utusan Melayu*

I have already explained my choice to examine *Utusan Melayu* briefly in the introduction. In order to access alternative sources of history, I had to look beyond the state monopoly of knowledge production about the experience of British colonisation and that meant looking at avenues within the archives that were directly from the people. While there were more critical efforts during the recent Bicentennial, the developments of Malay nationalisms and anti-colonialisms are also often not mentioned in official narratives of Singapore history as they do not fit into the post-colonial national goals of ethnic neutrality and the pursuit of capitalism. The politics brought up by Malay nationalisms and anti-colonialisms are considered security threats or national faultlines that should be avoided (Loh, Thum, and Chia 2017). As seen in previous chapters, these developments are largely overlooked and the peoples' narrative, or specifically the Malay Singaporean voice, does not appear at the forefront of post-colonial Singapore's official national history which is why I am privileging *Utusan Melayu* as a source of alternative history.

Utusan Melayu offered a source of *sejarah rakyat*[67] as it was a newspaper that was widely read and also independently maintained (until 1961) by the Malays. In his memoir "Malay Nationalism

[67] See Chapter 1

Before UMNO[68]", Mustapha Hussain (2005, 97), one of the founders of *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM[69]; Union of Malay Youth) in Kuala Lumpur in 1938, stated that when he was a hostel warden for the School of Agriculture in Serdang, he had found *Utusan Melayu* newspapers in their common rooms. He said that a "torrent of nationalistic feelings, deep Malay consciousness and an increasing awareness of the plight of poor Malays returned to my bosom" (M. Hussain 2005, 112) after reading the newspapers. *Utusan Melayu* and its contents was briefly mentioned in the Bicentennial Experience, without any reference to its importance and influence (see chapter 4). The exclusion of political activity and thinking of the Malays from Singapore's national history reinforces the 'myth of the lazy native' and the colonial understanding that the Malays were politically apathetic (Noh 2014, 246). Mustapha (2005, 97) added that "the British felt insecure; should a Malay intelligentsia emerge, their grip on Malaya would be threatened. They much desired a politically ignorant Malay community". In chapter 3, I elaborated on how the education system was disadvantageous to Malays and meant to keep them in the agricultural class. *Utusan Melayu* enabled Malays from all walks of life to be engaged with then-relevant political ideas, be aware that they shared the same plights and understand that colonialism was the root cause of their marginalisation and lack of justice (Awang 2016a). *Utusan Melayu* offered an anti-colonial position that was neither bourgeois nationalism nor communism. The newspaper was able to articulate their own experiences and envision their own goals for their future.

In addition, in the period after World War II, the newspaper focused on global decolonisation struggles, specifically of other British colonies and the Islamicate, and a consistent focus on the problems and issues faced by the Malays and *rakyat* (people/masses) as a whole. News about other colonies in Asia and the Middle East was constantly included, ensuring that lay people were conscious about their global status as the colonised. It is also interesting to note that due to its Malay and Muslim character, there was a heavy focus on the anti-colonial struggle in Indonesia, India and Palestine. Aside from political news, the newspaper occasionally had articles about important events in Islam such as the Prophet's birth, *Isra' Miraj*, Ramadhan and Hajj. According to *Utusan Melayu*, the goal of the newspaper was to make politics for everyone – to report news, to educate and give guidance to the people who were starting to politicise. It also nurtured a generation of radical Malay nationalists and leftists (such as Ishak Haji Mohamed (Pak Sako), Usman Awang, Harun Aminurrashid and Said Zahari), who played a pivotal role in the 1950s and 60s in raising the political consciousness of Malayans and pushing to organise the masses (Maidin 2013).

[68] UMNO refers to the United Malay National Organisation, a politically right-wing, economically conservative, Malay nationalist party, formed in 1946 (Roff 1967).
[69] KMM refers to *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Union of Malay Youth), formed in 1938 before WWII. Malay radicals such as Ibrahim Yaacob and Ishak Haji Mohamed disagreed with the narrow-minded state parochialism of the Malay political associations that existed at that time so they formed KMM, with the goals of overthrowing the British and bringing about a political union between Malaya and the Dutch colonial territories in an *Indonesia Raya* (greater Indonesia) or *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malay Unity) (Omar 1993, 26).

Lastly, *Utusan Melayu's* development and meandering nature of their political journey as well as associations with leftist organisations across ethnic lines, was an interesting development to follow, partly due to the journalists' internationalist outlooks and unique position as Malays living in a majority Chinese Singapore (Rahim 2008).

An introduction to *Utusan Melayu*, 1939-1970

This section outlines the political development of the newspaper and follows with the historical context of 1946-1948. Especially as this newspaper is not discussed in mainstream historiography, I dedicate a significant amount of space within this chapter to introduce the newspaper and its politics. In the 1960s, it became clear that *Utusan Melayu* became a concern to not only the British, but more so for UMNO, the Malay ruling elite as the newspaper threatened to expose and unhinge the modern/colonial world system, which benefitted the post-colonial elite.

Utusan Melayu (translates to Malay News), a Malay daily printed in the Jawi script, was published in Singapore on 29 May 1939. This was considered a landmark publication as it was funded, owned and written by Malays. The 1930s was regarded as the golden age of Malay journalism across Malaya. However, before *Utusan,* all the major Malay newspapers of the decade were financed and controlled by non-Malays, namely the Jawi Peranakans (Straits-born Muslims of Indian heritage), Arabs and the Chinese (Kuntom 1973, 7). This newspaper should not be confused with another newspaper also named *Utusan Melayu,* 1907 to 1921, which was owned by the Singapore Free Press. The link between the two newspapers was Eunos Abdullah, the editor of *Utusan Melayu i*n 1907. This was mentioned briefly in the Bicentennial Experience. Eunos founded *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* (KMS; Singapore Malay National Organisation) in 1926, a Malay nationalist association in Singapore that called for the political, social and financial advancement of the Malays. In 1939, as a young journalist on the committee of KMS, Yusof Ishak, along with Abdul Rahim Kajai, Ishak Muhammad and others, sought funds and expertise from within the Malay community across Malaya to set up a newspaper they could call their own – this became the later version of *Utusan Melayu*, which I study in this chapter. Yusof Ishak, more famously known to be the first President of Singapore in 1965, was also the founder of *Utusan Melayu.* Yusof intended for the *Utusan* to be owned and funded by the *rakyat* (the people) and therefore, spoke for the *rakyat*. It needed to be a truly Malay newspaper, Malay in its concerns and contents and Malay in terms of its staff and ownership (Z. Abdul Rahman 1988, 14). Yusof Ishak recalled visiting more than 30 different kampungs across Malaya, addressing more than 5000 people, to sell shares and around 400 people bought the shares, including drivers and hawkers (Maidin 2013).

In the early stages of Malay nationalism, the Malays were not anti-colonial per se. Their immediate concerns were about the influx of foreigners on Malay soil as well as the Malays' poor socio-economic standing vis-à-vis the other racial communities, the symptoms of modernity/coloniality. Colonial immigration policies and demand for labourers in colonial capitalism drastically increased the

Chinese and Indian populations across Malaya. By 1860, the Chinese community had outnumbered the Malay community in Singapore. Aside from population growth, the Malays were also beginning to be insecure of their status as a people due to the limited social mobility, and their fixed socio-economic status at the bottom. In these early developments of Malay nationalism, in general, the Malays were not explicitly anti-colonial as they viewed the colonial authorities as allies that could help them strengthen their socio-economic position. Therefore, they did not even envision ousting British colonisation or destroying the economic system that was set up by the British. This was when "*Melayu Jati*" (pure Malays) was conceptualised, differentiating 'pure' Malays from the Arab and Indian Muslim communities that have been in the region for a long time, speaking and adopting Malay language and culture. These insecurities seeped within the Malay Muslim community, where the Malays were unsettled at how the Arabs and Indian Muslims, were also leading the Malay community financially, intellectually, religiously and socially (Roff 1967). These developments were the foundations for the ideology of *bumiputera* (sons of the soil), internalising colonial racial categories (Manickam 2009), while also reacting to the effects of the modern/colonial racialised labour hierarchies. Early Malay nationalism was keen to promote the interests of marginalised Malays, however, they did not attribute the cause of their discontent to colonisation and colonial logics until much later. This confirmed the success of the British's 'divide and rule' policy (Omar 1993).

This historical context is significant because these developments motivated the funding of a 'truly Malay' newspaper and it also affected my choice in analysing *Utusan* articles from 1946-1948, instead of its earlier years in 1939. The experience of World War II and the Japanese Occupation of Malaya changed the newspaper's political thinking and inclinations towards building national consciousness, international anti-colonial consciousness and solidarity, and aspiration towards freedom. Before World War II, *Utusan*'s attitude towards Malay interests and privileges were generally defensive, opting to retain the privileges that the Malays had under the British Protectorates in the Malay World. After the war, it became more offensive, discussing the implications of the Malayan Union, a centralising policy that would put the Malay States, Penang and Melaka under a single direct British rule as well as opposing the Federation of Malaya[70] (Z. Abdul Rahman 1988).

The meandering nature of the newspaper's political journey shifted from a purely pro-Malay standpoint to one which was anti-colonial and *rakyat* oriented. *Utusan*'s trajectory represented the complexity of their ideals and the growing rejections of feudalism, colonisation and capitalism. Despite playing a big role in the foundations of UMNO, *Utusan Melayu* stayed loyal to the people in voicing their concerns, instead of representing any political party per se. Said Zahari, former *Utusan* journalist and political detainee in Singapore, asserted that "[o]nly with a free policy could Utusan Melayu be the voice of the people, fighting for the interests of the people with sincerity, integrity and courage" (Zahari

[70] These historical events will be outlined briefly in next section.

2001, 73). *Utusan Melayu* still did not outrightly belittle the Sultans as the newspaper understood that many Malays still believed in the Sultans' sovereignty and symbolism. However, *Utusan* became increasingly sympathetic towards socialism and communism as well as explicitly anti-colonial in their calls for *merdeka* (self-determination and freedom). With their socialist leanings and position as a minority Malay Muslim community in Singapore, they also associated with leftist organisations across ethnic lines (Rahim 2008).

The development of *Utusan* made political powers increasingly uneasy. Especially in the political climate surrounding the 1948 Emergency and ideological warfare against communism in the 1960s, this made the newspaper and those involved in its management vulnerable to political control, betrayal, character assassination and incarceration (Zahari 2001). By 1956, UMNO managed to acquire the newspaper by buying its shares. The decision was made to move the headquarters of *Utusan Melayu* to Kuala Lumpur in 1958, as the Board of Directors argued that as a leading Malay newspaper, it should not be based in Singapore and should be in the middle of the Malay community in Kuala Lumpur. Due to UMNO's influence as the newspaper's major shareholder, there was a change in the editorial policy in 1959, from an independent paper to that of a party publication (Maidin 2013, 91). Then UMNO President and first Prime Minister of Malaysia after independence in 1959, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had instructed the Board of Directors of *Utusan Melayu* to propose a vote of no confidence against Yusof Ishak because of his failure to shift *Utusan* to be a party publication.

Radical journalists like Usman Awang, Said Zahari and Salim Kajai, were the heart of the newspaper at that time, ensuring the people's voice were still represented and the cause for liberation was championed. Said Zahari was especially persistent in writing articles that were critical, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. He had a column that was pro-Indonesia[71] every week in *Utusan Melayu* and he gave the leader of *Parti Rakyat*, Ahmad Boestamam[72], a weekly segment titled "Courses on Politics". Tunku had claimed that *Utusan Melayu* was not being fair and Said responded with a list of statistics compiled by the News Editor, Salim Kajai, which shows that *Utusan* gives 60% of its space to government news, UMNO and the Allied parties and the rest of the 40% to other parties. After no change in *Utusan*'s political stance, the increased pressure by UMNO was so great that Yusof Ishak

[71] Following WWII, there was a rise of progressive nationalism and anti-imperialism in Indonesia under Sukarno and its extensive influence over anti-colonial left-wing parties in Southeast Asia was the greatest threat to their defence and perpetuation of Anglo-American interests and hegemony in the region, over and above any threat from the Malayan Communist Party. Left-wing Malay nationalists in Malaya and Singapore, who were inspired by Indonesian anti-colonial, anti-imperialist political movements threated British colonial interest. The British needed conservative, pro-Western and anti-communist local leaders for their former colonies, namely Malaya and Singapore (Zahari 2001).

[72] Ahmad Boestamam was a socialist revolutionary and influential Malay radical nationalist in Malaya. He helped form the leftist-leaning *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM, Malay Nationalist Party) and established its radical youth wing, *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API, Awakened Youth Movement), and later the *Parti Rakyat Malaya* (PRM, Malaya People's Party). He held steadfast to socialist idealism throughout his life (L.K. Teo 2018a, 66)

resigned and Said Zahari took over as editor-in chief. In 1961, UMNO took control of the newspaper's ownership and attempted to further control its editorial policy (Maidin 2013, 100).

This was a significant moment in the paper's history. Said and other editorial, administrative and production staff went on strike on 21 July 1961, in a bid to preserve the newspaper's independence. The strike was broken after 93 days, on 21 October 1961. When UMNO fully took control of the newspaper, Said Zahari left the newspaper. By the time of the strike, he had already forged close relations with other left leaders and activists from political parties, trade unions and other organisations, including *Barisan Sosialis* (Socialist Front) Leader Lim Chin Siong and *Partai Rakyat Singapura* (PRS; Singapore People's Party) leader Abdul Wahab Shah. He then shifted to edit *Rakyat,* the Malay-language newspaper of *Barisan Sosialis*. By then, he was already placed under surveillance and as soon as he joined PRS as president in 1963, he was arrested and detained under the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance under Operation Cold Store, a joint operation by the Singapore and Malayan governments and the British colonial authorities that resulted in the detention of more than 100 leftist leaders and activists. By 1970, *Utusan Melayu*'s management had closed its Singapore office and suspended its circulation in Singapore. The decision was made after the post-colonial Singapore government stopped granting permits to the company to circulate newspapers in Singapore (Maidin 2013). Coloniality of knowledge asserts that knowledge is actively excluded or controlled to be able to preserve coloniality of power. In the same vein, *Utusan Melayu* was a concern to not only the British, but more so for UMNO, the ruling Malay elites, and the post-colonial Singapore government, who wanted to control public narratives, especially those that threaten to expose and unhinge the modern/colonial world system, which benefitted them.

Accessibility of Utusan Melayu: readership and the Jawi-script

The accessibility of *Utusan Melayu* in its reach and in the language used, Malay written in Jawi script, ensured that many Malays were able to read or know about the contents within this newspaper. This meant that the Malays were exposed to the plight of the poor within their community, they understood the political developments that were happening within Malaya and beyond and they understood the impact and realities of colonisation. Contrasting this with the textbooks, *Utusan Melayu* presents a form of knowledge production, about the experience of colonisation from the body-politic of the Malay person, who is not of the elite and the state. The significance of this is that the knowledge production from *Utusan* comes from the colonial difference, granting it the potential for border thinking.

With regards to readership, newspapers became more accessible throughout Malaya as the newspapers were available at every Malay bookshop and clubs. These newspapers were read by a range of people from students to motor car drivers as well as peasants. It was not uncommon to see a teacher of a local school or the *penghulu* (village head) reading these papers and a crowd of people who were less literate listening, questioning and commenting around him (Ahmad 1941, 249). In early 1941, the

newspaper circulation was 1800 pieces daily and by the end of 1945, the distribution went up to 6000 a day. When the headquarters was relocated to KL from Singapore in 1957, the distribution was 23000, and after the journalist strikes in 1961 to oppose UMNO's influence, it was up at more than 50000 issues (Maidin 2013, 29).

