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HENK MAIER

‘We Are Playing Relatives’

Riau, the Cradle of Reality and Hybridity

In a world propelled by disintegration and renewal, ‘literature’ is still able to offer some of us the ultimate salvation from our anxiety. Is it not tempting, in these days of disquiet, to turn to *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, that encyclopedia of Malay writing, to soothe our worries, to enlighten our uneasiness about life? Following conventions and subverting them in one and the same movement, the Tale of Hang Tuah is full of irony – and irony is what we may need in order not to be torn apart by our ambivalent desires of intervention and disavowal. Evasive and inconclusive, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is exemplary for each and every form of Malay writing. It shows us how to play with love and life, with power and money.

One of the many fragments of the Tale that should be able to soothe our anxiety is the one in which Hang Tuah, the merchant’s son turned admiral and confidant of the Sultan of Malacca, is expelled from the Malacca court. The expulsion is the result of the slanderous suggestions of Karma Wijaya, the man from Java who has spread a rumor that Hang Tuah has been playing with the ladies in the palace; His Majesty, the Sultan, enraged and humiliated, decides that his most loyal servant should be eliminated.

Slander, Malay manuscripts keep warning us, is as destructive as fire. Saying one thing and referring to another, trying to be a truth and a lie at once, it ruins every possible harmony and order. The very ambivalence of the words that are disseminated by Karma Wijaya, the Javanese outsider in Malacca, not only makes Hang Tuah another victim of language, it also brings the Sultan out of balance. ‘Enraged like a fierce fire, like a tiger’, His Majesty does not explore the truth of the allegations as a good Malay ruler should have done. Instead, he immediately gives his Prime Minister royal orders to remove Hang Tuah from the court, expressing himself, as usual, in inconclusive words: ‘Banish him immediately – I know he will be dead’ (*Seğeralah buangkan, aku tahukan matinya*). Banishment or execution, or both? Hang Tuah accepts his lord’s verdict. He is given a ship by the Prime Minister, takes some people and some valuables, and decides to set sail for a place named Indrapura.

Of course Tuah has a reason to choose Indrapura. It is the place where Tun Teja, the daughter of the local Prime Minister, is living, and tales about her beauty – here Tuah shares his thoughts with the tale’s public in a flashback – have aroused the lust and desire of the Sultan of Malacca some sixty pages before. A man falls in love with a tale, is that not a plot for an

intriguing tale in itself? Taken by lust and desire, His Majesty has already tried to see to it that the tale he heard about Beauty and Elegance be concretized: he sent envoys to Indrapura to ask for Teja's hand. The girl, however, flatly rejected the proposal. 'A parakeet should stay with parakeets and hornbills with hornbills', she has told her relatives who were unable to persuade her to give in to Malacca's lust. Was the Sultan not a descendant of heaven, sublime and divine? How on earth could she, a human being, ever refuse the offer of such an illustrious being? Teja resisted the power of such pleas; she preferred to stay with her relatives, and the envoys had to return to Malacca empty-handed, provoking the anger of His Majesty. Hang Tuah's plan is obvious: he wants to bring the girl to his lord in order to regain his favor.

In Indrapura, Tuah discovers that Tun Teja has a strong will indeed; the girl refuses to come to Malacca, if only because she is engaged to a prince of Trengganu. In order to make his design come true, Hang Tuah then has to resort to ruses and tricks. He takes his time to become known at the court of Indrapura.

One day Teja's brother, Tun Jenal, invites him to join a party where some of the lady-servants of Teja are giving a performance for the honored guest who still calls himself *laksamana* (admiral), thus preserving his status and his loyalty to Malacca. Then this passage follows:

'And the singers said: "Good, my lord. What kind of melody shall we play because the melodies of the people of Indrapura are not Malay? Really, we may be Malays, but we are hybrid, not like the real Malays of Malacca." The *Laksamana* [Hang Tuah] smiled and said: "Maybe the people of Malacca are hybrid as well, mixed as they are with the Javanese of Majapahit, that is. You act like one, as though you want to put me to the test." Hearing these words of Tuah, the five singers turned around, embarrassed as they were in their manners and words: "You, too, are like one, sir; it is as though everything true we say becomes wrong." Then the *Laksamana* turned around with a smile. And the five singers started to laugh, picked up the drums and started to play. And the *Laksamana* was offered a goblet. And the five drums sounded like one. And the singers sang, very sweet were their voices. Then Tun Jenal rose up to dance. After two or three steps, he invited the *Laksamana* to join him. And the *Laksamana* rose up and danced, meanwhile folding his long kain and rearranging his long kris. And the *Laksamana* said: "Do not try to put me to the test because the lord of this man from Malacca is mixed with Majapahit Java, he does not know how to dance." Answered Tun Jenal: "What words are you saying, sir? We are playing relatives. You should not have distrust in your heart." And the *Laksamana* danced, very elegant was his dance, the people in Indrapura never saw a dance like the *Laksamana*'s dance before. [...] After having a drink, the *Laksamana* was given presents by Prime Minister Sri Buana, and by Tun Jenal; he was given a complete set of clothes. And the *Laksamana* gave handkerchiefs to the singers, five of the same fabric.¹

¹ 'Maka kata biduan itu: "Baiklah tuanku; ragam apa diperhamba palu ini karena ragam orang Indrapura bukan Melayu? Sungguh beta Melayu, kacukan juga bukan

These are intriguing words, creating a dazzling network of innuendoes and suggestions, laughs and smiles, maybes and as-ifs – and, as is the case in so many fragments in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, a careful reading cannot but steer us into various directions at once. What is ‘really’ going on in Indrapura remains hidden behind the veil of beautiful words that leave the sense of the scene indeterminate.

In his play of words and gestures, so it seems, Hang Tuah makes it clear to the women singers in Indrapura that even the glorious center of Malay power and authority may not be ‘real Malay’ (*Melayu sungguh*), influenced as it is by ‘Java’. Or does he perhaps implicitly agree with the suggestion of the Indrapurans that being a real Malay means being a hybrid, and that the ‘real Malay’ is the impure Malay – or that the ‘impure Malay’ is the real Malay? Or is this conversation between the honored guest and the singers just a battle of words, or a flirtation between an attractive man and some infatuated women, for that matter? Or should Tuah’s words primarily be interpreted as a sneer to the Javanese courtier Karma Wijaya whose slanderous suggestions made the Sultan of Malacca decide to expel his trusted servant and ruin the harmony of ‘real’ Malayness in Malacca? Or do his words only serve to make Tun Jenal reach the conclusion that these discussions about Malayness do not really matter so long as the honored guest is related to the Indrapurans and therefore is a real Malay, just like they themselves are?

Keywords in the above fragment are, of course, *kacukan* (hybrid; mixed) and *sungguh* (real; pure) – and in the end, it seems, it remains undecided who is the ‘real Malay’ and who is the ‘hybrid’ one. The Indrapurans challenge their guest to position himself, and Tuah, coming from Malacca, the place where, as the Indrapurans, pretending or not, assume the core of Malay culture has developed among real, authentic Malays (*Melayu sung-*

seperti Melayu Malaka sungguh.” Maka Laksamana pun tersenyum seraya berkata: “Orang Melaka gerangan Melayu kacukan, bercampur dengan Jawa Majapahit! Dayang pun satu sebagai hendak mengajuk beta pula.” Setelah biduan lima orang itu mendengar kata Tun Tuah itu, maka ia pun berpaling, malu-malu bahasa seraya berkata: “Tuan ini pun satu, sebagai pula beta berkata benar menjadi salah.” Maka Laksamana pun berpaling sambil tersenyum. Maka biduan lima orang itupun tertawa sambil mengambil rebana lalu dipalunya. Maka piala pun dilarang oranglah kepada Laksamana. Maka rebana pun berbunyilah kelimanya setala. Maka biduan itu pun bernyanyilah terlalu merdu suaranya. Maka Tun Jenal pun berbangkit menari, dua tiga langkah dianggapkannya kepada Laksamana. Laksamana pun berbangkit menari serta memperbaiki panjang kainnya dan mengiringkan keris panjangnya. Maka kata Laksamana: “Jangan sahaja diajuk, karena orang Malaka dan tuannya bercampur, Jawa Majapahit. Tiada tahu menari.” Maka sahut Tun Jenal: “Kata apa tuan katakan itu? Kita bermain adik-beradik; hendaklah jangan menaruh syak di hati.” Maka Laksamana pun menarilah terlalu manis tarinya, tiada pernah orang Indrapura melihat tari seperti tari Laksamana itu. [...] Setelah sudah minum maka Laksamana pun dipersalin oleh Bendahara Sri Buana dan Tun Jenal, dipersalin pakaian selengkapannya. Maka Laksamana pun memberi ikat tangan akan biduan itu, kain baju lima serupa.” (Ahmad 1975:189)

guh) has his answer ready: 'I may not be as pure as you think I am; I am the servant of a hybrid community and I am living in a mixed context, mind you. But if you want me to be a real Malay, then I am, and I will have a good time'. Hang Tuah does not really care, it seems, whether he is a real Malay or not; he just accepts the invitation – or is it a statement? – that he is a relative of those present so that he can enjoy himself, giving a good time to everyone present, including himself. The clothes that are exchanged at the end of the play merely confirm or even embody the feelings of kinship among Malays – or maybe they evoke a kinship that had not been there before.