In terms of language, it was always written in Malay using the Jawi-script, which meant that *Utusan Melayu* remained accessible to the Malay masses. It did circumstantially change to the romanised script on occasions. During the Japanese Occupation, Yusof was arrested along with Ramli Tahir, another editor in *Utusan* as they were claimed to be pro-British and spreading anti-Japanese propaganda. Most of the Malay language press were then suspended – the Japanese merged *Utusan* with *Warta Malaya* to form *Berita Malai*, which was originally in Jawi script but switched to the romanised version. This was counterproductive for the Japanese Occupation as Malays, who did not know romanised alphabets, could not read the papers. *Utusan Melayu* was revived in 1945, in Jawi. The Sunday variation, *Utusan Zaman,* resumed in 1947 in romanised Malay, but shortly, after it reverted to Jawi (Maidin 2013, 33). Although there is no data on the literacy rates in the early 1900s, the preference for Jawi script newspapers highlighted how people were more comfortable with Jawi as opposed to the Roman script to read Malay. Up to the early 20th century, almost everything written in Malay was in Jawi script (Hijjas 2022). On 1st September 1967, it became a romanised daily after it was acquired by UMNO, it was then renamed to be *Utusan Malaysia*.

Being accessible and widely read, *Utusan Melayu* was producing knowledge from the colonial difference for those who were occupying the position of the colonial difference. As elucidated in Chapter 2, knowledge producers from the colonial difference are not 'studying' the experience of coloniality but thinking politically from the experience of colonisation and acting to undo coloniality that is hidden behind the façade of modernity. This chapter seeks to legitimise this knowledge production.

Historical context of 1946-1948 in Malaya

I use thematic analysis to look at 370 *Utusan Melayu* issues from January 1946 to July 1948. There were some missing microfilms and issues such as the whole month issues from December 1946, July and August 1947. This inevitably leaves gaps in my research. However, I argue that 370 *Utusan Melayu* issues over the span of two significant post WWII years were sufficient in excavating narratives and themes within the newspaper. I also concede that future research can be done on the issues published during the 1950s when *Utusan Melayu* had further explicitly developed their national consciousness and built more alliances with individuals and movements outside the Malay community.

I chose to look at the newspaper issues published in post WWII years, between 1946 to 1948, which were pertinent in understanding Malay nationalism and more importantly, examining anti-colonial political thought (or at least, the roots of it) in Singapore, specifically by the Malays. In these

few years, there were key events that shaped Malay nationalism and anti-colonialism: the British returned to the Malay World in 1945 after the Japanese's surrender; the formation of United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) in 1946 in response to the Malayan Union being imposed; the coalition of the Malay Left under PUTERA (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat; Centre of the People's Power) and the non-Malay Left under AMCJA (All-Malaya Council of Joint Action), was formed in 1947 under PUTERA-AMCJA, the 1948 Federation of Malaya was agreed between UMNO and the British and finally, the 1948 Emergency was put into effect.

It is necessary here to outline the causes of Malayan anti-colonial grievances against the British to understand the importance of *Utusan Melayu* as a platform for expressing these grievances. Briefly, due to British commitments to the Atlantic Charter[73] and following Japan's surrender in August 1945, Britain united the micro-territories (separated into the SS, FMS and UMS) into a more defensible 'Malayan Union' (1946-1948), hoping to mould a 'Malayan nation' in a bid towards preparing Malaya for self-government. The Malayan Union had a few implications (Purcell 1946, 28): firstly, it bounded all 9 Malay states, Melaka and Penang into one colony, leaving Singapore separate. Secondly, the Union meant the implementation of broad-based citizenship, to any who claimed Malaya to be their homeland regardless of race or creed, subject to qualification of birth or a suitable period of residence in Malaya. Third, there would be a transfer of sovereignty from the Malay rulers to the British crown, except for matters of culture and religion. Lastly, the Malayan union "will have one purse into which all the tin, rubber and customs revenue will flow" (The Straits Times 1945, 2). Centralisation of power would give Britain better control of Malaya's economy and resuscitate Britain's post-war economy (Noh 2012). The Malayan Union was intended to prepare them [Malayans] for self-government, develop their resources and ensure security (L.K. Wong 1982).

The Malayan Union plans were met with strong Malay opposition and demonstrations over 1946-47 as they felt that with the redundancy of the Malay Sultans and the inclusive citizenship, meant the stripping of Malay rights to own Malaya (*hak ketuanan Melayu*). UMNO was formed in 1946 to oppose the Union, with its central goal as defending Malay rights. The timing of the Union, where the post-WWII chaos from ethnic tensions exacerbated by Japanese was still ripe, saw an intense manifestation of Malay nationalism. The resistance to the Union was so intense that the British had abandoned the plan. They called on UMNO and the Malay royalty to join in a working committee to draft an alternative proposal, a proposal that resulted in the creation of 1948 Federation of Malaya (Rudner 1970).

The Federation of Malaya was in effect from 1st February 1948 to 16 September 1963. The Federation agreements was still similar to the Union, in terms of political, economic and territorial

[73] The Malayan Union was a product of American pressure and world opinion on Britiain to decolonise its territories after the war, in accordance with the Atlantic Charter (L.K. Wong 1982).

unification and separation of Singapore as a crown colony. The Federation retained a strong central Executive under a High Commissioner but restored sovereignty of the Sultans. The Federation citizenship was also severely limited for non-Malays. The conditions were if both parents had been born in the Federation and lived there for 15 years. If not, they could apply for citizenship if they had themselves been born in the Federation and resident for 8 years, or if not born there, resident for 15 years (ibid.).

This created deep divisions between Malaya's various communities, or in another sense, heightened political expressions, which produced a diverse and eclectic political environment. The leftist Malay Nationalist Party (MNP, or in Malay, *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya*, PKMM) was set up in October 1945 and it was part of UMNO in 1946. However, a month later, they left UMNO because they realised that they had conflicting foundations of what liberation (*merdeka*) meant. The Malay leftists did not agree to the British only recognising the Malay elite in the Federation agreements and sought for self-government. Some even called for *Melayu Raya*, a pan-Malay political union of Malaya and Indonesia (Omar 1993).

In response to the Federation, the non-Malays were also upset about the oversight of these populations by the British as there was no considerations to include their associations in the drafting of the Federation constitutions. The All-Malayan Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) was formed, consisting of Tan Cheng Lock, supported by the Malayan Indian Congress, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, Malayan Women's Federation and the Malayan Federation of Trade Unions. In 1947, PKMM, with its youth wing, *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (Conscious Youth Organisation, API) were campaigning all over the country opposing the working committee for the Constitutional Proposal of Malaya. PKMM withdrew from AMCJA in 22 February 1947, and initiated their own organisation that united other Malay leftist groups under Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA) (Omar 1993). Other organisations included, *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (Conscious Women's Front, AWAS), *Barisan Tani SeMalaya* (Peasants Front, BATAS), *Majlis Islam Tertinggi* (Highest Islamic Council, MATA) and 80 other smaller Malay organisations.

The leftist coalition between the non-Malay AMCJA and Malay PUTERA was this formed in March 1947, united inasmuch as it was opposed to the proposed constitution of the Federation. The Coalition was made up of various political parties, non-governmental organisations and individuals from various ethnic groups. Together, they worked to oppose the Malayan Union and the Constitutional proposals of the Special Committee set up by the British (Ali 2017a, 6). AMCJA was opposed to the Federation constitution on grounds that it separated Singapore, that the citizenship laws were unfavourable to the Chinese and Indians. PUTERA was opposed to the dominance of the elitist and undemocratic nature of UMNO and the Sultans, who were accepted by the British as national leaders.

As an alternative to the Federation Constitution, they drafted the 'People's Constitution' that was a first attempt by the people of Malaya to "build a political bridge between the domiciled non-Malay communities and the Malay race" (Reza 2017, 31-51). The People's Constitution was radically different from what the Federation Constitution looked like in terms of: provisions for a democratic system of self-government, centred around the people's interests, the inclusion of Singapore in Malaya, the concept of '*Melayu*' to be used for citizenship and national status for Malaya, special policies introduced to the constitution to advance and uplift the Malay people and lastly, for matters of Islam and Malay Customs to be under the control of Muslims and Malays as well as for the Sultans to be constitutional monarchs, receiving advice from the *rakyat* through democratic means and not from the British 'advisors'. The colonial government rejection of the People's Constitution led to the 1947 pan-Malayan Hartal (strikes).

In mid-1947, *Utusan Melayu* increasingly started to distance themselves from UMNO and emphasised that they were on the side of the people. Previously, they were supportive of UMNO in opposing the Union, as the masses were opposed to the Union. Agreeing with the Malay leftists, *Utusan* noted that the Federation agreements was undemocratic as it increasingly sidelined the needs of the people and retained the powers of Britain and the Malay elites, instead of the attainment of *merdeka*. *Utusan* (1947a, 3) reported one of its writers, Ishak Haji Muhammad, comment:

> "The proposed Federal agreement absolutely has no democratic basis, contrary to nationalism, the Malay nation and Malaya. He [Ishak] also said that the Constitution is a tool with which British imperialism together with actors of feudalisms will destroy the national spirit of people in Malaya, based on democracy, which is getting stronger, day to day."

Considerations of Border Thinking within *Utusan Melayu*

In this section, I bring the focus to the contents of *Utusan Melayu*. I use thematic analysis to look at 370 *Utusan Melayu* issues from January 1946 to July 1948. The contents of *Utusan Melayu* will be compared with the five themes that were drawn from the previous chapters from the exhibitions and textbooks to highlight how occupying different geo- and body-politic of knowledge results in different ways of seeing and being.

(1) Were the British at the centre of Singapore's history?

The first narrative of modernity that was excavated from the colonial textbooks was that the British was responsible for the discovery and development of Singapore. This narrative was so foundational in the official post-colonial Singapore narrative of colonial history that one of the goals during the Bicentennial was to critique this foundational narrative, by decentring Raffles and applying the *longue durée* lens to history. Despite admitting that there were other actors and historical

developments in Singapore's history, British colonisation was still credited for introducing 'good things' like education, governance, capitalism and multiculturalism (essentially 'civilisation').

In this sub-section, I ask what did the Malays centre? I found that despite *Utusan Melayu* being a local newspaper that covered the development of the local Malay community, it had a significant focus on anti-colonial global developments. Unlike the colonial textbooks, *Utusan Melayu* had a global focus, particularly on Asian countries that were also colonised or protected by the British – India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Egypt and Palestine. The main focus was always regional, on the Indonesian National Revolution which began in 1945. There was constantly news on the state of affairs in Indonesia, including local calls for support in terms of donations towards the cause for liberation (Utusan Melayu 1945b, 3) or communal prayers during Friday prayers for the liberation of occupied lands in Indonesia and all around the world (Utusan Melayu 1945a, 2). With constant exposure and news about the Indonesian Revolution and ideas that came out of it, Ahmad Boestamam of the PKMM, who argued for *Melayu Raya*[74], advocated for the adoption of the Merah-Putih (the Red and White), which was the flag of the Republic of Indonesia (Voice of the People 1945; Utusan Melayu 1947b, 2). There is no clear evidence that this influenced the current national flags of Singapore and Indonesia, however, it is significant to me that these countries still have red and white as core colours on their flags.

On top of news coverage on the anti-Dutch struggles in Indonesia, in 1948, Sukarno's speech taken from *Siasat Jakarta* was published in *Utusan Melayu* where he advised the peoples in the region to not be tools of colonisers. Sukarno said that no matter what form of governance the country took, the people should be the ones to decide the fate of a country so that it will be a strong country (Utusan Melayu 1948g, 3). Sukarno's 1948 New Years speech to the Indonesian peoples was also published in *Utusan* when he spoke about the lessons that can be taken from the last 40 years of struggle in Indonesia (Utusan Melayu 1948v, 4):

> "He [Sukarno] said that the Indonesian people should not fall into the political trap of division. In our economy, there are labourers, farmers or traders. Our personhood is Sundanese, Javanese, Minangkabau, Bugis, Minhasa or Kalimantan. Our religion is either Islam or Christianity. But our politics is one: the Indonesia nation that had united national vision."

Utusan Melayu ensured that the people always knew about was happening in Indonesia and this directly influenced how *Utusan* thought about *merdeka* (freedom/liberation).

Furthermore, *Utusan Melayu* acknowledged that the call for independence in Asia was becoming louder. In the case of Burma, the British repeated the same rhetoric that they asserted in Malaya, which was that Burma was not ready for independence because of the lack of administrative

[74] As mentioned in Chapter 3, *Melayu Raya* or *Indonesia Raya* used to signify a pan-Malay nation, incorporating the Malay Peninsula, Java, Sumatra and the other Indonesian Islands.

skills and institutions (Utusan Melayu 1947w, 2). Despite this, *Utusan* readily wished Burma a safe Independence Day in 1948, and reflected on how the British comments that "they [the Burmese] were not ready" were just excuses to retain power (Utusan Melayu 1948t, 2). In the next month, February 1948, Ceylon (current day Sri Lanka) also gained independence. *Utusan* commented that another Asian country had attained self-governance in the British Commonwealth, and they had attained freedom without spilling blood (Utusan Melayu 1948d, 2). The focus on Palestine was consistent, with almost reports and opinions on it everyday between 1946-1948. Palestine was used as an example to the Malays to learn from and identify who was truly fighting for the peoples' liberation and who were trying to attain their own interests (Utusan Melayu 1947v, 2). There was an article on 26th December 1947 entitled "Islam and Palestine" (Utusan Melayu 1947f, 4) that spoke about pan-Islamism and how Islam encourages solidarity across borders. This was another instance of raising awareness of developments within Palestine and linking it to their Muslim subjectivity. In an editorial entitled "Islam requires us to struggle for the liberation of our people and land", it was stated that Islam is a religion that is dynamic and not static and inflexible, a religion that calls for something more than worship. *Utusan* (1948f, 2) wrote:

> "Islam does not prevent freedom or liberation because Islam is a religion of liberation, brotherhood and development. […] Cordoba was how it was because of how they put the *Qur'an* into practice instead of putting it on the shelf. Islam is not against development as it is dynamic but the success of it will depend on the scholars (*ulama*) and the Muslims."

Beyond *Utusan*'s Muslim subjectivity and concern with other British colonies, *Utusan* also played a role in nurturing solidarity amongst the labourers. Indian labourers boycotted French ships in the Indian ports, in show of support for Vietnam. Malayan labourers were also asked to join the movement to show support for Vietnam:

> "Labourers in Singapore have been asked to join the Indian labour movement in the boycott, which means that the people in Malaya will be involved in obstructing the French Imperialist efforts [in Vietnam]" (Utusan Melayu 1947a, 3).

In calling for solidarity, *Utusan* was cognisant that Singapore was not separated from the wider colonial experience, unlike the narrative of modernity that asserted how Singapore benefitted from colonisation. The Malayan-wide Hartal (strikes) itself in October 1947 was influenced by anti-colonial movements in India and Gandhi, fighting against the British using non-violent means (Utusan Melayu 1947j, 1). The global anti-colonial outlook and Malay Muslim subjectivities of *Utusan Melayu* highlighted a different focus, beyond British history and politics. It shed more light on the influences that contributed to the story of Malaya and Singapore's journey towards self-governance.

(2) Were the British benevolent colonisers?