In other words, the issue of Malayness is discussed here. Who are the 'real Malays'? Who are the 'best Malays'? Who is challenging whom? Who is the winner of this contest of words, and then of gestures and behavior? Tun Jenal sums it all up in his conclusion. 'We are playing relatives', a translation which is as ambivalent as the Malay *kita bermain adik-beradik*. 'We are relatives, and we are playing'; and 'we just pretend to be related'. The assumption of both interpretations is the same: some form of mutual trust is needed which can only exist between relatives, and once we have accepted each other as relatives, we will enjoy ourselves. Being Malay means being related, and once the fact of being related is accepted, even the word 'Malay' does not really count.

As a matter of fact, one of the central themes of the Tale of Hang Tuah may be the desirability to trust 'others' as if they were relatives, the drive to mix and assimilate with 'others' – and Tuah himself is the perfect emblem of this desire. As a young boy, he learns to express himself in no less than twelve 'languages'; once he becomes the trusted servant of his lord of Malacca and wanders over the seven seas to make his name better known, he constantly learns new manners, new customs, new phrases and words, without ever showing the slightest fear of losing his identity. He just has it and maintains it, so it seems. Never does he himself wonder whether he is impure or not, authentic or not. He enjoys himself in the company of others who treat him like a relative, and that is what counts for him. Does that make him a Malay – or maybe just a human being?

Reading *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is like being constantly given the suggestion that this is what Malayness is all about: it is the desire to create a feeling of communality and kinship between concrete human beings instead of the blind obedience to a set of abstract conventions, considerations of geography, or the belief in a stable personal identity. Flexibility and the willingness to play, in other words, is what counts in being a Malay, in acting out Malayness.

What the description of Hang Tuah's arrival in Indrapura shows in miniature is that every time outsiders appear in a part of the world where Malay is spoken, the people who receive them feel somehow compelled to position themselves, define their identity, and decide whether it is worth-

while to make an effort to assimilate these 'others' in words and deeds – or just dismiss them. Being a Malay, speaking Malay, and acting Malay is a willingness to adapt and assimilate, in other words. Hence it is not very surprising that *kacukan* and *sunnguh*, 'hybrid' and 'real', are the terms that pervade the discussions about Malay language and, in a wider sense, Malay behavior and values, every time these so-called outsiders (Javanese among them) come in – and that these discussions remain as indefinite as assimilation does. The flexibility is all-pervasive.

In this context, the term *bahasa*, so common a word in Malay manuscript writing, is a very effective one: it covers not only what we would call 'language' or 'discursive formation' but also 'culture'. *Bahasa* refers not just to the network of words that are spoken and written, but also to the set of good and relevant manners that keep a community together in peace and harmony. Words are just one element that is covered by the word *bahasa*, and *tahu bahasa* should not be translated as 'to know a language', as Westerners with their assumptions about identity and language so often do, but rather as 'to know the good or relevant manners of a certain group of people, including their language, so as not to offend them and bring oneself into a difficult position.' This wide use of the word *bahasa* is, by the way, nicely and minutely illustrated in the above passage on reality and hybridity as well when the Indrapuran singers are described as *malu-malu bahasa* (embarrassed as they were in their manners and words).

'Good and relevant manners' have to be constantly negotiated by those who are involved with one another; their validity is constantly changing form as conversations, discussions, and show-offs are replaced by others. Obviously, sultanic authority, the shaky apex of a community, plays a steering role in this fluid state of affairs by creating a relatively stable point in this *bahasa*; trusted courtiers like Hang Tuah are needed to go down and constantly show and negotiate with the members of their lord's community on how to behave, how to speak, how to live, love and die in harmony. 'Language' – the collective term of the words that are linked together in constantly changing configurations – is felt to be embedded in good and relevant manners, and vice versa: good and relevant manners are felt to be embedded in appropriate words. The interaction between the two is one of the reasons 'Malayness' is so fluid; it lacks an organizing center and, therefore, it cannot but elude those of us who are looking for solidity and definitions. It is telling that the word 'Malay' rarely occurs in manuscripts, the only witnesses we still have of this fluidity of old: the feeling of being a 'nation' with its *bahasa* was very loose indeed. In days of yore, 'Malay' did not bear the weight of exclusivity; it did not become prominent until 'others' made their presence more intensely felt and forced the people living on the shores of the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea and beyond to be aware of the possibility they were related, formed a group, and should feel together in a shared 'language', a set of shared behavior.

In their desire for solidity, stability and money, European merchants, missionaries, administrators, and scholars refused to appreciate this fluidity from the very beginning of their involvement with the local population. Guarding the order they gradually imposed by way of print, education, and administration, they felt the need to construct a set of norms that could be used as a measure of judging Malay behavior and discourse, fluid and moving, in terms of 'good' and 'bad', 'correct' and 'incorrect' – and they found local people willing to assist them in this. In the process, the reach of the term *bahasa* was gradually restricted to refer to 'language' alone, to words spoken and written while 'adat' became the term that referred to 'good and relevant manners'.

This separation between 'good and relevant manners' and 'language' has led to much confusion. It is reflected in the efforts outsiders have undertaken to define 'Malay' and 'Malays' in terms of a center, which never existed, and in terms of a 'language', which the people who used it saw as forming part of something larger. Outsiders forced local people to wonder and decide what their words, their manners and their culture were all about. In the nineteenth century these outside forces were becoming so strong that borders were erected, identities were created, solid notions of authenticity, hybridity and language emerged that had never been there before.

This is what the Reverend Valentijn has to say about Malay in his monumental work on the Indies, first published in 1724:

'The Malay language is of two kinds, the High Malay, that is the Malay that is used among the nobility at the courts, in affairs concerning the Muslim religion, and the Low Malay, that is pasar or market Malay that is spoken daily and within the community. The first-mentioned kind of Malay, they call it Bahasa Djawi, mother-language or pure language, is without any doubt the best, the most correct and sublime Malay; but that language is not understood even on the Malay coast, either on Java or on Sumatra, apart from Muslim kings, rulers and priests, and these people never use it either apart from writings of the Court or of religion. Apart from that High Malay language there is a Low Malay that, because it drew from many nations, each according to its own language and tongue, and also because it was sometimes mixed with some words from Portuguese, or from any other language for that matter, has also the name of Bahasa katsjoekan, that is mixed language, or Bahasa Pasar, that is market language, in so far as it is the language which merchants who are trading with one another on the market, use to make things clear and to understand each other.'²

² 'De Maleytsche taal is tweederley, de Hooge, dat is het Maleyts, dat men onder de Grooten aan de Hoven, in de zaaken van den Mohhammadaanschen Godsdienst, gebruykt, en het Lage, dat is het Pasar- of Markt Maleyts, dat men dagelijks en onder de gemeente spreekt. Het eerste Maleyts, bij hen Bahasa Jawi, Moeder- of Suyvre Taal genaamd, is buyten alle tegenspraak het beste, rechte, en 't hoogdravenste Maleyts; maar die taal werd zelfs op de Maleyse kust, nog op Java nog op Sumatra, van geen andre, dan van de Mohhammadaansch Koningen, Vorsten en Priesters verstaan, en van

'High' and 'low' in one: the ambivalence of 'Malay' has been noticed from the start. The illusion, always created by an outsider, that Malay was a discrete entity with strict boundaries and a center is equally significant. Valentijn's observations, however, are not really as clear as they appear at first sight. The Reverend does not give a precise definition of High and Low Malay, for instance. He does not make a sharp distinction between written forms of Malay and spoken forms of Malay either. The passage betrays some unmotivated assumptions. Firstly, the 'most correct and sublime Malay' is only used in writing. Secondly, the term *kacukan* or, in Valentijn's spelling *katsjoekan*, primarily refers to spoken forms of Malay, the so-called 'bazaar Malay', those fluid, constantly changing forms of Malay that were used by those who did not speak Malay as their native language, whatever that meant in the confusing discursive context of the islands. Thirdly, the differences between the two, no matter how unclearly defined, can be described in normative terms of 'high' and 'low' – as if writing should be regarded as being higher than speaking.

Of course, Valentijn's lack of clarity opens up a series of questions. What kind of Malay did courtiers actually use in their daily conversations, for instance? And how far did High Malay interfere with Low Malay in conversations among courtiers and religious scholars? How far did those who used 'Malay' make a clear distinction between the two at all? What exactly should make us decide that the best if not perfect or even pure form of Malay should be found in writing? How could the wild variety of spoken forms of Malay so easily be summarized by the term *kacukan*? How could the Reverend be so sure that *kacukan* was never used in writing?

The same term, *kacukan*, is used by Marsden, the British scholar of things Malay whose writings, more than any other scholar's, steered discussions about Malay in the nineteenth century and beyond. In his description of Malay, first published in 1812 and soon thereafter translated into Dutch, Marsden discerned four forms: *bahasa dalam* (court language), *bahasa bangsawan* (language of the higher classes), *bahasa dagang* (language of merchants), and *bahasa katjoekan* (mixed language of markets and harbors). The preference for writing over speaking that we find in Valentijn's description is not explored, but Marsden's categorization, too, leaves us with a number of questions. What is the difference between *bahasa dagang* and *bahasa katjoekan*, for instance? How

hen ook in de dagelijksche omgang nooit, maar alleen in de geschriften van 't Hof, of van den Godsdienst gebruikt. Behalven die Hooge Maleysche taal is er ook een Lage, die, omdat zij van verlerley Natiën, ieder na zijn eygen Taal en tongval, zo wat getrokken, en ook zomtyds met dese en gene woorden, 't zy uyt het Portugeesch, 't zy uyt enige andre Taal, vermengd werd, ook wel de naam van Katsjoekan, dat is mengeltaal, of van Bahasa Pasar, dat is markt-Taal draagd voor zo verre het die taal is, waardoor de kooplieden, die op de markt met malkander handelen, te regt geraken, en malkander verstaan.' (Valentijn 1724-26, II:244-5.)

should the interaction between speaking and writing be analyzed? How should we account for the notion of a discrete entity called 'Malay', given the assumption that mixed forms make part of it and, therefore, the borders are not very clear?

Subsequent students of Malay tended to redefine Marsden's four categories in an opposition between two forms of Malay that did not run parallel with the dichotomy between speaking and writing but with their respective function in the Malay world. *Bahasa dalam* and *bahasa bangsawan* are the terms for the Malay that is used on official occasions and in manuscripts, letters and ceremonies, on the one hand; *bahasa dagang* and *bahasa katjoekan*, on the other, is the Malay that is spoken in informal situations, in particular when strangers and outsiders are around. The distinctions, however, remain hazy and unsatisfactory, if only because their use of the term *Melayu* referred to a group of people many of whom did not yet call themselves *Melayu* and their use of the term *bahasa* too easily dismissed the link words had with manners.

In tune with nineteenth-century European ideas, scholars and administrators on the peninsula and the islands assumed that a distinct language carries a distinct culture. The language was the species specific, the soul of a 'race', a 'nation', a 'people', and hence efforts were made to determine the authoritative centers where, it was assumed, the best form of a language was used in support of the most authentic form of culture that served as the shining compass of living for those who operated in its light (Van der Putten and Al azhar 1995: 50-4).

Historical knowledge has it that so far as Malay is concerned, such a center of widely accepted authenticity and purity had not existed for centuries, if it ever had. In his play of words with the Indrapurans, Hang Tuah intimates that even Malacca did not qualify, contrary to their suggestion, pretended or not. Had linguists listened to his words and deeds, they would have known that their search for 'real Malay', 'pure Malay', and 'true Malay' was doomed. Those who used forms of what was to be called 'Malay' already knew this from the start, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* tells us. For them, the issue of what was marginal and what was central, hybrid or real was a matter of the position they were in while talking to one another; the words they used were always on the move, embedded as they were in good manners, the authority of which was constantly challenged by shifting perspectives, changing priorities, rearranging memories. *Melayu tinggi* did not exist without its apparent complement, *Melayu kacukan*, and vice versa; they were interchangeable, so to speak; in every situation and location they had to be negotiated again and again.

The Dutch and the British, outsiders and strangers as they were, tried to freeze this fluidity between 'real' and 'hybrid' by first creating a linguistically consistent form of Malay on the basis of what they claimed to have found in the writings they thought authoritative (*Sejarah Melayu*, above all), complemented with spoken forms in areas they thought of central

importance in the Malay world (Riau and Johor). This newly created form of Malay, primarily laid down in the written form of grammars and textbooks, was then provided with the notion of 'good Malay' and then with the notion of 'real Malay'. Thus, a novel form was turned into a norm. It was a Malay that was meant to serve as an effective communication as well as a careful description of the world; it was yet another intervention into the Malay discursive formation as much as it was a disavowal of it. Based on strict and explicit rules of grammar, this real and correct Malay was sooner or later found to be challenged or resisted by almost every form of Malay that was used in daily life, spoken and written. In ignoring its internal dynamics, European explorations of Malay, so intrusive, so influential, have only increased our disorientation.

For Dutch and English students of Malay alike, this confusion is summarized in what could still be considered the two closing statements of the study of nineteenth-century Malay, which in practice meant: written Malay in its standardized form. About *kacukan* Klinkert's dictionary, first published in 1893, is succinct as usual and therefore somewhat unsatisfactory: 'Katjaukan, instead of katjauwan, mixed, diversified, of a language, a people, etc.'³ Klinkert's entry of *sunnguh* is more elaborate and, therefore, more confusing: 'essential, correct, real, truly, serious, indeed, in truth',⁴ a series of terms that is followed by a string of flower-like quotations from manuscripts. Also the entry of *betul* – 'correct, real, true, essential, truthful, sincere'⁵ – is ornamented with succinct examples the first of which is a fine illustration of the search described in the above: *orang Melajoe betoel*, a real Malay (*een echte Maleier*).

'Kachokan or kacho'kan', Wilkinson tells us in his wonderful dictionary, first published in 1901, is

'bastard Malay, bazaar Malay. Etym. (in Kawi) = ignorance of the niceties of speech, vulgarity of speech. Later: = impure and unidiomatic Malay. Cf. (Hg. Tuah 200) the statement: Ragam orang Inderapura ini bukan Melayu; sunggoh-pun beta Melayu kachok-kachokan, bukan seperti Melayu Melaka sunggoh (our Siak songs are not Malay songs; we are Malays indeed but speak a mongrel tongue not the true Malay spoken in Malacca) – to which Hang Tuah replied, Orang Melaka gerangan Melayu kachokan berchampur dengan Jawa Majapahit itu (it may well be that we Malacca Malays speak impure Malay, mixing as we do with the Javans of Majapahit). Nowadays kachok is confused with kachau (mixed) [...] but the earlier meaning rather referred to the non-observance of the subtleties of Malay polite idiom.' *Sungguh* has just a short entry: 'Truth; reality' – an intriguing equation that merely reflected the confusion and fluidity. Wilkinson's entry *betul* is not much longer, and equally intriguing: 'straight; direct; accurate; true; right; just so.'

³ 'katjaukan, i.pl.v. katjauwan, gemengd, vermengd, van een taal, een volk enz.'

⁴ 'wezenlijk, juist, echt, werkelijk, in ernst, ter dege, inderdaad, in waarheid.'

⁵ 'juist, echt, waar, wezenlijk, waarachtig, oprecht.'

The sources Klinkert and Wilkinson used for their definitions were various, and so were the perplexities their definitions created. How could a word mean 'truth' and 'reality', 'correct' and 'essential' at once? No doubt, these nineteenth-century scholars and educationalists had the work of Valentijn and Marsden close at hand. It is very well possible that they were also inspired by the descriptions Abdullah Abdulkadir, renowned language teacher and clerk (1797-1854), gave of the terms. Mainly working for European and American administrators, merchants and missionaries in Singapore and Malacca, Abdullah was inspired by the teachings of his masters when he prepared his printed primers and textbooks for the newly founded educational institutions in the Straits Settlements. In his own writings he made it clear that, in the name of progress and coherence, the time had come to define the real Malay (*Melayu sungguh*), which should be made the solid standard. To him, it was self-evident that a more intensive use of print opened up the road to development and progress – and print and progress asked for the establishment of the 'real Malay'.