Moving on, when *Utusan* did centre the British in their narratives, what did they think of the British colonial administration? Did *Utusan* agree with the second narrative of modernity found in the textbooks and some of the Bicentennial exhibitions, that British colonisation in Malaya was benevolent and benign? On the contrary, *Utusan Melayu*'s epistemological position from the colonial difference allowed the newspaper to stand clearly against colonisation and speak about the experience of colonisation as colonised Malays. Firstly, *Utusan* was constantly educating the public about the plight of different communities within the Malay community, whether they were represented through organisations and unions, or not, for example the teachers, women, students, farmers, ship crew and fishermen. This provided an insight into how colonial governance had negatively affected different populations of the Malays. Secondly, *Utusan* recognised that Britain's intentions in "developing" Malaya was not out of altruistic intent and that their agenda was to maintain control over the population while benefitting from extracting its resources and economic profits. This recognition led to multiple critiques of the Malayan Union and the Federation of Malaya. Lastly, *Utusan* also highlighted how the British colonisers were actually violent, in their encroachment of the principles of democracy, free speech and human rights, especially during the 1948 Emergency.

i. The struggles of the Malay masses under British colonisation

While being consistent in highlighting the struggles of different communities, *Utusan Melayu* was also reflecting the rigid racial divisions of labour that was in service to colonial extraction. Based on "the Myth of the Lazy Native" (S.H. Alatas 1977), the Malays were marginalised from colonial extractive industries and stayed in more traditional work such as agriculture and fishing. *Utusan* reflected this division of labour based on race by highlighting the realities of the workers. On 26 November 1947, *Utusan* published an editorial about the plight of Malay farmers. It reported that "almost all the padi fields in Malaya belongs to the Malays so this means that the Malays would have more food security than other races […], but was that the case?" (Utusan Melayu 1947p, 2). The article showed how Malay farmers worked hard to produce rice, but the profits end up in the hands of capitalists of other races (*kaum-kaum modal bangsa asing*). In Kedah, it was reported that almost half of the paddy fields in Kedah were then mortgaged (*gadai*) or bought over for rental (*cagak*) by the Chinese and Chettis. This was the same with the buffalo that the farmers used to own. With these capitalist practices, they found that 75% of their produce went into the hands of those who did not do the hard labour. *Utusan* outlined that this exploitation was also at the hands of Malays who were in the aristocratic class, for example in states like Perak. In Kelantan, the farmers had to let go of their buffalo altogether as they could not afford to sustain their own lives day to day.

Utusan called on the colonial government to help the farmers by ensuring that there were farmers unions and updated irrigation systems. At the same time, *Utusan* called on the farmers not to

rely on the government. *Utusan* stated that the farmers were "the backbone in the movement towards our noble goals [of freedom]" (Utusan Melayu 1947p, 2). They thanked God for the existence of Malay farmer unions such as *Barisan Tani seMalaya* (Peasant's Front), *Persatuan Peladang-peladang* (Farmers' Associations) and others. *Utusan* asked these grassroots organisations what they planned to do to improve the lives of farmers materially, besides having meetings. The newspaper brought up the example of the Kedah Malay Farmers' Association, that aimed to occupy a seat or two in the Kedah government meeting council to suggest improvements to protect the farmers.

This article in *Utusan* was an example of how colonial law recognised private property rights, making land a commodity to be owned, bought and sold, inevitably creating conditions for landlordism and tenancy. There were situations when land could be lost through loan default when land was used as credit collateral (Jomo 2015). At the beginning of the colonial period, there was unequal distribution of land, with large land concessions allocated to members of the pre-colonial ruling class. The issue raised by *Utusan* were reflections of integrating the Malay peasantry into the British empire and the global economy (Jomo 2015). In relation to ownership, this resulted in sharp income inequality as the rising income and profits from the capital went to fewer and richer people. At the time of independence of Malaya in 1959, foreigners owned 60% of the share capital in limited companies, 75% in the agriculture sector and 73% in the mining sector, export earnings come from these two sectors. On top of this, *laissez faire* economic practices resulted in uneven development, with economic growth being concentrated in the West coast of the Malaya, where tin mines and rubber plantations were located. As a result, these states had better infrastructure. In the East coast, the population was mainly engaged in agriculture and fishing, with little or no development (Shah 2017). The article on the plight of farmers was one of the examples of how *Utusan* shed light on the impact of British colonial economic policy on the Malays, which sought to protect and preserve Britain's established business interests in the Malay Peninsula.

Aside from farming, the Malays also remained as fishermen. An editorial titled "Malay Fishermen and Fisheries Department (*Jabatan Ikan*)" was inspired by a question brought up in the Federation Legislative Council, that pointed out how the Fisheries Department was not meeting the needs of fishermen (Utusan Melayu 1948o, 2). Before the Japanese, Malay fishermen were using their own tools and techniques such as using the *belit* (twisting)*, kelong*[75]*, germal*[76]*, pukat hanyut*[77]*, bubu* (trap)*, rawa* (swamp)*, tangkul* (spear) and others. When the Japanese occupied Malaya, the Malay fishermen learnt Japanese ways of catching fish. After the war, they were unable to get jobs as the Fisheries Department, that dealt with fishing and research, brought in "experts" from Europe to teach

[75] *Kelong* refers to an offshore platform built with wood, which can be found in waters off Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia. Only a handful remain around Singapore due to rapid urbanisation. *Kelong*s were built by fishermen, primarily for fishing or fish farming. In larger structures, the fishermen dwell in them with their families.
[76] *Jermal* is a kind of fence that is attached near the shore to catch fish. There is a net attached to it to catch fish.
[77] *Pukat hanyut* is a technique used to catch fish, prawns and crab, where a net is tied to a buoy and a weight under the surface of the water. It can be translated to mean drift nets.

new fishing techniques, making these fishermen redundant. *Utusan* wrote that these fishermen should be independent to escape the exploitation of others, and update their techniques of catching fish and packing fish into tin for sales and exports (Utusan Melayu 1948o). In the 19 January 1948 editorial, *Utusan Melayu* spotlighted the poverty of the fishermen in Terengganu faced not only due to bad weather conditions (Utusan Melayu 1948m, 2). *Utusan* explicitly wrote that the capitalist class (*kaum modal*) was good at squeezing the fisherman dry as all the profits of their work went to them. Fishermen often took loans from these men to start fishing and somehow the gains return to the capitalists, with not much left for the fishermen (Sivalingam 1986). *Utusan* claimed that "this is also the fate of the agricultural class in Malaya" (Utusan Melayu 1948m, 2). Beyond highlighting how colonial capitalism had disrupted their livelihoods, *Utusan* offered an alternative solution to better the lives of the fishermen and the farmers. The newspaper suggested that the Malay community should start engaging in mutual aid or a cooperative (*gerakan syarikat kerjasama*):

> "This is not only the fate of the fishermen, but the farmers as well, as we have written about several months back. We see a solution to improve the fate of these fishermen and farmers. We should have mutual aid initiatives or cooperatives that can help improve their standard of living" (Utusan Melayu 1948m, 2).

Instead of getting trapped within exploitative capitalist practices, *Utusan* not only showed how colonial economic practices displaced indigenous knowledge and livelihood, but also offered alternatives such as cooperatives or mutual aid, though without much detail or explanation on how these should be run.

Lastly, beyond traditional industries, *Utusan* also forefronted the plight of the Malay teachers. The newspaper received many letters from the teachers speaking on issues of the state of education, pay and pensions. A reader wrote in saying that teachers were expected to not join any political parties. They could only join parties that were accepted by the government so one of the letters from the readers said that they were slaves to the government (*hamba kerajaan*) (Utusan Melayu 1947e, 2). They also spoke out against low pay. The Teacher's Union pleaded to *Utusan Melayu* to publish their letters, requesting for better pay, equal support for male and female teachers and better training so they could produce quality Malay students (Utusan Melayu 1947o, 1). *Utusan* also stated in another editorial that the British created a system that hindered Malays from entering certain jobs, rising in the education system, attaining or keeping land and progressing religious teachings (Utusan Melayu 1947l, 2), which was highlighted in Chapter 3. In showcasing the disruptions caused by colonialism, *Utusan* was directly critiquing the narrative of modernity that British colonisation was benign or benevolent. In terms of seeking alternatives, *Utusan* stated that the people should not seek solutions from the colonial

government as it was like waiting for a cat to grow horns[78]. The newspaper pushed their readers to question the 'benevolence' of the colonial government:

> "the Malays do not want to live in ignorance and obstinacy anymore. If the government is not willing to help us, then expect that the people will question the government intentions, which they have said to be leading and advancing all of us" (Utusan Melayu 1947s, 2).

Unlike the partial stories of modernity that we have seen in previous chapters, these issues were examples of how *Utusan* provided a fuller story towards modernity/coloniality by highlighting the disruptions and exploitation of colonial capitalism on the Malays. These articles on the plight of the Malay masses directly challenges the narrative that the British were benevolent. It also is interesting to note that despite being based in Singapore, *Utusan*'s worldview was not limited to the island and considered the wider implications of British colonisation in the wider Malay world.

ii. Uncovering the intentions of British colonisation in Malaya

Secondly, *Utusan Melayu* offered a different perspective of British colonisation, exposing the intentions of the British administrators behind their 'benevolence'. Governor General Macdonald gave a New Year speech in 1948 on radio stating "even though tin and rubber are valuable materials, they are not worth the price of love and goodwill between the people of this state [Malaya]". *Utusan* (1948s, 2) retorted:

> "We express our full agreement to the truth of his pearly words, now for our words. The Federation of Malaya, which will be implemented on 1st February, will not place a proper sense of love and good will between the common people of this state. On the contrary, the British government only intends to preserve love between the capitalists and feudalists."

Utusan also had a year earlier scathingly asserted that the British did not improve the economic situation in Malaya and merely wanted to "make Malaya a heaven for capitalists and hell for the colonised" (Utusan Melayu 1947k, 4). The Malayan Union and subsequently, 1948 Federation of Malaya intended to unify the Malay states and keep Singapore separate due to multiple reasons. One of the main reasons was that British mercantile interests operating in Singapore did not want to integrate 'the free-trade Straits Settlements with the 'backward' Malay states' (Rudner 1970, 117). Singapore functioned as a 'free port' and naval base, so the British also planned to remain longer on the island than in the Peninsula due to its strategic and commercial value (L.K. Wong 1982, 187).

Acknowledging that the British colonial forces did not intend for the betterment of the people in Malaya, *Utusan* (1948w, 2) commented that "the rule of Malaya is actually the control of rubber and tin, for rubber and tin, by rubber and tin; instead of the people". The article pointed out clearly that the

[78] *Kucing bertanduk*

British colonial government, whether liberal, conservative, or labour, did not care too much about the colonies. The people who paid attention to Malaya, were the rich elites who have bought shares and wanted to ensure that the colonies continue to bring them profits. Similar to the critiques found in some of the Bicentennial exhibitions, *Utusan* exposed the intentions of British colonisation in Malaya, which was to extract and exploit the resources and its peoples to gain more profit for the Empire.

On top of economic exploitation, *Utusan* explicitly pointed to British colonisation as the cause of racial tensions in Malaya. In response to the Union and Federation of Malaya, there were growing calls for immediate self-government. Governor General of the Malay States and Singapore, Malcolm MacDonald warned Malaya that it was not ready for self-government and that the inter-ethnic conflicts in India and Palestine, could happen in Malaya, as the Malays and Chinese were already doubtful of each other and did not think well of each other. *Utusan* criticised MacDonald, "these thoughts should not come from an administrator who is responsible for the peace of this country" (Utusan Melayu 1947y, 4). *Utusan* also voiced the doubts of the people if they could trust the British and the promise that Singapore would be added to the Federation later, as they had broken promises in India and Palestine previously:

> "We are trying to show how the imperialist powers are twisting their words to pit the rights of one peoples against the other who are colonised, all while pretending to be authority above it all, standing outside of politics in the colonised country" (Utusan Melayu 1947y, 4).

This quote made it clear that *Utusan* was aware of the British's strategy of divide and rule and their act as mediator between the different races, to maintain stability and peace in Malaya. This conception that the coloniser could act as a 'neutral' actor was also reproduced in the decision to keep the Raffles statue, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In 1948, *Utusan* published a statement by PUTERA[79] (Utusan Melayu 1948j, 4) that explicitly pointed to British colonisation as the cause of racial tensions in Malaya, where they also traced the 'divide and rule' policy to other colonies, such as India:

> "Everyone knows the situation in Malaya before the war, that the seeds of racial discord, as mentioned by Mr MacDonald, was purposefully planted in Malaya before the war, by British colonisation. The evidence is there if we endeavour to investigate. The Japanese also magnified these divisions. […] The main cause of racial tensions in Malay today is the backwardness of the Malays in the economy, and in addition, how the British government positioned itself as the defender of Malay rights. The British policy of aggrandising itself as the defender of Malay rights has two effects: The first is to cloud the vision of the Malays to believe that the British in this country are the only supporters of the Malays. And secondly, to revive the misplaced jealousy amongst non-

[79] A large number of Malay leftist groups united under PUTERA and it acted as the opposition to UMNO.

Malay peoples, who do not see the falsehood in the British's statement as the defender of Malay rights."

It was significant for *Utusan* to publish PUTERA's full statement, to allow their readers to consider how the British colonial administration was hypocritical, extractive and divisive in nature. Unlike the narrative of modernity that celebrated British colonisation for bringing in modernity, *Utsuan Melayu* reflected how colonisation created oppressive structures of domination that they had to be freed from. Any attempt to credit the British for being benevolent, overlooks the fact that colonisation was at the expense of many in Malaya, India, and the larger British empire. The colonial project was never benevolent and always motivated by self-interest, economic and psychological exploitation (Césaire 2000). As in *Utusan Melayu,* the colonised did not rationalise colonisation as a moral evil with economic benefit, they understood that colonisation was not only the control and administration of the colonised but a system of power that subverted, appropriated and exploited peoples and resources to serve their colonial interests (Ekeh 1980).

iii. British colonisation was violent

Contrary to the narrative of British colonial rule being benign, *Utusan* asserted that the colonisers were controlling the narrative of who was considered a threat to freedom. In the first half of 1948, *Utusan Melayu* were regularly publishing accounts of labour strikes and confrontations with the police, often called upon by their employers. On 29 May 1948, *Utusan* stated that "some people want the government to take harsh action against the labour movement but we should know that there has already been harsh action by the government against the labourers striking" (Utusan Melayu 1948i, 2). *Utusan* stressed that harsh action would not solve the demands of the labour movement in this country and would lead to worse situation. The government did not lack powers or arms to prepare for any action against the labour organisation so *Utusan* (1948i, 2) warned that:

"Harsh action will make the current situation and tensions worse and the government should not be influenced by the capitalist class. They should not view the labourers as a problem but to look at their worries willingly, to settle their problems with sympathy and justice".

When the colonial government started using the 1948 Emergency to arrest anti-colonial actors and leaders, branded as communists, *Utusan* (1948h, 2) stated:

"We admit that we do not like the violence that has been rampant in this country but we are on the opinion that to get rid of violence in the country, it should not be mixed with actions to suppress the struggle of the people who are seeking justice and right to live fairly. […] We hope that the government does not encroach on the people's right to organise and move, to speak out, think and have meetings".

In light of tensions between the labour movement and the government, just before the announcement of the Malayan Emergency on 24 Jun 1948, the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU) was banned on the 2 June 1946 (Utusan Melayu 1948e, 1). Established in 1946, the Pan-Malayan General Labour Union changed its name to PMFTU in 1947. It boasted a membership of 263,593 and this represented more than half the total workforce in Malaya. 85% of all existing unions in Malaya were part of the PMFTU (Hector 2017). They organised on average two estate strikes a week in 1947. Soon after PMFTU was banned, the incident at Sungei Siput, twenty miles from Ipoh, brought Malaya and Singapore into a state of emergency. On 16 June 1948, three British plantation managers were killed at Sungei Siput, on two adjacent rubber estates by Chinese gunmen, said to be from a communist group. This pushed High Commissioner of the Federation, Sir Edward Gent, to declare a state of emergency in several areas in Perak and Johor on the same day. It was extended to the Federation of Malaya on 18 June 1948 and to the Colony of Singapore on 24 June 1948. The emergency called for the imposition of the death penalty on those found with unauthorized possession of arms, ammunition or explosives. It also gave police special powers to arrest, detain, exclusion from certain areas, assembly of persons, imposition of curfews, search of persons and premises, closure of roads, paths and waterways, requisition of buildings, vehicles and boats and the seizure of documents and articles that can be dangerous (Phee 2012). This event laid the foundations of the Internal Security Act (ISA) in Singapore that exists till today, in the name of security. The ISA are regulations that allow arrest and detention without trial (Seow 1994). The Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), Singapore Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) and the New Democratic Youth League (NDYL) were also subsequently banned under the newly enacted Societies and Ordinance and Trade Union Ordinance (Singh 2015).