One of the many textbooks Abdullah prepared for use in schools was an edition of *Sejarah Melayu*, a loosely connected series of tales about the rulers of Malacca that was to become the authority of 'Malayness' for locals and Westerners alike. *Sejarah Melayu* could very well serve as yet another example of how tradition is invented: in successive reprints, Abdullah's publication became widely available in schools and colleges and, as a result, Europeans as well as Malays were to regard it as the most important and most representative work of the truly Malay literary genius. Originating from the so-called Malay heartland (*alam Melayu*) and dealing with affairs in that very heartland, it became not only the most reliable source of information about the history of the Malacca Strait, serving as a touchstone for many historians to come; it also became an example of the most elegant form conceivable of written Malay. As such it was to serve as the basis of many of the efforts European linguists were to make in constructing 'the' grammar that should account for the curious hotchpotch of discursive forms that were brought together under the term of 'Malay'.

The personal notes Abdullah Abdulkadir added to his edition of *Sejarah Melayu* by way of an introduction are revealing in their clumsy and long-winded bluntness.

'Firstly, the gentlemen who are headmasters of the places where Malay and other languages are taught in Singapore as set up by mister Raffles, they should look for books in Malay that are famous or known to Malays so that they can be taught to children, good and refined Malay that is, so that they become more familiar with their own language so that they will no longer be confused and communicate by way of a language that is a hybrid [*kacukan*] of the languages of the numerous peoples who use the Malay language. If, for instance, a Malay child is used to living together with people of other nations like the English, the Chinese, the Christians, the Hindu, the Dutch, the Javanese, he will hear from his early youth on how all these people mix their own languages with Malay. Then he will listen

to Malays on the basis of those wordings, and of course he will then think: this is Malay. Obviously we already know that. When Malays come from Java, we hear that their wording is mixed with Javanese and Dutch words. Because of that if children learn the correct Malay [*Melayu betul*] like the *Sejarah Melayu*'s, they will certainly be able to separate the trade [*dagang*] and rude [*kasar*] words from the correct [*betul*] Malay words. That is why we wish to teach the real language to the children so that Malay will remain in its beauty, without being scattered here and there.'⁶

The heterogeneization of Malay had to be stopped. Malay discourse had to be rearranged for the sake of education, progress and print. Abdullah may not have been the first one who publicly expressed this need for establishing 'correct Malay' (*bahasa Melayu betul*), he was at least the one whose words, in the nineteenth century, were to have the greatest reach among Malays who read his publications in their formative school-years and subsequently developed the notion of the *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race; Malay nation) (Milner 1995).

Equally telling in this context is Abdullah's anxiety about the disinterest the people of the peninsula themselves showed for what he thought to be their 'language'. In his *Hikayat Abdullah*, a tale that, first published in 1849, was to become yet another core text in the early educational institutions on the islands as well as on the peninsula, he returns to this indifference several times. The people around him could not care less about his appeals to regulate their language, the language teacher tells his readers in deep disgust.

⁶ 'Pertama-tama maka adalah segala tuan-tuan yang menjadi kepala kepada tempat mengajar bahasa Melayu dan lain-lain dalam negeri Singapura yang telah diperbuat oleh tuan Raffles itu, berkehendak mereka itu akan mencari kitab-kitab bahasa Melayu yang telah termasyur, lagi yang diketahui oleh segala orang Melayu akan dia, supaya boleh diajarkan itu kepada segala kanak-kanak karena yaitu bahasa Melayu betul dan halus adanya, supaya boleh mereka itu berjinak-jinakan dengan bahasa dirinja supaya jangan mereka itu berkacau dan bergaul dengan bahasa kacukan daripada bahasa bangsa-bangsa yang banyak yang berbahasa dengan bahasa Melayu. Maka jikalau kiranya anak Melayu yang biasa berkampung-kampung dengan bangsa lain-lain seperti Inggeris dan Cina dan Nasrani dan Hindu dan Belanda dan Jawa, maka daripada kecilnya ia telah menengar segala bangsa itu bercampur dirinya dengan bahasa Melayu. Maka didengarnya orang Melayu pun menurutkan perkataan itu. Maka dapat tiada disangka oleh budak itu, inilah bahasa Melayu. Maka nyatalah ini telah kami ketahui. Maka apabila anak Melayu datang dari negeri Jawa, maka kami dengar akan perkataannya itu bercampur dengan perkataan Jawa dan Belanda. Maka sebab hal yang demikian jikalau kanak-kanak belajar bahasa Melayu yang betul seperti *Sejarah Melayu*, niscaya dapatlah diceraikan oleh mereka itu perkataan dagang dan kasar itu daripada perkataan Melayu betul. Maka sebab perkara yang demikianlah kami hendak ajarkan kepada segala kanak-kanak akan bahasa yang betul supaya bahasa Melayu itu kekal dengan keelokannya dengan tiada berceceran kesana kemari.' (Abdullah 1952:xxi-ii; Spelling has been modernized.)

'It is a matter of wonder and astonishment to me to see how the Malays remain unaware of themselves, living in ignorance because they will not learn their own language or have schools where it may be taught. It is an insult to the intelligence to suppose that a man with no education can become clever by his own effort. Is it not a fact that all races of this world, except the Malays, do learn their own language? The Malays say: "What is the good of learning Malay for it is our own language. Moreover it is useful only in this world. Let us rather learn Arabic which will be useful in the world to come."' (Hill 1970:56.)

How could Malay-speaking people ever be able to face the growing pressures from outsiders if they did not bother to organize their language and create a standard that, by making clear distinctions between 'real and correct language' and 'confused language', was essential in creating the sense of a nation that was strong enough to stop the demise of peninsular life? How would 'the Malays' ever be able to rise on the scale of civilization if they did not want to accept the ideas that were introduced by Europeans? Local fears of losing Islam were unfounded; in this respect Abdullah, a pious Muslim, pointed to himself: he remained a good Muslim to the very end. And if the assimilation of European ideas would lead to a more active resistance against the tyranny of local rulers, then none would be happier than Abdullah who regarded the Sultans and their families as a main source of the misery and confusion in which the peninsular population was living.

We could wonder whether the Malays were really as indifferent and disinterested as the language teacher was complaining and whether his analysis of the situation was not based on wrong assumptions about the people he so much liked and disliked at once. After all, they were faced here with someone who was not really one of them; Abdullah may have talked about 'us, Malays', but himself being of mixed Arab-Tamil descent he was an outsider of sorts. Unwilling to assimilate completely and speaking and writing in a kind of Malay that was different from what local people were used to, he was an outsider and an insider at once, making himself a fine example of the very *kacukan* he so despised. No wonder his famous contemporary, Raja Ali Haji, did not think him worth mentioning in the writings he produced on the island of Penyengat, in the very center of Riau. No wonder Abdullah's name does not occur in the writings that were produced in Kedah or Patani. No wonder he became a hero for the first generation of locally born journalists and writers in the Straits Settlements many of whom were of mixed descent just like him. No wonder his right to speak out about the Malays was to become an issue in this century when the feeling of belonging to the *bangsa Melayu* (Malay nation) was taking shape around an awareness of sharing a distinct language and its complement, a set of behaviors.

Abdullah's stance could serve as a good illustration of the Bakhtinian thesis that concepts like authenticity, purity and order tend to become an issue when outsiders want to actively interfere in a language they do not

use as a first language, but at the same time they refuse to assimilate without reservation to that language and everything it stands for. Like so many other outsiders before and after him, Abdullah was confronted with forms of behavior and ideas the supporters of which kept him at a certain distance. They could not stop him, however, from being intrigued by them. For centuries, these people's primary focus of attention had been the local ruler; for centuries their conversations had been like Hang Tuah's, playful and negotiating. Just like his European and American masters, he was eager to understand the rules and regulations of the discursive formation that these men and women who, for generations living on the coasts of the Malacca Strait and South China Sea, were using in speaking, writing and acting without ever being clearly aware that the core of this formation could serve as the basis of a common identity, a shared culture.

Abdullah lived at the beginning of what we now call the colonial period, which started around 1850. It was a time when, in both the Malay States and the Netherlands Indies, scholars and administrators began a search for terms and categories to systematize and understand the discursive network they found in active use from Patani to Bima, from Kedah to Ambon, from Padang to Menado, from Medan to Banjarmasin, from Singapore to Batavia. It seemed like a configuration in which the elements had so much in common that for these outsiders they were varieties of a single system, and could be covered by a single term: 'Malay'. But what exactly was this system of 'Malay'? Who spoke it most correctly, who used it well? People in Minangkabau, in Kerinci, in Timor, or in Kelantan or Batavia, or in Bima? Or those living in Riau or Pontianak?

Dutch and British students believed that the cradle of Malay was located in the areas around the Strait of Malacca; more precisely, in the Riau-Johor area. There, they thought, the most glorious Malay sultanate of Malacca had had its origin and demise, more or less modeled on the mysterious empire of Srivijaya. There writing was still held in high respect thanks to the endeavors of Raja Ali Haji and his relatives, operating from the islands close to Singapore. Working in a community of literates in which philology was a core discipline – writing is solid, writing is stable – most Europeans operated from the assumption that preference should be given to manuscripts over spoken forms in that area, and in other areas for that matter, Batavia included. In particular *Sejarah Melayu* – and here scholars more or less unknowingly followed Abdullah's footsteps – was declared to represent 'correct and refined' (*betul dan halus*) Malay; it was the work that should serve as the basis of the standard of the language, supported by other manuscripts that had been produced in that area – the fact that the title *Sejarah Melayu* refers to a multitude of texts did not disturb these self-confident statements.

A long list could be given of scholars and administrators who, each in his own way (the absence of women in the project is striking), made a

contribution to the notion of a standard. Roorda van Eijsinga, Von de Wall, Klinkert, Gerth van Wijk, Den Hollander, Pijnappel, Spat, Van Ophuysen, Marsden, Swettenham, Shellabear, Clifford, Wilkinson and Winstedt all created their own form of Malay. Mixing elements of variants and registers of spoken Malay with fragments of manuscripts, each of them presented his creation as 'good Malay' and then almost imperceptibly moved this toward the notion of 'correct Malay' and, then, of 'real Malay'. They all operated, so to speak, in a double movement, prescriptive and descriptive at once, leaving the disparity between the way 'Malay' should be used, consistent and coherent in linguistic terms, and the way it was effectively used, unpredictable and puzzling, unresolved. It is important to realize that they were all outsiders and strangers who presented themselves like insiders of sorts who from their point of authority were able to set the tone and tell the people around the Malacca Strait and South China Sea and beyond how to use Malay if they, too, wanted to be accepted as correct users of Malay.

In doing this, these Dutch and British outsiders placed themselves in a long tradition of prominent and revered authors with *kacukan* origins. Nurrudin al-Raniri, the great seventeenth-century author of religious works, for one: he was from India and learned Malay later in life. Maybe Sri Lanang, the alleged author of *Sejarah Melayu* who, Winstedt claimed, was an outsider like Winstedt himself. Raja Ali Haji, the most important author of Riau in the nineteenth century, who was proud of his Bugis descent. And Abdullah who could be regarded as one of the initiators of the distinction between right and wrong, correct and incorrect, under the influence of print and lithographs.

So obsessed were they with this search for a standard of correct Malay in manuscripts – the closer to the original text, the better – that colonial scholars, dressed in authority, preferred to downgrade the forms of writing and speaking that could claim to be 'correct Malay' along different lines. They frowned upon the lithographs that were published in Singapore, for instance. They overlooked the periodicals that started to appear in almost every urban center of some size in the islands and the peninsula. They dismissed the writings that came from the so-called Sino-Malay press. They hardly took notice of the writings that originated from Kedah, Kelantan, Ambon, Java, or Menado. They laughed about the spoken forms of Malay they found everywhere in Southeast Asia; 'gibberish Malay' they called them. They ignored the central characteristic of Malayness, its fluidity. However, every time they compared the system they had constructed with what people actually said in everyday life, confusion and bafflement were the result; the remark the linguist Van der Tuuk made in the 1870s, which was to resound up to the final years of colonial rule in the Indies, was symptomatic:

'No language has been so affected by the desire for a system as the Malay language, for the very reason there is hardly any system in it. People think it is an easy language – the number of unqualified amateurs sufficiently shows this – and yet so far none of its many students has succeeded in making it clear.'⁷

No doubt, discussions about correct and incorrect Malay have taken place since days of yore among scribes and scholars, invisible and unknown to us now – and it would not be a surprise if most of those who had joined in these discussions were non-Malays by origin, puzzled and confused like Van der Tuuk. Abdullah's words and activities probably did not change the tone of these discussions; his words had a certain impact, however, on the dynamics within Malay, in favor of the centripetal forces that were generated by the colonial masters in Batavia and Singapore who, sooner or later, tended to equate 'correct Malay' with 'real Malay', and assumed that all forms of Malay were either based on a single system of language or could be reduced to such a system.

The notion of 'correct Malay', of 'real Malay' (*Melayu betul*; *Melayu sungguh*) slowly but steadily invaded conversations in colonial Southeast Asia, not only due to European involvement, but due also to Muslim teachings, Chinese and Indian immigration, and radical changes in the economy. In this process, writing – the fixed form, the expression of high culture, the Koran, the newspaper, the emblem of stability – was given priority over speaking; concurrently, the forms that were used in the marketplace were increasingly dismissed as deviations and aberrations, as loose mishmash and gibberish, not 'real', not 'true', not 'correct' even after they appeared in print. The colonial masters and their friends made 'Malay' into a pyramid-like hierarchy, organized on the basis of a distinction between Malay as a 'language of culture' – as expressed in manuscripts that had been produced in Riau as the geographical center of the Malay world – and Malay as a 'language of communication' – as expressed in speaking and later in print in the margins of the Malay world and beyond.

This creation of a Malay standard raises a question that has hardly ever been addressed: Does an outsider who manages to have his claim of possessing knowledge of 'real Malay' accepted become an insider? Does he have the right to pass judgment on the linguistic competence of others? It could be formulated, too, in terms of the inconclusive conversation between Hang Tuah and the singers in Indrapura: Is anybody who speaks Malay entitled to tell other speakers of Malay that they are 'not real', 'incorrect', and 'hybrid' because they have mixed with 'others'?

Things have not really changed since the Indrapurans had their battle of

⁷ 'Geene taal heeft zoo onder stelselzucht geleden als de Maleische juist omdat er zoo weinig stelsel in is. Men houdt haar algemeen voor gemakkelijk – dit blijkt uit de menigte van onbevoegde liefhebbers – en toch is het niemand harer talrijke beoefenaars nog gelukt haar duidelijk te maken' (quoted in Hooykaas 1939:411).

words with Hang Tuah and Van der Tuuk wrote his words of scholarship. The search for the system of 'Malay' has continued, the efforts to freeze the fluidity has been perpetuated. Yet 'Malay' has continued to elude us, students and speakers alike. It has escaped systematization and order, so it seems, constantly emerging in new formations, continuously popping up in new forms, undermining every effort to construct a stable point of order, even in the late colonial days when centripetal forces were gaining the upper hand and the need to stabilize the newly formed standard made itself felt like never before.

In Indonesia, the Oath of Youth (*Sumpah Pemuda*) of 28 October 1928 has become a central point of glory in the creation of Indonesia as an independent Republic: it was the moment when the self-proclaimed representatives of the Indonesian nation declared Malay to be Indonesian in their famous slogan 'One Archipelago, One People, One Language' (*Satu Nusa, Satu Bangsa, Satu Bahasa*). None of the numerous descriptions and retrospectives of the events surrounding the Oath, however, makes it clear what kind of Malay these 'nationalists' had in mind when they decided to make 'Malay' the language of the nation they tried to evoke. For them, this lack of clarity did not really matter; it was, rather, the dream that counted, and whenever these nationalists deliberated on the issue – oh irony – in Dutch, they were obviously not aware of the intricate problems they had to solve in concretizing that dream in everyday life.

Language is the soul of the nation – it became a winged slogan in circles of Indonesian nationalists and beyond, echoing an idea that had taken the imagination of people in Europe a century before. Nationalism being a creation of the oppressors as much as of the oppressed, political and cultural activists in the Indies took European nations as their example. Did not every nation have a single language that served as a unifying force, and should not Indonesians reach a consensus about the idea that Malay, a language that was almost no one's in terms of origin, should be an essential tool in unifying the people on the islands in the new culture they tried to build? Only gradually some Indonesians – Takdir Alisjahbana played the prominent role among them – were capable of substantiating this notion of a national language by constructing a strongly prescriptive grammar. It was a concerted action, undertaken mainly by people of *kacukan* origin once again, originating from places where distinctly different languages were spoken and, hence, Malay was used as a second language. In their conceptualizations and formulations these 'language engineers' leaned as heavily on Dutch publications as politicians did; significantly, they were more than once accused of writing Dutch in Malay words, just as politicians were often accused of being too much inspired by European ideas.