Before the Emergency was instated, an article titled "The Malays are not content being colonised by anyone" (Utusan Melayu 1948k, 6) was published in response to Malcolm MacDonald's recent statement where he said that the Malays should not fear colonisation but communism. *Utusan* wrote that the Malays had been so kind to entertain what MacDonald said about Britain guiding Malaya towards self-government as well as how the British colonisation was not a danger to Malaya. To this statement, *Utusan* (1948k, 6) wrote convincingly:

> "We know the Coloniser, whatever form he takes, its form is to dominate, extort and oppress the colonised. There is nothing that is beneficial from it [colonisation], on the contrary, it is a loss for us and a disappointment as how we have experienced for the past 100 years; the resources of our country have been looted and extracted leaving us poor and weak. All while our safety and peace of our country is violated and will be violated again, which always leaves us in chaos. The desire to live with culture, language and customs, religion and all the rights and benefits of our homeland, freely, is growing and is the basis motivating Malaya's children to struggle now. Is it possible that they are thrusting their heads into the crocodile's jaws because they want to leave the tiger's mouth?"

The final question was posed in the form of a *peribahasa* (idiom) questioning the motives of the British bringing up communism as a threat: were they afraid of the growing anti-colonial fervour and so decided to demonise the communists? *Utusan* recognised that the British colonial government were worried by both communism and anti-colonialism because these movements were disrupting their colonial interests. *Utusan* finally hinted that communism existed because of imperialism and capitalism, which meant if the British wanted communism to be gone, imperialism and capitalism had to go: "it must also be said that the frameworks of imperialism and capitalism are what caused the creation of new ideologies, such as socialism, fascism and communism." *Utusan*'s observation echo Grosfoguel's (2009, 26) conception of fundamentalisms, where "Third World fundamentalisms[80]" were a response to Eurocentric modernity as a global/imperial design.

In response to the increasing focus on communism, *Utusan* (1948n, 2) published an editorial titled "The fate of the peoples cannot be forgotten". The 1948 Federation of Malaya saw sudden increased engagements by the British colonial government to listen to the needs of the people that were brought up in council meetings. *Utusan* reminded the people to remain doubtful until people's needs were met, for example, farmers were waiting for better infrastructures, land tax to be reduced and arms to fight off enemies; the labourers wanted their salary increased and affordable houses; those in civil service wanted stability. Without addressing the problems faced by the people, the colonial government was instead flagging danger from the "red ghost", the ghost of Communism, which was threatening the security of the country. *Utusan* criticised how the colonial government was only on the alert when there was a threat against "capital and the pleasures of life of one group that is already comfortable and brings profit to people who were living comfortably as well". *Utusan* (1948n, 2) added that other forms of insecurities that the people faced were ignored because the government wanted to defend capitalism:

> "All these [people's poverty] have been ignored but when the government must defend the interests of capitalist class, the government is able to act quickly, despite the poor being apparent in our country. [...] The people's plights cannot be forgotten even though the government is dealing with danger. If you say that the danger is communism, then the fact that the people's needs are ignored can feed into the communist support even though their organisations are banned and their leaders are arrested and exiled".

The fear of communist influence and dissidents in general led to the subsequent use of force by the British government.

From these reports, the experience of colonisation recounted by *Utusan Melayu*, and by extension, the *rakyat* it represented, was not one that was "beneficial". The British colonial government

[80] Third World fundamentalisms respond to Eurocentric modernity with a rhetoric of an essentialist pure exteriority to modernity – "anti-modern modern forces that reproduce the binary oppositions of Eurocentric thinking" (Grosfoguel 2009, 25).

was not seen as benevolent in their efforts and goals to develop Malaya and Singapore, instead they were seen as disruptive and ineffective. *Utusan* understood that the British was in Malaya to economically benefit from their colonies and maintain control over these territories. More importantly, *Utusan Melayu* worldview of Malaya was not limited to states or borders so the exploitation and demise of a population in Kedah, for example, was enough to mean that British colonisation was not beneficial to the region, even though the British did focus on economically developing the Straits Settlement and especially, Singapore. In a more literal sense, British colonisation in Malaya was not benign and was violent, especially when it came to the development of the political Left and communist-influenced groups. This violence has stunted peoples' political movements and freedoms until today (Han 2023).

(3) Was the civilising mission beneficial?

In the previous chapters, I argued that the narrative of modernity (3) i.e. the notion that the civilising project was beneficial, was one of the main narratives that the post-colonial Singapore state maintained and celebrated. This narrative refers to the legitimacy of the establishment and continuation of colonisation of Malaya to 'develop' the people and bring 'civilisation' to Malaya, by bettering its political, economic, and social institutions. As elaborated in previous chapters, the civilising mission of any colonial project was to morally and materially lift, improve and develop the supposedly backward or uncivilised peoples to help them into embracing modernity. The post-colonial Singapore state had internalised the civilising project as something beneficial. In this section, instead of critiquing the civilising mission per se, I highlight how *Utusan Melayu* defined what *merdeka* (freedom and liberation) meant, offering alternative narratives and visions of the future for Malaya (besides the attainment of 'civilisation' as defined by the civilising mission).

From the previous discussions, it was clear that essentially, *Utusan Melayu* wanted the people to live well and see their material conditions improved, politically, economically and socially. They supported a people-centred politics instead of supporting the interests of the elite class. Within the discourse surrounding the 1948 Federation of Malaya, *Utusan* (1947n, 2) stated that the Left did not accept the Federation as they considered it the "mixed child of the feudal class and the colonisers" and some did not accept the People's Constitution, as it was the "mixed child of the Malay proletariat and the merchant races (*bangsa dagang*), who pledged allegiance and loyalty to this country". *Utusan* noted that the political Right seemed to be solidifying the seat at the top, so the Left needed to solidify their support from the people. *Utusan* advised the Left that their political, social, and economic programmes needed to be firmed up so that the struggle can be unified and meet the material needs of the people. *Utusan* (1947n, 2) wrote that "the people were made conscious under the banner of *merdeka* but now it is up to the Left to put in the work and the proof of that slogan into our politics, economy and social life". So what did *merdeka* mean to *Utusan*? What visions did *Utusan* have for Malaya?

i. Merdeka as self-rule

The most apparent understanding of m*erdeka* was freedom from British colonial rule. The discussions on *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) and *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay ownership) existed because the Malays, whatever their political affiliation, felt increasingly displaced from their homeland (*tanahair*). At a basic level, *Utusan* (1948b, 2) understood *merdeka* as self-governance:

> "the goal of all political parties, whether right, left or center is working towards standing on our own, they are differing on the ways to achieve that pure goal, and whether self-government would be now or later. This goal must be realised by all parties, the kings, the leaders, intellectuals and common people – We have to be a people who are not content with being colonised by anyone".

In an editorial entitled "the Malays want change", *Utusan Melayu* (1947z, 2) stated that the Malays wanted change and they did not want to be owned by anyone or to be victims of colonisation. They wanted to live free, focusing on education and the preservation of the Malay language. It also meant not being under colonisation and being able to govern based on their own values. Inspired by the anti-colonial movements in Indonesia, *merdeka* also meant "to be free, attain freedom to prosper" (Utusan Melayu 1948v, 4). Another editorial titled "The Malays are not content being colonised by anyone" (1948k, 6), *Utusan* recognised that:

> "We know the Coloniser, whatever form he takes, its form is to dominate, extort and oppress the colonised. […] The desire to live with culture, language and customs, religion and all the rights and benefits of our homeland, freely, is growing and is the basis motivating Malaya's children to struggle now."

ii. Merdeka beyond class hierarchies

In addition, to self-governance, *merdeka* was not a vision that was limited to the elites. In fact, the cry for *Merdeka* was popularised by PKMM, who was inspired by elements of the Indonesia Independence struggle. PKMM's youth wing, API militarised the call with "*merdeka dengan darah"* (liberation with blood). As UMNO was merely dissatisfied with the withdrawal of privileges of the Malay elite, which they had enjoyed prior to war, their slogan was "*hidup Melayu*" (long live the Malays). One of the most prominent arguments against immediate independence was that the Malays were not ready to compete against the Chinese without British protection. UMNO sought to counter calls for independence and anti-colonialism with an older idea of sovereignty, towards a colonial protectorate. (Amoroso 1998).

Thus, when UMNO declared that "Malay lands are the rights of the Malays", *Utusan* questioned "so who are the Malays who will have this right? How many of the poor will remain poor, ignored, left behind and not brought to the negotiating table?" (Utusan Melayu 1948b, 2), questioning UMNO's concern to preserve nominal sovereignty of the Malay rulers, instead of uplifting and attaining

freedom for the masses. *Utusan* (1947r, 2) also stressed that stated that "politics is for everyone, not only the elite class". In the previous section, *Utusan* consistently advocated for the rights of labourers and peasants to ensure that their readers understood who *merdeka* was for.

While *Utusan*'s discourse on *merdeka* calls for a future that delinks from the civilising mission of hierarchies, beyond class lines within the Malay community, there was not much conceptualisation of a 'Malayan' nation that included the other races within Malaya. *Utusan* supported UMNO against the Malayan Union in the early 1946, as they still viewed the other racial communities as foreigners who had settled in Malaya, internalising the colonial racial categorisations. The racial categorisations and policies of British Malaya associated being part of the Malay race (and their associated groups such as those from the archipelago) to mean being indigenous. Despite the fact that the Malays are native to the region, this resulted in the limitation of access by other racial groups to indigenousness and the rights that were associated with that state of being (Manickam 2009, 600). There was not a developed sense of national consciousness between the different races in Malaya yet as the Malays did not see the other races as people who would fight and be loyal to Malaya. In the later months of 1947 to 1948, I do notice there was more willingness by *Utusan* to call for unity amongst the racial communities against the common goal of removing imperialism.

iii. Merdeka as consciousness

Another understanding of *merdeka* was the importance of being conscious, which meant educating themselves about their local situations as well as global developments. *Utusan* was consistent in publishing articles about the local and global situation in simple language so that their readers were able to stay informed and understand their role in the struggle for *merdeka*, and "think for themselves" (Utusan Melayu 1947q, 4). *Utusan* (1947r, 2). stated that:

> "One of the biggest improvements in the Malay community, is the development of thought and writing. We are not exaggerating when we claim that one of our successes is that we allow for the freedom of thought for all our readers. "Utusan Melayu" is a newspaper that the Malay community in Malaya and the Malay peninsula privileges."

In the same issue, in a separate article outlining what communism is and its global developments, *Utusan* (1947u, 3) stated its intentions:

> "Our responsibility as a daily newspaper is not only to report global news but it is our responsibility as part of the nation that is struggling for noble goals, to educate and give guidance to our people who are just beginning to mobilise properly in politics. Politics is for everyone, not only the elite class".

Utusan wrote about a range of issues: comparing Communism and Western Democracy (1947c, 4), highlighting what Communism meant, the proletariat and the history of the Russian Revolution

(1947u, 3), the history and development of racial relations in Malaya (1948j, 4), how colonisation affected *waqf* (endowment) properties (1948c, 2) and many more on the issues surrounding different groups of Malays (as stated above, the different labour groups, the state of education and women's rights and issues). *Utusan* (1947t, 2) was self-reflexive in saying that "imperialist policy is at fault for taking our rights but we must also admit our own faults". They said that the Malays were too trusting and do not care enough about political matters of their own states – a call to be alert and politically literate to better their own state of affairs.

On top of being conscious and understanding their role in *merdeka*, *Utusan* (1948l, 2) linked behaviours and attitudes to political freedom as well. *Utusan* (1948l, 2) conceptualised *merdeka* as a political struggle that would affect the attitudes, habits and actions of a nation, as they understood how the system of governance in a country affected the people it governed:

> "The struggle for freedom anywhere shows us that political struggle is not easy, it is difficult. History also shows us that the attitudes, habits and actions of a nation is influenced by the system of governance and government in a country. This means that if there are bad attitudes, actions, behaviours or actions that is bad in the Malay person, it is also in the fault of the structure and way of governing the country based on colonisation (*Tetapi yang salah ialah aturan dan cara permerintahan negeri ini yang berdasar kolonial*). To succeed in changing the people, we also need to change the government and shape it based on the values we want".

"[F]rom enslaved souls *(berjiwa hamba*) to attitudes, habits and actions of people who are liberated", *Utusan* (1948l, 2) understood *merdeka* as also a link between physical freedom and phsychological and behavioural freedom. At the end of every argument, *Utusan* sarcastically wrote "*Hidup Melayu*" (long live the Malays), using UMNO's slogan. Although *Utusan* did not state their intentions, I understood this repetition as discrediting UMNO's form of Malay nationalism, that was not anti-imperialist nor people centred. It is significant to note that *Utusan* understood colonisation as a political system of power that affected the attitudes and behaviours of the colonised (Fanon 1967). M*erdeka* linked political freedom to people's behaviour, being able to think for themselves and decide their own futures. This goes against the narrative of the civilising mission, that the colonised were peoples that needed saving or civilisation as the colonised were thinking peoples who can and want to decide their own futures and values to govern society.

iv. Merdeka as solidarity and struggle for justice

Lastly, *merdeka* was understood by *Utusan* as solidarity with other labourers, anti-colonial struggles, and other races, as well as a struggle for justice. In the previous sections, we have seen *Utusan* calling for solidarity with labourers within Malaya and other countries. Despite not conceding on the Malay rights to ownership (*hak ketuanan Melayu*), *Utusan* (1947a, 3) recognised that solidarity meant

working together with the naturalised settlers of different races that were also working toward freedom and the Malayan peoples had to work together to remove colonisation:

> "The opposition against the Malayan Union was something that was against the understanding of Malay nationalism. The Federation is where Imperialism and Feudalism work together to destroy the peoples' nationalist fervour in Malaya to oppose the peoples' mobilization that is based on democracy. […] If the Malays want to attain their rights, they have to hold hands with other races in the country. Strength only comes with unity. PKMM needs to involve itself in the congress and cooperate with other races."

Utusan made this statement before PKMM was involved with PUTERA-AMCJA later in the year, the coalition made up of various political parties, non-governmental organisation and individuals from various ethnic groups. With the widespread opposition towards the Malayan Union in 1946 (Bradell 1944, 41), the British worked towards ensuring that the 1948 Federation Agreements worked towards meeting their interests and the interests of the Malay Sultans and UMNO. The Federation of Malaya in 1948 ensured a federation of the peninsular states and settlements, safeguarded the special position of the Malays and the sovereignty of the Malay rulers and more restrictive citizenship requirements. *Utusan* (1947a, 3) described this development as "Imperialism and Feudalism" working together against peoples' mobilisation that called for *merdeka* in terms of self-governance and democracy, being able to choose their own political representatives.

In encouraging democratic relations with other races, *Utusan* (1947t, 2) added that:

> "we have to advance on both sides of the struggles – pushing imperialism out but also to ensure that the relationship between all peoples of Malaya is good. Majority of Malayan residents are from countries that are in similar situation as ours and they are fighting colonisation too. If we get along and help each other, there is big hope that working together allows us to eliminate imperialism and return Malaya to our true right."

On top of solidarity, *Utusan Melayu* understood the struggle for *merdeka* to be the changing of the systems and institutions from imperialism, colonisation and feudalism to a system based on democracy to benefit the people. *Utusan* commented on the slogan "the king is the people and the people are the king", which meant that the existence of the Sultans was only valid due to the existence of the people for without whom, there would be no King. *Utusan* (1947l, 2) continued "but with the Federation agreements, will the poor sit together with the Sultans at the state meeting or will they be required to only come out on the Sultans' birthdays to praise him?".

Furthermore, *Utusan* explicitly wanted justice in terms of changing colonial structures and institutions. In 7 April 1948, *Utusan* argued that the economic structure should be changed to benefit

the Malays. *Utusan* (1948a, 2) stated that the Malayan economy is based on the economic interests of Great Britain so the job opportunities are limited:

> "As long as the profits from tin and rubber are not used to elevate the value of life for the people, and only used to be benefit the fields and estates of its owners, we will still be in a colonial system. […] We need to change the economic structure where the riches of Malayan land can be used to benefit the people and this can only be changed when the system of government changes to prioritise the people".

Utusan (1947l, 2) also addressed the systems of education and how it affects the racial hierarchies and labour division:

> "What about the students who have gone to London, Egypt and universities in India and still given positions that are slightly lower than the rank of big clerks. So the people of Malaya, no matter how knowledgeable they are, are not trusted to hold the leadership positions in the state?"

They commented on the restricted access to lands in villages, laws on farms, regulations to broadcast and limitations towards advancing religious studies, which were all evidence of bad governance by the colonial government. In a letter to the editor published in *Utusan*, regarding the Kebun Ubi farmers whose land was bought over and told to leave, the author (1948u, 5) wrote "who in his right mind and soul, especially based on values of democracy, can just immediately be uprooted from his land with a smile and *redha* (contentment)?" *Utusan* published the full letter, which ended with a reminder that "the struggle must be in the cause of justice and humanisation (*kemanusian*)".

Overall, *Utusan Melayu* offered different visions and goals for Malaya based on *merdeka,* which meant self-determination, consciousness and based on solidarity and justice. Instead of pursuing a vision of modernity bestowed by British colonisation in the form of the civilising mission, *Utusan* offered glimpses of what a *merdeka* future would value. While delinking from the civilising mission and offering alternative visions of the future, *Utusan* still internalised colonial categorisations of race and a nationalism that called for an exclusive Malay ownership of Malaya, excluding non-Malays in Malaya.

(4) Are the Singapore national borders natural?

In the Chapter 4, I examined narrative of modernity (4) that naturalised Singapore's borders as an independent nation-state separate from the rest of the region. The last narrative of modernity (5) was an extension of this narrative, as the concretisation of nation-state borders led to the overlooking of Singapore's links and broader history within the wider peninsula. Just like the narrative of modernity that centred the British, this narrative of modernity was so foundational in Singapore's post-colonial history writing that one of the main goals of the 2019 Bicentennial was to look at Singapore's history

through a *longue durée* lens. The implications of this were acknowledging that Singapore was not a 'point zero' and was part of the vast networks of maritime ports, riverine systems and islands within the Malay Peninsula. In this section, I elucidate *Utusan*'s understanding of borders, specifically how Singapore was viewed within the region.

Contrary to the state borders present between Singapore and Malaysia today, *Utusan Melayu* referred to *tanah Melayu* (Malay lands) without the caveat of including Singapore, or specifying any Malay state. It was a given that *tanah Melayu* included Singapore (Utusan Melayu 1946a, 4). The pan-Malayan Hartal on 20th October 1947 was a telling example of how connected Singapore was with mainland Malaya and the Malay world in general. *Utusan Melayu* was actively reporting on the organisation of the strikes, as well as the impact that it had all over Malaya, despite being based in Singapore. Across the Malay world from Perak to Singapore, nearly all services were shut down in opposition to the British's Federation Agreements. The PMFTU worked together with PUTERA-AMCJA as well as many other groups to organise a mass strike across Malaya. Those who opposed the Federation Constitution, which was agreed between the British administration and Malay elites, and/or supported the People's Constitution, drafted by PUTERA-AMCJA were invited to strike. *Utusan* (1947m, 2) elucidated that the meaning of the hartal was to struggle as a people against colonisation, for democracy, social justice and humanism.

The Straits Times reported on 21st October that most rubber estates and tin mines in Selangor were not in operation. In Batu Arang, 2000 labourers did not turn up for work. Ports in Swettenham and Singapore were at a standstill due to lack of manpower. On 22nd November 1947, the Straits Times claimed that the hartal was a "predominantly Chinese affair". Historian Yeo Kim Wah (1973, 45), who only referenced English newspapers such as Straits Times and Indian Daily Mail also said that "Malay support was negligible, even though the AMCJA-PUTERA claimed that seventy percent of East Coast Malays observed the hartal". *Utusan Melayu* challenged these statements testifying that the Malays also participated in the hartal, almost all business in Singapore were closed, public transport was stopped, and the ports were brought to a standstill for the day. It seemed like only the European brand names were open, such as Robinsons, John Little and more. *Utusan* reported that in Batu Pahat, Malay businesses and Indian food shops were still running, while in Kuala Lumpur, shops owned by all the different races were closed. In Penang, *Utusan*'s reporter said that most shops closed in support for the strikes except for a few small Indian Muslim and Malay shops. *Utusan*'s report concluded that the reporters did not ascertain if those who were participating in the strikes were supporting the Chinese Chambers of Commerce (CCC), which opposed the Federation Constitution or PUTERA-AMCJA, which drafted the People's Constitution.

In light of the 1947 pan-Malayan Hartal, *Utusan* (1947i, 1) published the address made by Governor General MacDonald:

> "Many people are upset because the Federation will include nine Malay states, including two colonies, Penang and Melaka, which will be united under one government, whereas Singapore is separated. They say that geographically, economically and politically mainland Malaya (Semenanjung) and Singapore are one. But in our lives, what happens can be very different from what we hope for. In these situations, a smart person would be satisfied with what they have and work towards getting more than they achieved."

Despite the paternalistic comment towards the end, MacDonald's statement highlighted how people viewed Singapore's position as integral to the Malay peninsula. He added that he opposed the Hartal and admonished the leftist factions for not wanting to accept democracy gradually as planned by the British colonial administration. He (1947i, 1) added that:

> "No matter how big or small the public response to the Hartal is, do not be mistaken into thinking that these people represent a large and united movement on the constitutional issue. If the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Malayan Communist Party, AMCJA and the coalition of trade unions participating in this Hartal were to consult and work together to draw up their own proposals regarding the constitutional issue, they would inevitably be divided and not get unanimous agreement".

Utusan (1947x, 2) responded that "MacDonald forgot that there was a difference in the purpose for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and PUTERA-AMCJA organising the Hartal. MacDonald also forgot that the People's Constitution drawn up by PUTERA-AMCJA, was made up of discussions and goals of the Malayan Communist Party and AMCJA and people in Malaya who want democracy, social justice and humanisation (*peri kemanusiaan*)".

Utusan understood that apart from the goal of Singapore being part of the Federation, the People's Constitution did not represent the views of the CCC. Yeo (1973, 46) described the People's Constitution as a "document which embodied a delicate balance of interests between the non-Malay left-wing parties and the MCP on the one hand, and the Malay left-wing parties on the other". Despite the differences in political goals and compromises made, what was clear was that the organisation of the pan-Malayan Hartal highlighted a way of thinking and praxis that did not delineate Singapore as separate from mainland Malaya. Just as the MHC exhibition argued in "*Seekor Singa…",* Singapore and Malaysia "did not always exist as discrete and separate political territories".

Aside from collective action, *Utusan* often published about meetings of organisations that would be held in Singapore, along with other states across Malaya. Leftist Malay organisations such as PKMM and API, and leftist organisations in the AMCJA, like Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) were often based or had regular meetings in Singapore, even though they represented different racial and social communities in Malaya. PKMM specifically stated that they wanted to have their third annual

congress in Singapore as they had the intention of strengthening memory, will and goals. Having the congress in Kampung Gelam in Singapore, PKMM intended to show that Singapore should not be separate from the mainland and other Malay Lands. *Utusan* (1948r, 1) published the statement made by PKMM that the British does not have the right to separate the homeland. PKMM also moved their headquarters in 1947 from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore to "strengthen the struggle" (Utusan Melayu 1948q, 2). This can be contrasted with UMNO's decision to move *Utusan Melayu* headquarters from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in 1958, to be "in the middle of the Malay community in Kuala Lumpur", solidifying the idea of Singapore's separation from mainland Malaya (*Semenanjung)*. The first congress that PKMM held was in Ipoh, and then subsequently, in Melaka, to remind people about the great past of Malay empires. In 1947, it was purposefully held in Singapore, to show that Singapore and Semenanjung were inseparable. *Utusan* (1947g, 3) opposed the Federation Constitution that united Melaka and Penang into the Federation of Malaya and retained Singapore as a crown colony:

> "The party's congress in Singapore this year reminds the Malays that in the island now, lays the bastion of British colonisation in Southeast Asia, and this means that the nation's struggle for independence will mean nothing if Singapore is still trapped in the metal claws of the coloniser".

Utusan also reported that the PUTERA-AMCJA, which had drafted the People's Constitution, unfurled their flag for Malaya (Yeo 1973, 48), which included Singapore in their conception of Malaya. *Utusan* (1947h, 4) reported:

> "The symbol of the people's struggle has been agreed on, it is a flag with red and white, and 12 yellow stars in 3 rows of 4 in the upper left corner. The star has 5 points. Red means brave and white means true. 12 Stars indicate the 12 stars. The 5 points means happiness, nationalism, people's sovereignty, brotherhood and justice. The colour yellow means prosperity, knowledge and well-being."

Finally, the mere fact that one of the most influential Malay newspapers was based in Singapore and was influential in organising from Singapore – whether in the formation of UMNO or helping the Left organise the Hartal – allow us to appreciate how interconnected Singapore was with the wider Malay peninsula. Despite it being based in Singapore, the political focus of the newspaper as well as its audience was spread all over Malaya. The way *Utusan* and the Malay Left thought about Singapore, not only offered an alternative insight to conceptions of space but broadened the conversation of Singapore as belonging to the wider Malay World. I regard this as a form of epistemic disobedience in rejecting the clear national borders that Singapore holds today.

(5) Is Singapore part of the Malay peninsula?

The last narrative of modernity that was excavated in the previous chapter is how post-colonial state narratives often overlook Singapore's broader history as part of a vast maritime network of ports,

riverine systems and islands, that constituted the Johor-Riau Sultanate. In the previous chapter, I discussed that the 'point-zero' narrative posits everyone in Singapore as immigrants, that have been naturalised citizens and overlooks the indigeneity of the Singapore Malays. While there was some effort to recognise the *Orang Laut* population on the island during the Bicentennial, the explicit issue of indigeneity and discussions (or negotiations) that the Malay and non-Malay anti-colonial movements were having were not acknowledged.

On the other hand, in this section, I highlight how *Utusan Melayu* offers an alternative history that acknowledged Malay indigeneity. The phrases *bumiputera* (sons of the soil/native) and *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay ownership), though now laden with heavy meanings of Malay supremacy and chauvinism due to its current political manifestations, were used in *Utusan Melayu* to speak of indigeneity and ownership of Malay lands, or in extension of meaning, the right to be sovereign (*hak ketuanan tanah Melayu*). In the discussion on "*Merdeka*" earlier, *Utusan Melayu* spoke about these terms within the context of self-determination from British colonisers, their willingness to work together with the naturalised settlers to remove colonisation and the will to change systems and institutions of imperialism, colonisation and feudalism. It is important to consider these used within its historical contexts and the Malays' position of weakness at that time.

With decisions such as the Malayan Union and Federation of Malaya made on behalf of the Malays, the Malays "feel that their right to be sovereign was taken away by the British. Because of that, they feel like all their rights as natives (*bumiputera*) have been erased" (Utusan Melayu 1947d, 2). Admittedly, the discourses on Malay indigeneity and its political implications, were in reaction to the implications of the Malayan Union, where the British made Malayan citizenship open to everyone in Malaya. This exacerbated the fears of Chinese political and economic control. The subsequent discussions and negotiations between the Malays and the other communities in Malaya were not even considered in the post-colonial state narrative, to avoid any racial tensions. It was easier to forget and create a new national identity that was 'Singaporean' (Rahim 2009).

The Malayan Union brought about a lot of discourse about the rights of the Malays to rule and make decisions about their own future. In an editorial dated 6 February 1946 about the Malayan Union, *Utusan Melayu* stated that the decisions made by the British about Malaya and Singapore were directly linked to their dignity and rights. The newspaper (1946b, 2) said:

> "The act of duty by the British [referring to the Malayan Union], is not only out of place but also against international law. Sending Sir Harold MacMichael[81] himself, there is no escape for the British government from being accused of usurping the rights of the Malays. Therefore, whatever

[81] Sir Harold MacMicahel was the former High Commissioner for Palestine (1938-1944). In 1946, he became the King's representative to sign official treaties with the Malay rulers over the Malayan Union proposal scheme.

steps the Malays take to defend their rights to be a free nation, like the British, is valid. If anyone tries to stop or interfere then it cannot be avoided that these people will be accused of obscene behaviour (*perbuatan cabul*). This all means that they are trying to usurp the rights of a people who have the rights to defend their dignity and human rights."

Aside from a Pan-Malay understanding of *bumiputera* and the inclusion of Singapore within Malaya, *Utusan* reported cases of displacement of the indigenous Malay (small 'i') in Singapore. The Bicentennial brought attention to the histories of the *Orang Laut* in Singapore, however, aside from histories of Indigenous peoples, the Singapore state still perpetuates the narrative that Singapore was a nation of immigrants. *Utusan* (1948p, 1) challenged this narrative with a report in March 1948 where the villagers at Kebun Ubi in Singapore were forcefully displaced from their villages and lands. This was also reported in English newspaper such as The Straits Times (1948, 7), The Straits Budget (1948, 14) and Malayan Tribune (Malaya Tribune 1948, 2). The villagers received a notice that some businessmen wanted to use a portion of their dwellings to host a trade fair. They decided on Geylang due to the infrastructure in the area. PKMM, the Peasants' Front and the Malay Farmer's Welfare Organisation banded together to help these farmers stay at Kebun Ubi. The organizer of the Malayan Fair of Trade and Industry Mr Cheah Kim Bee, responded to the protests that he had compensated the families with alternative accommodation nearby and $100. *Utusan* (1948p, 1) asked what was the reason to displace the farmers who worked land and whose livelihood depended on the fruits of the soil? I mentioned earlier that *Utusan* (1948u, 5) also published an anonymous letter where the author asked:

"who in his right mind and soul, especially based on values of democracy, can just immediately be uprooted from his land with a smile and *redha* (contentment)?"

This was one of the instances where *Utusan* highlighted displacement of Malays in Singapore. The praxis of Malay organisations, such as PKMM and Peasants Front, also highlighted how integral Singapore was to the Malay World. These associations had active members in all the Malay states, including Singapore, which allowed them to be effective in organising and representing people all over Malaya. At the same time, *Utusan* highlighted the culture of displacement and deforestation to make way for more economically activities and industries, such as the gambier and pepper plantations, brought about a culture of buying or occupying land that was deemed "unproductive". This displacement of villagers continued all throughout the nation-building period in Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew, and similar development projects are still happening today (Shukarman 2016).

Overall, *Utusan* considered Singapore as part of the larger peninsula, and recognised issues of Malay indigeneity. The Malayan Union and the Federation of Malaya go against the right to sovereignty that the Malays should have over their own land, and within these discussions of *bumiputera*, Singapore

Malays were not excluded from the discussions. In addition, *Utusan* reported on Malays who were living and working the land in Singapore before 1965, which challenged the narrative that everyone in Singapore came as immigrants. These narratives found in *Utusan* critiques the narrative of modernity that asserts Singapore's point zero history and its separation from the Malay world, overlooking indigeneity of Singapore Malays to Singapore and the wider region.

Concluding Reflections

Utusan (1947t, 2) elucidated that there were two goals for Malay politics:

"First, Malaya has to be restored under Malay ownership (*ketuanan Melayu*), which is the struggle to eliminate Imperialism. Second, we must solve the problem of the deteriorating relations between the *bumiputera* (natives) and the settlers in Malaya, which is the struggle for Democracy. These two problems are linked. Here, we must examine the cause of usurpation of our rights and the reasons behind it. There is no one else who has oppressed us other than the imperialists, but we must admit our faults as well, for trusting them and for not paying attention to politics, as a people".