Of course cultural and political nationalists did not like to be reminded of their complicity with the colonial oppressors – and, as a matter of fact, they still do not. Neither were they very proud of their willingness to

cooperate with the Japanese who replaced the Dutch as the masters of the islands. From their perspective, however, the end justified the means; they deemed the creation of a good and correct Malay – they now called it *bahasa Indonesia*, ‘language of Indonesia’ – necessary for the creation of the Indonesian nation.

Bahasa Indonesia was a creation, a hybrid of various forms of Malay, mainly regulated by way of European notions of grammar. In vocabulary as well as in syntax, in morphology as well as in phonology, it is inspired, above all, by written forms of Malay that had been analyzed, systematized, and extended by way of categories that are based on European linguistics, the heritage of Van Ophuyzen and Spat rather than of Raja Ali Haji. It was yet another form of Malay, the product of discussions and a consensus among those who, being of different origins, tried and tested in different discursive formations, had ‘to make things clear and understand each other’ in a language that was not their own, to use Valentijn’s words. In other words, a newly constructed form of *kacukan* was made into ‘high Malay’, to quote Valentijn once more. In the political constellation that was propagated in textbooks, literature and journalism this *bahasa Indonesia* was authoritative enough to push other forms of Malay, that of the manuscripts included, aside; it made them into either ‘tradition’ or ‘dialects’ and substandards. As if Malay, fluid and evasive, was willing to have itself regulated.

Once again people of *kacukan* origin played a predominant role in the efforts to regulate the fluidity of Malay. Politicians such as Hatta, Njoto, and Soekarno, journalists such as B.M. Diah and Mochtar Lubis, writers such as Armijn Pane, Takdir Alisjahbana, Hamka, Sitor Situmorang and Pramodya Ananta Toer had the authority to show the way, and those are just a few of the people who felt committed to concretize the notion of a standard in the young Republic of Indonesia. They did not only show the way to a standardized form of written Malay; as so often happens in the standardization of a national language, their writings also served as a compass for speaking Malay – after all, the experts’ notions of a ‘language’ easily become an integrated part of the linguistic consciousness of a speech community when they work in the shadow of political authority.

And the people in Riau and Johor, the cradle of Malayness, the area that in the colonial days had been made the Malay heartland, the area where the best and most correct Malay was used according to the colonial masters? They stood by and watched how another variety of ‘their’ language became the carrier of yet another set of ideas and values. Some of them expressed their anger about the neglect of the wealth of manuscripts, the ignorance about the tellers of tales among these outsiders. Did not scribes and tellers sufficiently show the strength and flexibility of extant forms of Malay? Why make another form again and not just perpetuate the forms already used? Most of them, however, accepted the existence of this new form of Malay with an open heart. For them, *bahasa Indonesia* was

yet another variation, another form of Malay, next to the others. Like Hang Tuah before them, they continued their journey through life on the waves of fluidity, trying to enjoy themselves, and leaving it to others to decide in how far they were using real or hybrid Malay.

The efforts to impose the standard – 'Indonesian' is its term, the word 'Malay' is not used for this novelty anymore, a political statement – were intensified during the New Order in which technocracy is working hand in hand with politics along different lines than in the Old Order. More concrete attempts are being made to see to it that the sense of a standard be concretized in daily life. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government-supported Center for Language Development and Construction in Jakarta launched several concerted campaigns to propagate the use of what it eventually called *bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar*, a marvelous slogan which is usually translated with 'good and correct Indonesian', but carries the connotations of morally good (*baik*) and philosophically truthful and real (*benar*). The Center's campaigns reached an impressive climax in the publication of a new dictionary and a new grammar in 1988 on the occasion of one of the many Congresses of Language that have been held to keep the momentum of a standard language alive. The dictionary as well as the grammar are meant to serve as the compass for everyone who wants to be a 'good' Indonesian and speak and write correct and good Indonesian, many of the papers and speeches of this Congress emphasized; every state needs a standard language and all citizens of the Republic of Indonesia should abide by it.

And of course the authority of *bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar* continued to be challenged in all corners of the Republic, by people of all walks of life. Lacking a soul, missing warmth, *bahasa Indonesia* is essentially no one's language; it is the language of formal writing and formal speeches and in the increasingly monolithic ideology of the regime it has become an empty shell which had to be filled with other forms of Malay, with other languages. 'High Malay' indeed, so high that it has become inaccessible to almost everyone apart from a few intellectuals and administrators. The prominent Jakartan intellectual Goenawan Mohamad summarized the situation as follows: 'The official and national language spends most of its time not in the wry or witty words of writers but in closed classrooms, between office walls, in seminars and conferences or in the innocuous and interpersonal chatter of distant acquaintances. There is no element of sensuousness. In the monotone environment in which Indonesian lives, the concrete world seems not to exist; it is not relevant. The world has already been changed into an amorphous mass that is present in the mind as nothing more than generic signs' (Goenawan 1993:125).

Also in what now is called the Kingdom of Malaysia, the movement toward standardization and homogenization is taking place through propaganda and engineering. The context in which this happens, however, is a different one, and so was the nationalism that provided the framework

for it. In the Indies, a small group of mainly Dutch-educated people of *kacukan* origin decided that Malay should be the national language of the state they were dreaming of; Malay, they argued, was relatively neutral in political and cultural terms, being the major vehicle of communication among people who had different languages as their mother tongue and the first language of small minorities in some pockets on the islands only. Inspired by a slowly growing nationalist self-confidence, political and cultural leaders in Batavia, later Jakarta, intended to make a language of communication into a language of culture, concepts they had been taught by their Dutch teachers. They designed a new language on the basis of Malay in close cooperation with the colonial masters; authors, education-alists and journalists around this small group of anti-colonials took it to be their task to see to it that this 'Indonesian' gained momentum and spread over the islands. In what now is called Malaysia, a small group of Malay-speaking, locally educated people managed to make their 'own' language the predominant language in the new state. Since the days of Raffles, British administrators and merchants had led Malays to believe they had historical rights to call themselves 'children of the soil', and from that qualification Malays derived the right to keep control over the land of their forefathers and make Malay language the language of authority on the peninsula; the leading position of Malay over Chinese and Indian 'languages' and 'dialects' was just confirmed by the fact that, next to English, it had been the major language of communication whenever members of different ethnic communities met. For a variety of reasons the British masters complied with many of the claims the self-proclaimed Malays made in the hectic years of Emergency, and that is how 'Malay' became one of the tools of nation building. Firstly, in a standardized form it was to make an essential contribution to the strengthening of a Malay identity. Secondly, it was to be imposed upon the so-called immigrants who, up to a certain point for the sake of peace and order, were willing to accept the political superiority of those who called themselves 'children of the soil'.

Here, too, the question of what Malay really was, had to be answered. Here, too, there was a complicity of 'natives' with their colonial masters. Clifford, Shellabear, Winstedt and Wilkinson did the groundwork by making a description of what they thought to be good and correct Malay. Leaning on older written texts such as *Sejarah Melayu* rather than on spoken forms and recent publications, they organized 'Malay' on the basis of categories of European linguistics; differences with the standard Malay in the Indies were primarily in lexicon and morphology. British descriptions that were applied in textbooks and government publications subsequently served Za'ba as a starting point in his efforts to construct the grammar of 'real Malay' that was at least as prescriptive as it was descriptive.

In the 1950s, the Malay-speaking part of the population – a deceptively large minority – managed to have Malay accepted as the national language of the new kingdom, not in the least as a result of the amazingly effective

endeavors of members of the so-called 1950 Generation of Authors (Asas 50). In the first decade after Independence in 1957, authorities in Kuala Lumpur were lacking the vision to implement the proposed Malayization of the land, paying mainly lip service to this drive for the construction and spread of 'correct Malay', the national language being part of an all-encompassing national culture. Only after the societal unrest of 1969 was the Malayization of the Kingdom taken more seriously in a centrally organized drive for economic justice and social harmony; much energy has since been spent in the efforts to strengthen the position of Malay as the national language of Malaysia. Those efforts were not necessarily appreciated beyond the Malay minority.