In the same article, *Utusan* concluded the Malays had to work together with other communities in Malaya who are against colonialism, which was the root of their problems.

This statement is representative of how border thinking within *Utusan* challenges the celebratory narratives of modernity that can be found in the colonial textbooks and that remain ineffectively challenged in the Bicentennial commemorations. This chapter highlighted how speaking from the colonial difference allowed *Utusan Melayu* to tell a different and fuller story of modernity/coloniality, specifically how coloniality had affected the Malays in Malaya and how the Malays were responding to their problems. On top of critiques to the narratives of modernity, *Utusan* also offered elements of epistemic disobedience: in their alternative visions for the homeland, they offered different understandings of *merdeka* as opposed to embracing the civilising mission. It also offered alternative conceptions of space or more accurately, borders and broadened the conversation of Singapore as belonging to the wider Malay World. Even the simple decisions to use the Jawi script and refer to the Islamic calendar dates alongside the Gregorian dates in the newspaper issues, were indicative of an alternative site of knowledge production.

Despite recognising the racialised hierarchies of labour that placed them at a lower social status in Malaya, in their conception of indigeneity and sovereignty, *Utusan* still internalised the racial categories created by colonisation. The political strategies behind the claims for Malaya being Malay land and exclusive Malay ownership of Malaya was not fully fledged – while it called from the removal of colonisation, the early claims to indigeneity did not include the other ethnic populations residing in Malaya. I argue that this could largely be limited to the issues from late 1945 to 1948. In the 1950s,

there could have been narratives that elaborated on *merdeka* and how the Malays imagined a liberated society would be, after more interactions, collaborations and negotiations from non-Malay anti-colonial movements in Malaya. This could potentially be future research. In the next chapter, I also argue that this "exclusionary" claims for indigeneity need to be read within the context of political weakness and the broader definitions of *Merdeka*.

Utilising the autonomous tradition to read *Utusan Melayu* also questions if there were other hegemonies within these narratives. As the articles were written without their authors and journalists explicitly named, were there women voices within the newspaper? To what extent was traditionalism and ethnocentrism present in their narratives. Despite this within the context of comparison with the Eurocentric metanarratives explored earlier, *Utusan Melayu* still offers knowledge production from the site of colonial difference that offers a fuller picture of modernity/coloniality and alternative visions of a *merdeka* future.

Chapter 6
Coloniality of knowledge is central to the colonial matrix of power

"Singapore somehow seems more Western than the West" – Baraka Blue[82]

The previous chapters, chapters 3 and 4, highlighted the partial stories of modernity found within colonial history textbooks written by the colonial government and how these narratives of modernity were reproduced or critiqued by the post-colonial Singapore state within the 2019 Bicentennial Commemorations. Using the decolonial framework outlined in chapter 2, I then explored *Utusan Melayu,* a site of knowledge production from the position of colonial difference. Thematic analysis of *Utusan* critiqued the partial stories of modernity told in the colonial and post-colonial Singapore state's construction of history. It also offered insights into alternative ontologies and epistemologies of the Singapore Malay during the post WWII period.

One of my conclusions in Chapter 4 was that when the narratives of modernity – that British colonisation was benign and that the civilising mission was beneficial for Singapore – are still celebrated in Singapore today, this not only distances Singapore from the experiences of colonialism of majority of the global population but also ignores coloniality within its own shores. The performance of criticality as seen within the Bicentennial commemorations, which meant being 'nuanced' and weighing the good and bad of colonisation, not only relegated the 'colonial' to the past but also ignored how processes of modernity are constitutive of coloniality. In short, when modernity is not effectively examined or critiqued, it enables coloniality to be maintained and reproduced (Gani, 2017).

So far, the thesis has addressed the first research question, highlighting the implications of coloniality on knowledge and discourse – but does this matter beyond the epistemic realm, does it matter for the 'real world'? Here, the second research question also arises, what can be done to overcome both the epistemic and material injustices of coloniality? In this final chapter, I draw on the analysis from the previous chapters to offer reflections on these questions.

This chapter will thus be structured into two levels of analysis: at the level of global designs and local histories. Looking at global designs, I focus on the theoretical contributions that Singapore as a case study can add to the discussions of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality: how does coloniality of knowledge in Singapore manifest materially? In the first part of this chapter, I illustrate how the 'benefit' promised with development and modernity seem to always be at the expense of others as well as their ways of being and seeing the world. The narratives of modernity, not only ignore the realities of modernity/coloniality, but also justify preservation of these unequal hierarchies that 'benefit' a handful at the expense of other communities, epistemologies and the environment. As elaborated in

[82] Baraka Blue, a poet from Seattle and based in Oakland, California, came to Singapore in 2018 for a poetry recital of his new collection "Empty and the Ocean", which I attended. He commented that Singapore somehow seemed more "Western than the West".

Chapter 2, coloniality of knowledge is not only an epistemic concern, it is "central to the operation of the coloniality of power" (Conway 2013, 23). As Ndlovu (2018, 98) argues, the colonial domination in knowledge production seeks to control the minds and ways of knowing of the "colonial subalterns" in order to sustain the very structures of coloniality, represented as the 'coloniality of power'. Especially in the case study of Singapore, that has been used as an exhibit for the 'positive legacies' of colonisation (Holden 2019, 633), I illustrate how global colonialities (global designs) are manifested materially in Singapore in the pursuit of modernity in Part 1.

Secondly, looking at local histories, I highlight the contributions with regards to the contents that I have excavated in the previous chapters. Addressing the second research question on what can be done to overcome both the epistemic and material injustices of coloniality, I suggest that border thinking offers the first step towards overcoming epistemic injustice. Border thinking firstly tells fuller stories of modernity/coloniality and secondly, offers alternatives epistemologies beyond modernity/coloniality towards just futures, which could potentially overcome material injustice if these alternatives are allowed to flourish. Here, I summarise the ways in which *Utusan Melayu* as a source of border thinking.

Part 1: Global designs reflected materially in Singapore

I recently went to Boat Quay in Singapore to see the Raffles statue on a hot afternoon. There were a couple of tourists around, but I was the only visibly brown and Muslim woman there. As I got nearer to the statue to read the plaque, I could feel someone hovering behind me and unsurprisingly, it was a security guard watching me (instead of the other tourists) closely. As I walked away from the statue, I noticed that the guard proceeded to return to his shady spot under a tree. This short experience led me to two questions that are very much linked to my analyses of the narratives explored: the first, what did Raffles (and by extension, the memory of British colonisation in Singapore) symbolise such that it warranted that kind of protection from the guard, and what current hierarchies does this uphold? And second, what does this say about those who occupy the margins, how we are perceived, and how spaces for potential critique are limited?

From my analysis of these sites of state knowledge production, the surface comparison of the historical narratives from the colonial textbooks and the Bicentennial exhibitions shows that the scholarship on Singapore's history has progressed – looking beyond 1819, meant two things: decentering the British and acknowledging the seaport of Temasek that existed 700 years before in 1299. Decentering Raffles, or the British in general, was a form of diversification as other figures, aside from Raffles, were put at the centre or given more consideration. Examples of outstanding individuals, such as Sang Nila Utama, William Farquhar and Lim Boon Keng, and communities such as the Indigenous peoples (*Orang Laut*) and immigrant labourers, were considered as important historical actors, displacing the focus on 'Great Men' (S.F. Alatas 2021). In chapter 4, I noticed that aside from acknowledging the contributions of those other than the British to Singapore's modernity, a deeper form

of diversification would be to acknowledge different *forms* of knowledge production, not just different knowledge producers. It is praiseworthy that the Malay manuscripts such as *Sejarah Melayu* and multiple *hikayats*, as well as tools by the Orang Laut, were considered as legitimate sources of knowledge production in current history-writing as opposed to colonial history-writing.

The history-writing from the colonial textbooks to the 2019 Bicentennial exhibitions progressed in its critical treatment of the narratives of modernity to an extent, as all the exhibitions highlighted the negative impacts of British colonisation. However, the overall purpose and narrative forefronted in the Bicentennial, especially in the exhibitions organised by the SBO, were how Singaporeans appropriated and excelled in modernity instead. This is where the discussion on dewesternisation in knowledge production comes in.

As elaborated in the theoretical chapter in Chapter 2, I took on the conceptions of dewesternisation that have been elaborated by decolonial scholars. Dewesternising is the political delinking from economic decisions from the West but still retaining the practices of capitalism and the idea of development. This is manifested in the establishment of alternative global political-economic formations such as BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the Asian Infrastructural and Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI) (Kho 2017). Dewesternisation denotes looking away from the West and making independent decisions regarding the politics of development and economic control of the state (Walter Mignolo 2012). Grosfoguel added that dewesternisation is a kind of response to Eurocentric modernity, with post-colonial states seeking non-Eurocentric modernities – countering obvious Western modernisation paradigms but internalising and maintaining selective aspects of modernity/coloniality. Dewesternisation thus encompasses either an 'absolute exteriority' to modernity (native fundamentalism (Grosfoguel 2009)) or adopting selected characteristics of modernity to empower the local postcolonial ruling elite (D.P.S. Goh 2012). The overall narrative forefronted in the Bicentennial was how Singaporeans appropriated and excelled in modernity instead.

The diversifying and dewesternising critiques elaborated in the chapter covering the narratives within the Bicentennial (chapter 4) may seem like decolonising knowledge as it was critical of hegemonic historical narratives. I argue that diversifying and dewesternising critiques still retained some narratives of modernity, to empower the local postcolonial elite and their vision of the future for the nation. In addition, the Bicentennial still avoided providing discursive space of the painful anti-colonial struggles of the Chinese-speaking, working class as well as the Malay leftists, thereby marginalising their contents of discontent (Huang 2021, 122). While the acknowledgement of the both the positive and negative sides of British colonisation in Singapore may seem like balanced consideration, this approach also does not acknowledge modernity/coloniality. The supposed pros and cons of colonisation are not mutually exclusive to each other but are actually two sides of the same coin. Remembering colonisation in isolation and categorising its pros and cons allows us to believe that we

can benefit and keep the positive legacies while leaving the bad behind as we carve our own path, separate from the West (dewesternisation).

Historian Sai Siew Min (2021, 196) accurately articulated:

> "Singapore had, in fact, "over-acceded" to the trappings of civilisation, rendering continued colonial rule unnecessary. We are not a shining example of the good colonisation did; we are a shining example of how our former coloniser had become redundant. In short, Singapore no longer needed Steve Jobs. We simply took over Apple and did way better than him".

In this statement, Sai argued that Singapore had become more capable of modernising as compared to the West. She continued that Singapore did not replace colonialism with something else, as that would have been anti-colonialist. Singapore continued to embrace the Euro-American dominated capitalist system after 1965 and went on exceeding the 'standards of civilisation', granting Singapore the economic prosperity that it is so proud of today. The metaphor of the statues exhibition during the Bicentennial was apt in highlighting how despite the efforts to diversify and dewesternise history-writing, what Raffles and British colonisation symbolised remains – and I add, is actively protected. Rao (2016) rightly states that "statues are never merely symbolic". In the case of Singapore, the Raffles statue signifies not only the deep-rooted belief that Singapore's development into a free port and modern city was due to the experience of British colonisation, but also its continued commitment to the pursuit to a modernity that hides its darker side, coloniality. Despite a more critical effort during the 2019 Bicentennial to look beyond Raffles, this effort only led to stating how British colonisation was bad but their bringing of modernity and civilisation was 'good' for Singapore – separating coloniality from modernity. Glorifying partial stories of modernity, without acknowledging modernity/coloniality, maintains or reproduces colonialities in different forms such as: commodification of labour, exploitation of natural resources, and the preservation of racialised civilisational narratives. We see global colonialities reflected in Singapore's context in such ways, which I will elaborate on below.

Commodification of labour power from the Global South

One of the main features of global coloniality is the pursuit of a neo-liberal capitalist economy which prioritises economic development. Approaching capitalism as a feature of global coloniality implies that there are interconnections and continuities between the racial inequalities in the contemporary labour market, racial distinctions woven into the evolution of market economy and the legacies of colonialism (Ashiagbor 2021, 506). In Robinson's formulation of 'racial capitalism' (2000, 26), he explained how race permeates social structures emergent from capitalism. Capitalism did not overthrow the fixed social hierarchies of feudalism but extended and incorporated these unequal social and/or colonial relations (Susan et al. 2022, 1). In addition to racial capitalism, global capitalist development was fundamentally dependent on colonial exploitations and appropriation (Bhambra 2021, 313). The implications of this were the commodification of labour power from the Global South for the

benefit of markets in the global North. The constitutive role of race and colonial extraction in the development of capitalism is thus reflected in contemporary labour markets of the global North. In relation to migrant labour, this is manifested in racialised segmentation of the labour market and commodification of labour (Quijano 2000).

These features of coloniality – racialised labour extraction and commodification—are also reflected in Singapore. During the colonial period, as the Bicentennial exhibitions highlighted, colonial capitalism had uprooted native economic systems and labourers from China and South Asia were highly sought during British rule to work in Malaya. As mentioned in chapter 3, labour divisions within Malaya were structured by racial and socio-economic hierarchies, which the education system sought to maintain. There were also many articles in *Utusan Melayu* that highlighted the plight of the different Malay communities, reflecting the rigid racial division of labour in service of colonial extraction, with Chinese labourers working in tin mines and Indians working on plantations (Hirschman 1986, 345). The Malays were marginalised from colonial extractive industries, where they stayed on in more traditional fields such as agriculture and fishing (S.H. Alatas 1977).

Despite acknowledging the negative impacts of British colonisation on immigrant living and working conditions in the past, Singapore's embrace of modernity/coloniality, saw a form of global coloniality being replicated within its shores. The practice of human labour acquisition from the Global South remains in contemporary Singapore. Without acknowledging modernity/coloniality, racialised and geographically differentiated division of labour, as well as the commodification of labour are maintained for the sake of post-colonial economic development. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2019), Singapore had scored 84.8 out of 100, overtaking the United States as one of the world's most competitive economies. Singapore outperformed other countries in terms of infrastructure quality and its open economy. Singapore thus, heavily relies on migrant labour, not only to attain infrastructural excellence, but also to support the growing economy. The migrant labour in sectors such as domestic helpers and construction, make up more than half of the foreign workforce in Singapore (Ministry of Manpower 2023), and these workers usually come from Indonesia, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. Baey and Yeoh (2015, 12) argued that "a distinct sort of labouring body is produced and demanded", referring to the essential role low-wage migrant workers play in the building of modern Singapore. Migrant work in Singapore has been described as precarious and "low-cost, hyper-productive, docile and disposable" (Baey 2015, 12). Baey and Yeoh's research revealed that migrant construction workers 'choose' to endure unsafe or exploitative working conditions rather than risk the possibility of repatriation. Poor working conditions include forms of illegal salary reductions, contract substitutions, poor and exploitative working and living conditions. Notably, in general, Singaporeans are not taking on these jobs, which reflects the clear labour divisions structured by racial and socio-economic hierarchies.

This feature of coloniality was exacerbated and made apparent when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Singapore. There was a marked escalation of COVID-19 cases and as of 6th May 2020, 88% of the 20,198 confirmed cases in Singapore were the low-skilled migrant workers living in foreign worker dormitories (D. Koh 2020). A construction worksite in Singapore has workers from multiple dorms and so when one gets infected, the congregants within the dormitories can get easily infected. The dormitory conditions were further exposed as overcrowded and inhumane, with thousands of workers living in close quarters where 12 and 20 men might share a single room (Ratcliffe 2020). On top of the poor living conditions, as Singapore exited the lockdown, the measures to contain COVID-19 among migrant workers were not minimized – which saw Singaporeans transitioning back into normalcy, whereas the migrant workers were still expected to be confined in their dormitories. In a joint statement by Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME) and Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), the two local migrant welfare groups heavily criticized these regulations as it restricted the movement of at least 300,000 workers to be confined to the dormitories after their work hours. This gave the employers power over the migrant workers' ability to leave the dormitories. According to HOME and TWC2, this unchecked power "offers no scope for workers to leave their accommodation to seek redress, case advice or new jobs" (TWC2 2020). This is just a glimpse of the working conditions of migrant workers.

Despite acknowledging the negative impacts of British colonisation on immigrant living and working conditions in the past, Singapore's embrace of modernity (without critically examining how coloniality is constitutive of modernity) saw a form of global coloniality being replicated within its shores. The immigrant 'low-skilled' labour during the colonial period is now being replaced by non-Singaporeans immigrants, often made up of peoples from the Global South that are geographically close to Singapore, preserving the racialised and geographically differentiated division of labour, as well as the commodification of labour.

Figure 12: On the left, a picture of construction workers being transported on a truck in Singapore (Photo by Humans Not Cargo, Flickr). On the right, a picture of Filipino domestic helpers at the Church of Saint Alphonsus on Palm Sunday (Photo by Andrew Koay)

Exploitation of natural resources

Another feature of global coloniality is the exploitation of natural resources in the name of socio-economic 'progress' and development. From 1500s to the early 1800s, European colonisation began an unparalleled global expansion that resulted in unprecedented changes in ecological processes and the health of indigenous flora and fauna. Landscape modifications and extraction of natural resources were not a new development, but the modern/colonial world system transformed the magnitude and scale in which it operated and to the degree to which local environments were transformed (Lightfoot et al. 2013). In *Utusan Melayu,* the 1948 report on displacing Kebun Ubi villagers to make way for the Malayan Fair of Trade and Industry, highlighted these modern/colonial transformations where natural landscapes were cleared to make space for colonial interests. The MHC Bicentennial exhibition went as far to compare indigenous attitudes towards the environment with how the colonial administration interest in nature was always to serve an imperialist purpose. Despite these critiques, Singapore has continued land clearing for the sake of economic development.

These practices, such as land clearing, reflect the modern/colonial view of the environment, as a resource to be put into service of its inhabitants or attaining economic benefits. Over the past decade, 1,782 ha of secondary forest cover has been lost to urbanisation, with the remaining forests becoming more fragmented (Wu 2023). Beyond clearing lands, Singapore is also currently engaging in resource extraction, in its urban development projects. One example would be the importing of sand for the construction of landfills and production of concrete. For Singapore, sand is particularly important for land reclamation, where parts of the sea are filled to create new land. Examples of reclamation projects are the Marina Bay Sands (MBS) extension and in the future, the Tuas mega port. The tourist attraction at Marina Bay is built on 101 hectares of reclaimed land (A. Tan 2019a). Singapore had exhausted its own foreshore sand by the early 1980s, so it sought to import sand from elsewhere. In the decade between 2006 and 2016, Singapore was the top importer of sand five times (OEC 2017). After receiving sand from Malaysia for many years, the Malaysian government banned sand exports to Singapore in 1997. Singapore then turned to its second neighbour, Indonesia. In no less than a decade, Indonesia also implemented a sand export ban in 2007. Singapore turned to Cambodia after but two years later, Cambodian prime minister outlawed sand exports. Singapore has been looking at Vietnam, Myanmar and as far as India, for sand imports as well (Franke 2014). A documentary titled "Lost World" (Mam 2018) by award-winning Cambodian filmmaker, Kalyanee Mam, focused on the narrative of a young Cambodian woman, Phalla Vy. She lives in a small fishing village off the island of Koh Sralau, where villagers and ecosystem are suffering from the negative impact of sand dredging[83]. The documentary highlighted how it is a highly destructive process, causing damage to the habitats of sea creatures and plants, as well as the livelihoods of villages where the sand is taken from. In the documentary, Vy was

[83] Sand dredging is the removal of sendiments from the bottom of rivers, oceans and other water bodies.

brought to Gardens by the Bay and she said, "This land is my land". Although it cannot be confirmed if Gardens by the Bay was indeed built using Cambodian sand per se, the fact remains that natural resources have been extracted at the expense of people and the environment, for the purpose of "civilisation" and economic growth in Singapore.

Sand dredging on such scales were also new to countries like Cambodia, so the labour operating the machines and boats had to be externally sourced or trained, which neither empowers the local economy nor build on existing skills. The informality of the sector was also mirrored in the lack of formal working contracts and security standards, marginalising the workers and villagers, while the Singaporean dredging and construction companies made good money (John and Jamieson 2020). Extraction at such great amounts also sought to benefit Singapore in the long run with its image of luxury and civilisation with Marina Bay Sands and the Tuas mega port. In the pursuit of a Eurocentric modernity and the unquestioned paradigms of development and urbanisation, the coloniality reproduced by the politically and economically powerful elite in the post-colonial world stems not only from extractive industries but also how people and the environment have been framed as resources that can be exploited, extracted and plundered in the name of growth.

Racialised civilisational narratives

Lastly, without interrogating modernity/coloniality and the continuous reverence of a "beneficial colonisation", colonial legacies such as essentialised racial identities remain unquestioned and affect perceptions of race in Singapore and Malaysia till today. In the textbooks, the justification for British governance in Malaya was the precondition to protect and develop Malayan economy, as the Malays and the Malay rulers were disunited and weak (Swettenham 1907, 221; Winstedt 1935, 135-172). In Singapore particularly, the image of the Malay community as lazy or lacking has affected the narratives, policies and treatment of the Malay community in post-colonial Singapore (Rahim 1998). This was also internalised by the Malay elite that went to rule post-colonial Malaysia (Fanon 1967). In 1971, the UMNO leadership published a book "*Revolusi Mental"* (Mental Revolution) (1971), which argued that the Malays were inherently backward and poorly educated race that was trapped in a world of superstition, blind deference to authority and lack of economic sense. The Malays are also perceived as lazy as they have failed to go through a mental revolution to be a society that is competitive and progressive.

With *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Alatas sought to interrogate the cultural deficit thesis[84] (Rahim 1998) and traced its evolution from the demands of colonial capitalism, which were to fuel labour-intensive plantation agriculture as well as the mining industries in Malaya. He (1977, 76) stated

[84] The cultural deficit thesis posits that social disadvantaged ethnic communities have remained economically and educationally marginal primarily because of their negative values and generally negative attitudes that create the material conditions that reproduce their social disadvantage.

that the "preoccupation with other types of labour that fall outside the category of the 'mule among the nations' is qualified as idle or indolent. To be a chattel of colonial agrarian capitalism is a requirement to be considered as industrious". The Malays were thus labelled as lazy and idle as they had other means of livelihood outside of the colonial industries and refused to allow themselves to be exploited. He basically argued that these racialised stereotypes of the natives in the Philippines, Java and the Malay Peninsula were how colonial capitalism evaluated people according to their utility in the production system and profit level. It was the same ideology that is responsible for the 'positive' stereotyping of the Chinese and Indian migrants, who were seen as 'model' labour migrants as seen during the Bicentennial. The stereotypes that the Chinese were hardworking and diligent while the Indians were docile and easy to control were also found in Swettenham's textbook (1907). Different communities of people were seen through various myths and stereotypes to justify governance over them and how they should be used to serve the Empire.

When the post-colonial Singapore state believes that colonialism was beneficial for Singapore, inevitably, they uncritically accept the civilising mission and the ideology surrounding the Malay community's racial and cultural 'shortcomings'. We see that the cultural deficit thesis has been increasingly relied upon by the PAP government to explain the perpetuity of Malay marginality in Singapore, ignoring the institutional factors, contributing to the Malay community's socio-economic, educational and political marginality (Rahim 1998, 3). By judging colonisation in terms of its pros and cons, instead of a process of modernity/coloniality, we forget that European colonisation enabled the pursuit of modern civilisation relying on these civilisational narratives to extend their colonisation of the Malay world, which had enduring political, economic, and social consequences for the post-colonial world.

This is only an overview of some features of coloniality that are reproduced in contemporary Singapore – how global designs are reflected in the local (Walter Mignolo 2000) or "internal colonialism"(Tuck and Yang 2012). there are more to interrogate. However, this section intended to draw the links between the narratives of modernity excavated from the state's sites of knowledge production and how features of coloniality that are hidden are reproduced materially in Singapore.

Part 2: Local histories represented in *Utusan Melayu*

Beyond adding to the discussions on modernity/coloniality (global designs), this research largely interrogated the narratives of modernity that told partial stories of Singapore (local histories). This section addresses the question of how do we overcome both epistemic and material injustices of coloniality? Here, I argue that *Utusan Melayu* as a source of border thinking allowed for a response *to* and *beyond* modernity/coloniality, in three ways: *Utusan Melayu* identified the intentions of British colonisation in developing Malaya, challenging the foundational national myth of 'benevolent' colonisation; envisioned *Merdeka* (freedom) and a future beyond the civilising mission; and centred the

discussion on indigeneity and the Malays, challenging the narrative of 'exceptionalism' and Singapore as an immigrant nation.

Countering the myth of beneficial colonisation

Speaking from a position of epistemological colonial difference, *Utusan Melayu* firstly challenged the foundational myth that colonisation was beneficial for Malaya. In fact, beyond countering myths, I argue that *Utusan Melayu* was able to highlight how global coloniality impacted local histories. In reporting about the plight of different labour groups such as the farmers, fishermen, ship crew, teachers, *Utusan* was inevitably describing how colonial capitalism has resulted in the rigid racial division of labour and how extraction and exploitation was happening locally. There was the acknowledgement that colonisation did not intend to uplift and develop the colonies. The ultimate goal of colonisation was to benefit the colonial metropole and its economy by extracting its resources and profits. How this global design (colonial capitalism) was represented locally was in the form of the Federation of Malaya, which *Utusan* (1948s, 2) claimed was the "preservation of love between the capitalists and feudalists". Reflecting the subjectivities of the colonised Malays, *Utusan Melayu* wrote about how colonisation was a global phenomenon that created oppressive structures and systems of domination. To credit the British for developing Singapore and ultimately, benefitting it, overlooks the fact that more detrimental effects of coloniality have affected and are affecting other people all around the world. When thinking and writing from a colonial difference, *Utusan* did not rationalise being colonised by weighing its moral evil vs the economic benefit, the newspaper showed how colonisation was a system of power that sought to benefit the colonisers and maintain power hierarchies.

The deep-rooted belief, found in both the colonial textbooks and the overarching narrative of the Bicentennial, that Singapore benefitted from British colonisation also led to the national myth of Singapore exceptionalism discussed in chapter 4. In contrast, *Utusan* was able to highlight the deep connections Singapore had to the *Nusantara.* This was apparent because of the newspaper's constant interest in the events and politics of the Malay world, including the fight against Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. There were articles on supporting, collecting donations, even Friday sermons and urging of the Malay peoples to pray and pay attention to the struggle against imperialism and colonisation in Indonesia. *Utusan* also highlighted how besides global coloniality playing out in the local, transnational anti-colonial tools are also being adopted in the Malay world. The 1947 Hartal was very much inspired by the non-violent resistance movement led by Gandhi in India (Utusan Melayu 1947m, 2). *Utusan* reports of the Hartal highlighted how the whole Malay Peninsula, including Singapore, coordinated the strikes in opposition to the British's Federation Agreements. On top of transnational anti-colonial solidarities and learning, the 1947 Hartal was a main event that stressed how Singapore remains an integral part of the region.

Utusan as an alternative source of history and border thinking allowed us to firstly go beyond the myth of beneficial colonisation by exposing colonial interests and exposing colonisation as a system of power. Secondly, by countering the myth of beneficial colonisation, *Utusan* overcame the rhetoric of 'exceptionalism', reaffirming Singapore's transnational relations with not only the rest Malay world but other colonised nations. This was an example of how *Utusan* told a fuller story of modernity/coloniality by occupying the position of the colonial difference.

A Merdeka future vs the civilising mission

By occupying the epistemological borders, *Utusan* offered alternative conceptions of the future and 'civilisation', thinking *beyond* modernity/coloniality. As discussed in the previous chapters, the civilising mission that accompanied colonialism was a set of ideas and practices that were used to justify and legitimise colonisation. For the later period of colonisation with the British, it meant bringing 'civilisation' in the form of free trade, capitalism, law and good governance (Watt 2011). Its foundational ideology was to morally and materially improve and 'develop' the claimed backwards or primitive peoples. This was the justification to military occupy and colonise. Thus, if Singapore asserts that it did benefit from colonisation, inevitably, there is an uncritical adoption of this foundational ideology – civilisation means embracing the tenets of capitalism, development at any cost and political organisation and governance based on the nation-state.

Merdeka, on the other hand, was a constant cry for freedom against the British colonialists and the most apparent understanding of *merdeka* in *Utusan Melayu* was attaining sovereignty over the land. Aside from freedom from colonisation, *merdeka* also meant freedom of the mind and consciousness, meaning, to be conscious of their state, outside of the colonial image set for them – "the Malays are able to think for themselves" (Utusan Melayu 1947q, 4). Lastly, *merdeka* meant a struggle towards solidarity and justice. *Utusan* articulated that the anti-colonial struggle meant cooperating and communicating with other racial communities to remove imperialism as well as determine what changes should be made to the current colonial structures and institutions – "an economic structure where the riches of Malaya can be used to benefit the people and this can only be changed when the system of government changes to priorities the people" (Utusan Melayu 1947q, 4). In this sense, civilisation was something that the people should discover and determine for themselves based on the principle of *merdeka* as opposed to coloniality or capitalism. In imagining a *Merdeka* future, even though it was not properly fleshed out in its form, *Utusan* reclaimed their capacity to think for themselves, and their hopes to govern and prosper without the "guidance of the modern […] agents and institutions" (Walter Mignolo and Escobar 2010, 12).

Indigeneity of Singaporean Malays

The last contribution that *Utusan* offers to the local history of Singapore is the discussion on indigeneity. Briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, indigeneity in the Malay world and many parts of Southeast

Asia is not as clearly defined as in the America, Australia or New Zealand, where there is a distinct native-settler dichotomy. In the historical context of the Malay Peninsula, this claim is embedded within the historical specificities of the country and manifest itself in many forms. The 'indigeneity' that this thesis refers to is the colonially constructed, and later own, reclaimed, position as 'natives' of the land as a result of the colonial constructions of race in Malaya, distinguishing the Malays, aboriginal peoples (*Orang Asli*), Chinese and Indians (Hirschman 1986; Idrus 2022, 61). Malays are considered indigenous (or native) to the Malay world but not categorised as 'Indigenous Peoples' (capital "I"), as the Malays constitute a majority in Malaysia and are politically, economically and socially dominant. Indigenous Peoples refers to the Orang Asli, an administrative category that includes the many different aboriginal groups in the Malay Peninsula.

In brief, one of the understandings of indigeneity led to the development of *bumiputera,* or 'sons of the soil', an exclusionary political concept in post-colonial Malaysia that grants the *bumiputera* (the Malays) reservations of land, quotas in the civil service, public scholarships and public education, quotas for trade licenses, and the permission to monopolise certain industries if the government permits (Chin 2022). As opposed to this political conception of *bumiputera*, I refer to indigeneity as a concept of existence that is not necessarily tied to any political agenda or slogan.

In the case of Singapore, Raffles is still revered as a symbol for Singapore's economic development, not only because of the embrace of capitalism and urban development, but also because the focus on Raffles wards off any nativist indigenous claims and prevents the exploitation of racial and communal cleavages (Chan and Haq 1987). Setting him up as the 'founder of Singapore' evades any contending claims of Malays, Chinese, Indians or Eurasians as indigenous – this required a degree of "collective selective amnesia" (Huang 2021, 113). This selective amnesia has resulted in the discomfort of outrightly acknowledging Malay indigeneity in Singapore, partly as it shatters the myth of Singapore as "point zero" and that Singaporeans are all immigrants. There is also a fear that such acknowledgements of indigeneity will lead to Malay ethnonationalism and chauvinism similar to that in Malaysia.