In particular thanks to the activities of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the government-sponsored think tank of things Malay, the standard for written Malay whose basis had been made by Za'ba, was further elaborated and implemented; as was the case in Indonesia, it then was to serve as the basis for spoken Malay. The complexity of the Dewan's task was aptly summarized by the linguist Asmah hj. Omar:

'Written modern Malay reflects the continuity of the language of Sejarah Melayu, which was the standard language of the Johor empire in the seventeenth century. It is due to this fact that we have the well-known myth that standard Malay of today is the Johor-Riau Malay. In actual fact, the written language and the language of mass media existing today do not represent the variety that the Johor-Riau people use in their dialectal community. The intellectualization that goes with the standard language is as alien to the Johor-Riau people as it is to the Kedah or Kelantan people.' (Asmah 1975:53)

'Intellectualization' and 'alien' are the keywords here; they point to the danger every kind of language engineering is confronted with: the propagated form of Malay may easily lose the support of the men and women in the street who are lacking the education to keep up with what is written and spoken in 'Malay' or 'Malaysian' – or in 'Indonesian', for that matter. Sooner or later they may feel excluded from the nation building that is going on and, instead, keep to their own forms of language in silent acts of resistance and subversion.

Intellectualization is one of the dangers that looms over 'Indonesian' and 'Malaysian'. Slogonization is another one: words and terms are emptied of every concrete meaning so that textbooks, addresses and speeches are hanging in the air, perpetuating one another rather than exploring and linking up with the world of everyday life in Indonesia and Malaysia. Significant in this connection are the persistent rumors in Malaysia that those who do not call themselves 'Malays' often have a better knowledge of this officialese or intellectualse than those who do, and that there is a silent consensus among Indonesians that outsiders know at least as much about *bahasa Indonesia* as they do themselves.

In linguistic terms, standard Indonesian and standard Malaysian – the alternative use of ‘Malay’ and ‘Malaysian’ by authorities in Kuala Lumpur is merely adding to the confusion – are versions or variants of ‘Malay’. A solid knowledge of ‘Indonesian’ or ‘Malaysian’, however, is no guarantee to understand all possible variants of what linguists have now brought together under the name of ‘Malay’. Or rather, knowing written ‘Indonesian’ and ‘Malaysian’ and being able to apply this knowledge in daily life does not mean one is able to understand or appreciate other forms of ‘Malay’, as Asmah points out in the above quotation. Not just the outsiders – those who are taught modern Indonesian or Malaysian in terms of standardized rules and base their speaking on those rules – are having great problems in understanding what is going on in conversations, speeches and performances in daily life. Also those who try to use *bahasa Indonesia* or *bahasa Malaysia* on the basis of their knowledge of another variety of Malay are not seldom at a loss.

In wider terms, the mutual intelligibility among speakers of the variant versions of Malay, in scholarship as well as in politics presented as something self-evident, is limited only; the Malay that is, say, used in the interior of Patani or Kelantan is so different from the Malay that is used in Jakarta, Denpasar or Banjarmasin that even the assumption that we are dealing with one and the same language seems hardly tenable – and the introduction or imposition of ‘Indonesian’ and ‘Malaysian’ has merely added to the confusion in the discussions that writers such as Valentijn and Abdullah initiated about ‘high’ and ‘low’ language, about ‘correct’, ‘real’ and ‘true’ language. So long as we use writing as our compass in defining a language, there is not a real problem: *bahasa Indonesia* and *bahasa Malaysia* are primarily written forms of language and their authority is confirmed by the fact that they are used on official and formal occasions to convey the messages of those in power. Problems start when we try to link this written form with day-to-day speaking – and we do not need to know of the writings of De Saussure and Derrida to be aware of the issues involved in this.

Concurrently, one of the main ironies of the emergence of *bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar* and ‘standard Malaysian’ is that the people who are living in what has for so long been considered the Malay heartland – the coasts around the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea – are no longer thought of as using the most correct and true form of Malay. Riau and Johor, once regarded as the cradle of Malay, have been marginalized, their inhabitants’ speech being dismissed as a dialect. What is more, the inhabitants of the cradle defy, more or less knowingly, the authority of this engineered form of ‘their’ language; they challenge the authority of the center, in linguistic as well as in political terms by simply holding to their own, questioning the authority of those in power, and turning their back on these know-it-alls. The Kedah and Riau ‘dialects’ are a far cry from the Malay that is prescribed by Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta; inter-

estingly enough, the writings of Shahnnon Ahmad and Sutardji – authors who are proud to originate from these so-called margins – equally run against the standardized grain, so confused, so hybrid, so *kacukan*.

What then is the *Melayu benar*, what *Melayu kacukan* in these days of centralization and standardization, of intellectualization and alienation? What is 'real Malay', what 'hybrid Malay'? And who is to decide this? The people in Pekanbaru, Jambi and Kelantan, or the people in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur? What are *bahasa Malaysia* and *bahasa Indonesia*, if not constructions of scholars and administrators, efforts to find a way out of continuous defamiliarizations that are bound to be challenged and to fail? Malay is still escaping – and even printed materials are not able to save us from everlasting confusion.

Authorities in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur – the two centers of government, the two centers of scholarship and language planning – keep telling their subjects that, so far as Malay is concerned, there is modern writing and there is traditional writing, and there is a gap between the two which is reflected and supported by another dichotomy: speaking and writing in *bahasa Indonesia* and *bahasa Malaysia*, on the one hand, and speaking and writing dialects, on the other. 'Modernity' has been practiced in a fast-expanding scale in newspapers and other printed materials since 1930; by way of the modern media, governmental institutions and education, it is spreading from the urban centers on the islands and the peninsula to the interior, to the margin, making a substantial and forceful contribution to political unity and cultural coherence. 'Tradition', created as its complement, is primarily reflected in manuscripts, in the few tellers of tales who are left in the countryside and, on another level, in the daily conversations in so-called dialectical forms of Malay. Problems arise when students of Malay writing go to, say, Pekanbaru in search of this so-called 'tradition' – and is not that term associated with ancient, roots, origins, sources, days gone by?

They will discover that tale telling is still very much alive and that tellers of tales are making use of literary devices and techniques that are usually associated with being modern (Derks 1994). They will also find that older writings are still being recited in public, altogether not so different from the recitations and performances of so-called modern poetry and prose in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. If 'tradition' means 'of the past', then there is nothing 'ancient' about tellers of tales – or are they poets and novelists? – such as Pak Ganti or Pak Taslim. They are as much alive as Shahnnon Ahmad and Pramodya Ananta Toer, now usually regarded the leading artists of the Malay language in, respectively, Malaysia and Indonesia. Pak Taslim and Pak Ganti keep Malay alive just as much as journalists and writers in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur do. The same could be said of other writings that appear beyond the urban centers, other recitations that are taking place in the so-called periphery, in so-called far-away and peripheral

places like Kota Bharu, Bima, Ambon, Alor Setar and Ngawi. Why dismiss them as 'traditional' or 'provincial' and therefore marginal merely because they are not produced in the so-called centers of authority and do not necessarily comply with the rules and regulations of what is now considered the 'real and correct language' and the 'canon'? Why ignore them because they question the validity and relevance of what considers itself as the center of authority?

Another set of problems emerges when we express, pretended or not, our bliss in reading manuscripts and so-called critical editions of manuscripts. Some of us do like to read 'hikayat' and 'syair', the so-called witnesses of the heritage, of tradition, of death. Thus *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, for instance, is kept alive and active, and we certainly do not feel like facing death and demise alone in our efforts to make sense of it. The Tale of Hang Tuah deals with issues and offers solutions to problems in contemporary life as much as it did in the past – and as much as the tales of Pak Ganti and the poetry of Wiji Tukul do. Its wordings are like another flower in a never-finished garland, next to Shahnnon Ahmad's *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia*. The fact that some of the keywords in this so-called 'traditional' text are terms that are usually connected with the experience of modernity – *gelisah*, *rawan*, *sedih* and *rindu*: all of them could be translated with 'anxiety' or 'anguish' – is not the only reason to claim vitality, contemporality and 'modernity' for 'tradition'; they question the relevance of this kind of dichotomy, and of any kind for that matter.