The contents of *Utusan Melayu* confirm that indeed there is collective selective amnesia with regards to the indigeneity of Singapore Malays. The pan-Malay consciousness across the region was lucid during the organising efforts against the Malayan Union. Despite being based in Singapore, Utusan *Melayu* managed to mobilise Malay leaders and the public to rally against the Malayan Union. *Utusan* highlighted how the Malays were worried about their right to ownership of lands as well as the right to rule over their own lands. The phrases *bumiputera* and *ketuanan Melayu*, though now laden with heavy meanings of Malay supremacy and chauvinism due to its political manifestations, were used in *Utusan Melayu* to speak of indigeneity and ownership of Malay lands, or in extension of meaning, the right to be sovereign (*hak ketuanan tanah Melayu*). *Utusan* stated that British colonisation had taken

away their dignity as natives of the region. The understanding of 'indigeneity' that *Utusan* had was that the Malay person would not have to specify which state the person was from. For example, if a Malay from Johor moved to Terengganu, he would still be considered native to the land. These claims of Malaya being Malay land were a natural response to modernity/coloniality, however, with a significant non-Malay population in Malaya, these claims were challenged and negotiated, as evident in the People's Constitution and calls for a multicultural "Malayan" nationalism instead (Thum 2023).

During the period of 1946-48, these were the considerations of *Utusan Melayu.* The two main goals that *Utusan* had for Malay politics was to reclaim Malaya to the ownership of the Malays, and deal with the tense relations between the different races. *Utusan* claimed that these issues were related, and the solution would be to remove colonisation as it was the root of both issues. Although they have not developed clear solutions on how to overcome racial divisions, I find two epistemological divergences significant, first, the acknowledgement Malay indigeneity was non-negotiable and necessary for the freedom of the country and dignity of the people. This is contrary to the contemporary Singapore state upholding ethnic neutrality and equality to maintain multi-culturalism. Secondly, *Utusan* understood that colonisation was causing further tensions and divisions between the different communities living in Malaya, and the focus should be the removal of colonisation. Similar to other groups, the common cause was to remove the British; but how the nation would be was a work in progress. In this sense, *Utusan*'s call for recognition of indigeneity was a political strategy for those who were seeking to free themselves from colonisation and regain rights for the lands of their ancestors. Within the local context of the Malay world, some future questions and research that could be explored is how 'indigeneity' were important tools of articulation for empowerment and/or exclusion, how did this kind of cultural politics emerge, its process and shifts and how it was utilised from a position of weakness (ie as the colonised) or strength (ie coopted by post-colonial elite).

How solidarities and nationhood could have looked like was briefly experimented on (Hong 2021b, 89), before the PAP monopolised the political and discursive sphere of nation-building after the 1965 Separation of Singapore from Malaysia. One example of such experimentation was reflected in Chua Mia Tee's *National Language Class* iconic painting that represents the challenges of an emerging nationalist identity, with Malay language as the social glue uniting the various ethnic communities and the major medium of communication for the masses (Rahim 2009, 1). The painting depicts Singaporeans of different ethnicities learning Malay, the national language of Singapore, Malaya and the Malay world. This was a significant choice by left-wing Chinese school students, who in the anti-colonial zeal demanded that the study of Malay replace English in their Chinese medium schools (ibid.). An earlier example of such experimentation and solidarities was also present in the alliance of PUTERA-AMCJA. The alliance was home to a broad spectrum of political parties and ideologies from the Malay Left and non-Malay parties. In response to the Constitutional Federation of Malaya, they proposed the People's Constitution, which called for both the recognition of indigeneity of the Malays

as well as equal rights for all who regard Malaya as their homeland. With the detention of Malay Left leaders and the banning of API during the 1948 Emergency, PUTERA-AMCJA dissolved (Ali 2017a). Essentially, these experimentations in nation-building were trying to include the question of race and the indigeneity of the Malays. The main epistemological divergence was that instead of revering colonisation that 'allowed' for a point zero in nation-building, a recognition of what colonisation had done to racial politics and the removal of this, was considered a solution for the *Utusan Melayu.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter seeks to highlight how coloniality of knowledge, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, has insidious ramifications beyond just discourse. The first main argument of this chapter is that the hegemonic narratives of modernity maintain the colonial matrix of power on a structural and material level, and allow global colonialities to be reproduced locally, thereby connecting epistemic and material injustices. By dewesternising – acknowledging the negative aspects of British colonisation, while pursuing an alternative yet still Eurocentric modernity, the Singaporean state reproduces coloniality in its pursuit of modernity. Without acknowledging modernity/coloniality, Singapore maintains or reproduces colonialities in different forms such as: commodification of labour, exploitation of natural resources, and the preservation of racialised civilisational narratives.

The second main argument is that engaging with border thinking and knowledge production from the colonial difference is the first step towards overcoming epistemic injustices. By considering *Utusan Melayu* as a source of border thinking, it was granted the epistemic authority to speak about what the newspaper considered problems, what constituted these problems and what were the means of redress (Shilliam 2016a, 255). I argue that the contents of discontent within *Utusan Melayu* were effective in countering the partial stories of modernity and highlighting a fuller picture of modernity/coloniality such as challenging the foundational national myth of 'benevolent' colonisation and the narrative of ''exceptionalism' and Singapore as an immigrant nation.

Utusan also offered elements of epistemic disobedience: in their alternative visions for the homeland, within the discourse of *merdeka* as opposed to embracing the civilising mission. Aside from freedom from colonisation, *merdeka* also meant freedom of the mind and consciousness, meaning, to be conscious of their state, outside of the colonial image set for them. It also offered alternative conceptions of space or more accurately, borders and broadened the conversation of Singapore as belonging to the wider Malay World. However, it must be stated that their ideas on *merdeka* seemed more foundational and not offering concrete material visions. This could be because the issues I examined were from 1946-1948 and *Utusan*'s ideas were not fully developed or fleshed out yet. In addition, it is possible that they were not able to develop their ideas further due to political repression and eventual monopolisation of public space.

Despite this, I argue that they had a basis towards constructing or maintaining paths and praxis "toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing and living" (Walter Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 194), which can be explored in later issues in the 1950s, or from the journalists' other works, such as memoirs, literary writings and political manifestos. These alternative epistemologies for more just futures have the potential to overcome material injustices.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

"Armed with the knowledge of our past, we can with confidence charter a course for our future. Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle. We must take hold of it and forge the future with the past" – Malcolm X (1964)

Introduction

As I write this in late October 2023, situated in the United Kingdom, the world is witnessing a genocide of Palestinians in Gaza unfold in front of us through our screens. Hundreds of thousands across the world are taking to the streets to pressure their local governments to call for ceasefire, while Singapore's streets remain "peaceful". On October 18, the police and the National Parks Board released a statement that no permits will be "granted for assemblies that advocate political causes of other countries or foreign entities, or may have the potential to stir emotions and lead to public order incidents" (The Straits Times 2023). On October 30, a Singaporean boxer was summoned by an Investigation officer to provide a statement on why he displayed a Palestinian flag during his boxing match. He made a video to discourage others from doing the same, emphasizing that it was an offence to display foreign flags in Singapore. The police were concerned that such actions might heighten emotions of anger and hate (Rahman 2023). The irony was that on the thirtieth day of the attacks on Gaza on November 5, with a death toll of almost 10,000 (Al Jazeera 2023), hundreds of Singaporeans gathered to welcome Prince William as he arrived in Singapore ahead of the Earthshot Prize Awards Ceremony. He was warmly received with cheers and the audience were waving Union Jack flags – a "foreign" flag.

Figure 13: Prince William arrives in Singapore Changi Airport where a massive crowd cheers and wave Union Jack flags to welcome him (Photo by Mothership SG)

These contradictions that are happening in Singapore, such as the global anti-racist, anti-colonial solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 compared to the 2019 Bicentennial Commemorations, and in this political moment, gathering in solidarity for a liberated Palestine compared to gathering to welcome a member of the British royal family, highlight the continued colonisation of the mind. British colonial legacy that created and allowed for the genocide in Gaza today is willfully forgotten as Singaporeans continue to celebrate their representatives and prefer for the preservation of 'peace' within their own borders instead of allowing for its citizens to show transnational solidarity based on humanity.

Summary of argument and research implications

The overall aim of this thesis was to examine the coloniality of knowledge production in Singapore and how it manifests materially. In this thesis, I was guided by a two-part decolonial framework of deconstruction and reconstruction, to firstly, examine historical narratives that have been made hegemonic by the colonial and post-colonial Singapore government, and subsequently, to uncover and cultivate local histories/praxis/epistemologies that address imperialism and expressions of colonialism (coloniality) (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 19).

Firstly, I identified narratives of modernity that were made hegemonic in the Singapore's state official history writing. I began by examining the 'creation of history' for English and Malay vernacular schools by the British colonial officers, such as Swettenham and Winstedt. In addition, under the supervision of Winstedt, Abdul Hadi, a Malay teacher, produced history textbooks that diverged from his predecessors as he was more critical of the British's colonial intentions and activities. Within these textbooks, there were main narratives of modernity that surfaced that I consider foundational as we see some of these narratives being reproduced a 100 years later in the Bicentennial commemorations. Colonial knowledge production in the textbooks offered partial stories of modernity, such as how the British were benevolent colonisers, the civilising mission was beneficial for Malaya and the creation of borders. I argued that these narratives were told from the position of imperial difference, where histories were silenced, and modernity was celebrated without the consideration of coloniality.

The four narratives of modernity found in the colonial textbooks were so foundational that it was reproduced in different ways in the writing of post-colonial national history, specifically in the public museum exhibitions of the 2019 Bicentennial. I expanded the post-colonial narratives of modernity to include how Singapore understood itself as a state separate from the rest of the region and consequently, its broader history as part of a vast maritime network of ports, riverine systems and islands that constituted the Johor-Riau Sultanate (Joraimi 2021, 12). Despite the foundational narratives of modernity persevering 100 years on, knowledge production from various state institutions resulted in varied levels of criticality – the exhibitions that were under the SBO, were merely diversifying sources of knowledge without recognising the darker side of modernity. Other exhibitions were more

critical in that they sought to narrate fuller stories of modernity/coloniality and highlighted indigenous silences.

However, the overall purpose of the Bicentennial remained as a nation-building exercise – illustrating the notion that despite a recognition of colonisation's negative aspects, the post-colonial Singapore state still managed to excel in modernity. I contend that adding multiple voices in the writing of Singapore's history (diversifying) to critique British colonisation, while still justifying Singapore's pursuit of its own version of modernity (dewesternising), does not effectively decolonise knowledge production. As Mignolo (2009, 161) stated, decolonial and dewesternising options are similar in that both definitively reject 'being told' what 'we' are, but they diverge on one point: the latter does "not question the 'civilisation of death' hidden under the rhetoric of modernisation and prosperity, of the improvement of modern institutions (e.g. liberal democracy and an economy propelled by the principle of growth and prosperity); decolonial options start from the principle that the regeneration of life shall prevail over primacy of the production and reproduction of goods at the cost of life (life in general and of *humanitas* and *athropos* alike!)".

Secondly, in an effort to go beyond diversifying and dewesternising, I engaged with knowledge production from the colonial difference, which critiqued the partial stories of modernity by elucidating modernity/coloniality as well as offering alternative epistemologies, such as *merdeka* and indigeneity. *Utusan* decentred British colonisation by including articles on other anti-colonial struggles around the world, especially within the region and the Islamicate. The newspaper also critiqued partial narratives of modernity, highlighting how British colonisation was not benevolent and the civilising mission was not beneficial. *Utusan* highlighted how the Malays were impacted by colonial capitalism and called for *merdeka. Merdeka* encompassed the call for freedom – freedom from colonisation, freedom to determine their own futures, freedom to think for themselves and the struggle towards justice and humanisation. Beyond Singapore borders, *Utusan* illustrated how the Malays saw Singapore as an integral part of the larger Malay peninsula, elucidating the indigeneity of Singapore Malays as well. The contradiction within *Utusan* was how it held elements of epistemic disobedience because of its position within the colonial difference, while also internalising racial categories that was created by colonisation. The understanding of race inherited by the British limited the access by other racial groups to indigeneity and the rights associated with that reality (Manickam 2009, 600).

I conclude with Chapter 6 highlighting the overall contributions of the thesis. I addressed the two research questions posed in the beginning. Firstly, addressing the first research question of how coloniality is harmful, I argue that hegemonic narratives of modernity maintain the colonial matrix of power not only on an epistemic level but also on a structural and material level. This allows global colonialities to be reproduced locally, thereby connecting epistemic and material injustices. Secondly, I argue that border thinking can be the first step towards overcoming epistemic injustices. By

legitimising *Utusan* as epistemic authority, its contents of discontent countered the partial stories of modernity and offered foundational ideas of alternatives to modernity/coloniality.

Overall, this thesis sought to explore going beyond performances of criticality in diversifying and dewesternising practices and explore the potential for border thinking in *Sejarah rakyat (*people's history). The two-part decolonial framework can be used to firstly, interrogate the national myths and hegemonic narratives of modernity and secondly, explore ways to go beyond modernity/coloniality. The acknowledgement of modernity/coloniality should propel communities to think beyond a Eurocentric modernity. In rediscovering knowledge production from the colonial difference that have been marginalised or actively erased, we can "chart our course for our future", one that is more just and based within our own traditions and concerns.

Further research

My archival research covered 370 *Utusan Melayu* issues between 1946-1948, which were periods that were soon after WWII. The issues between 1948-1961 still offer so much insight into the development of anti-colonial and nationalist thought in the Singapore Malay community. In the 1950s, there could have been narratives that elaborated on *merdeka* and how the Malays imagined what a liberated society would be, after more interactions, collaborations and negotiations from non-Malay anti-colonial movements in Malaya. It would be interesting to examine Malay political anti-colonial thought in the 1950s as well as their continuous negotiations of race and equal citizenship. Future research can include asking the questions: can there be a recognition of indigeneity and the equality of bodies and minds under state law? Were there more concrete visions of polities beyond the nation-state? What role did Islam play in shaping their political stances? There are other newspapers published in Singapore that have yet to be examined as well.

Concluding Remarks

As Tuck and Yang (2012) asserted, "decolonisation is not a metaphor" – in the case of settler colonies, colonial occupation has not ended, and decolonisation means giving back land to Indigenous communities. They (2012, 2) argue that "the language of decolonisation has been superficially adopted into education and other social science, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decentre settler perspectives". As Tuhiwai-Smith also asserted (2012, 3), "taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences – but it does not prevent someone from dying".

In concluding this thesis of at least 4 years, I reflect on the extents of erasure and whether my research is important in the context of so much death and oppression globally, currently in Palestine, Sudan, Congo and more. While I seek to critique and undo coloniality in Singapore, I do not want

decolonisation to be a mere metaphor. It is a matter of urgency that Singapore and the world acknowledges modernity/coloniality and the existence of the colonial matrix of power. The darker side of the model that positions the West as the reference point for decades, as the pinnacle of the civilised world and humanity, has truly been unmasked as they actively participate in the dehumanisation and destruction of human life. I am thoroughly convinced for the sake of preserving our humanity, the world needs to actively and introspectively move and think beyond modernity/coloniality and colonial and imperial hegemonies. True liberation means eradicating all forms of oppression and systems that empower these hegemonies. In this case, even if the extent of erasure is not as dire in Singapore, Singapore must reflect on the power hierarchies and oppressive systems that it benefits from and work towards removing inequalities and injustices. I hope that this thesis was a small step towards that. I echo *Utusan's* (1948k, 2) proclamation that we should "not be content being colonized by anyone".

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