'Real' and 'hybrid', center and periphery, standard and dialect, authentic and mixed, modern and traditional – these are issues that are not only relevant for linguists who too easily have repeated one another in stating that the Malay that is used in the writings originating from Riau is the real, correct and authentic Malay and has been made the basis of modern, central and standardized forms. As soon as we start reading the recently published letters Raja Ali Haji wrote from Penyengat, the very literary center of Riau and Johor in the nineteenth century, we realize that these letters, too, are full of syntactical and morphological constructions that do certainly not follow the standardizing grammars that have allegedly been constructed on the basis of the writings from the so-called cradle of Malay. Like all of his work, Raja Ali Haji's letters, too, should make us wonder once again about how 'real', 'authentic' and 'correct' indeed the written Malay of Riau was. More than that: how it is possible that linguists could ever claim that 'Indonesian' and Malaysian' and their tentative predecessors, are modelled on it? Why do we now experience this form of Malay as hybrid while Raja Ali Haji himself – his *Bustan al-Katibin* and his *Pengertian Bahasa* suggest a great linguistic awareness – would undoubtedly have called it 'real' and 'correct'. The resultant wonder is all the same, and the resultant questions remain undecided. Who exactly determined what

the 'real Malay' should look like, where and how exactly was this distinction between real and hybrid Malay made, how on earth could anyone argue that the newly constructed forms of Malay were inspired by these writings from Penyengat? Why has anyone ever assumed that Malay, the embodiment of fluidity and flexibility, could be domesticated, standardized, or even stabilized? If even the work of Raja Ali Haji is not central to Malay writing and speaking, as scholars keep claiming, why should we then decide that the Indonesian that is made in Jakarta is central to present-day Malay?

These are also relevant issues for anyone who is interested in describing 'Malay' in a wider context. In writing some kind of history of Malay writing, for instance, which necessarily starts out from the assumption that the formation of literary canons and institutions is very closely linked with the notion of correct language, closely related to state-formation, commercialization and the use of printing techniques.

Canonization and standardization operate along concurrent lines, it seems. Some forms, some texts are selected, others are marginalized from a center that has managed to acquire the radiance of wisdom and power. However, this wisdom and power, assumed or not, are not a safe guarantee of being able to distinguish true and real from mixed and hybrid; they create a break in the continuity, and oppose center to periphery, modernity to tradition once and for all. A discursive formation does not necessarily run along the lines a center wants it to run. There is always the challenge, the resistance. There is always the margin that claims to be another center and succeeds in making everything solid melt into air.

Such considerations should make us decide that every manifestation of Malay writing should be approached as break and continuity, traditional and modern at once. A gap could be created, for instance, between *Syair Ikan Terubuk* (The Poem of the Herring) and 'Nyanyi Sunyi' (Lonely Songs) in terms of tradition and modernity, if only because the author of the first is anonymous and the author of the second is Amir Hamzah, a member of the board of editors of the prestigious journal *Poedjangga Baroe* in Batavia; moreover, the date of appearance of the first is shrouded in mystery and the date of the second is clearly 1941, and Malay scholarship has it that the absence and presence of names and dates of creation could be used as a conclusive criterion for making a distinction between 'old' and 'new'. At the same time, however, it could very well be argued that the two poems form a continuity. They are mutually intelligible. They both try to come to terms with human restlessness. A good knowledge of 'The Poem of the Herring' is as enlightening in reading 'Lonely Songs' as the other way around. A similar question could be posed, a similar ambivalent conclusion could be drawn if we juxtapose, for instance, Muhamad Bakir's *Hikayat Sempurna Jaya* and Putu Wijaya's *Perang*, two Malay tales that repeat tales of the Javanese shadowplay repertoire with a vengeance. The fact that the first is offered in a manuscript in Arabic script

and was produced at the end of the nineteenth century, the other in the form of a printed book that appeared at the end of the twentieth century could be used to assume a break because print and handwriting are usually considered as manifestation of different types of culture. But then, they are both composed in Malay, and they both challenge the well-known repertoire of Javanese tales with irony and realism of a kind, and those could be considerations to place them in a continuity. And why not link Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia*, a tale that was printed in Jakarta in 1981, with Raja Culan's *Misa Melayu* or with Raja Ali Haji's *Tuhfat an-Nafis*, manuscripts that were composed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, for the simple reason that all three of them try to make sense of human memory and reminiscence in forms of Malay that seem to be mutually intelligible, as well? In textbooks on Malay writing the three names are never found together in the index whereas they clearly concur in theme and exploration of that theme and are very well able to enlighten one another. And so on, and so forth.

A term like 'tradition' is a deceptive one if only because every writing has a tradition in that it stands in a series. 'Tradition' suggests a state of freezing and completeness whereas every recitation, every reading is a difference within a repetition. Texts that were composed a long time ago not only confront their anxious public with death and fulfillment, they also show a way to salvation – and some of them will keep doing that, dragging other texts in their wake. The anonymous *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is contemporary to, say, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* because they are both still being read and interpreted. Terms like 'periphery' and 'margin' are deceptive because they suggest there is a solid center that is accepted and appreciated as such – and there is not.

Therefore, 'periphery' and 'center' may not be very adequate or satisfying terms either in defining the dynamics or transformations in Malay writing. The poems of Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Chairil Anwar, and Ibrahim Sattah – all of them authors who were tried and tested in the Malay heartland – are voices from the center that keep telling the periphery on Java: 'this is the real Malay, you are *kacukan*'. At the same time, however, their work could be seen as voices of the periphery that challenge the authority of the political and cultural center of the 'real Malay' as propagated by Jakarta and Java; they may even force it to change its self-confident tone. The relationships between so-called modern writers on the peninsula and those who are writing in Batavia, Djakarta, and Jakarta is equally confusing and indeterminate. The latter may indeed be *sebenarnya* on the basis of their alleged sophistication and their capacity to assimilate elements from the outside, on the basis of their hybridity, that is. At the same time, however, the peninsular writers may be seen as *sebenarnya* because they can claim to operate from the Malay heartland where Malay has been used as a language of culture rather than as a language of communication, to use the old colonial dichotomy once again that was

introduced to make sense of the world of Malay writing and speaking.

There is the case of Hamka, the man from Minangkabau (on the western part of Sumatra) who, after an early success in Minangkabau writing, decided to use, instead, the Malay that had been developed by the Dutch in the late colonial days. Of Ahmad Talu, the Minangkabau who lived in Penang and shifted his Malay register, accordingly, to please his peninsular readers and make money. Shamsuddin Saleh, the man from Siak, moved to the peninsula and moved from Siak Malay to Singaporean Malay. Arena Wati, the Buginese, decided to shift to Malay, and then moved to Malaya. What are they, where do they stand in the formation of Malay? *Syair Perang Makassar*, a Malay poem that was written in Makassar, the heartland of Makassarese and Bugis in the seventeenth century. *Hikayat Patani*, a collection of Malay tales that were conceptualized in a hostile Thai context in the nineteenth century. Are they part of the real and authentic Malay, or are they peripheral? Are they 'traditional' and 'dead' when they are still being read and still are of relevance if we want to make sense of the writings of so-called modern authors like Arena Wati and Othman Kelantan?

The same inconclusiveness holds for authors like Nuruddin ar-Raniri, Raja Ali Haji, Abdullah Abdulkadir, Muhammad Bakir, Sheikh al-Hadi, Armijn Pane, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer. All of them emerged from a non-Malay world. All of them, somehow, felt to be like a center of authority for justifying their claim that they were offering the 'real Malay' and opened up to the 'true Malay'. All of them are *kacukan* and *sunnguh* at once; their writing was made exemplary by one center of authority or the other, setting the tone, confirming the norm that was constructed as the 'real' or 'true'. If the real Malay is the hybrid, however, then the situation is confusing and puzzling. Inconclusive, that is.

Talking about Malay is creating a tale of evasions and shifts, and the efforts to impose a hierarchy upon the distinctions between Indonesian and Malaysian, between the peninsula and the islands, between the world around the Strait of Malacca and the world beyond, between 'good and correct', 'wrong and incorrect', 'real' and 'hybrid' are doomed to remain indeterminate. Doomed they are because they ignore the dynamics that are generated by the very tension between *sunnguh* and *kacukan*; they remain indefinite and inconclusive, dependent as they are on the perspective from which 'Malay' is looked at – and perspectives change constantly. They silence the numerous voices that should be heard simply because these voices make themselves heard. Hang Tuah, Tun Jenal, and the lady singers of Indrapura were aware of the issue of hybridity and reality within the realm of Malay discourse. They were aware of the fact that discussions rather than a conclusion kept the fluidity intact. They discussed 'Malayness' in terms of *sunnguh* and *kacukan* but left the issue of its essence unresolved, focusing, instead, on the willingness to feel related. By doing

so they confirmed the fluidity and ephemerality of Malay.

The question of what is *sungguh* and what is *kacukan*, what is 'real' and what is 'hybrid', what the 'center' and what the 'periphery', the narrator and the heroes of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* tell us, is a matter of perspective; as perspectives are changing all the time, so is the answer to such questions. We all are both, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* should make us conclude, and it is significant that Tuah himself concludes that inconclusive conclusion with a dance – a dance that everybody enjoys. 'We are playing relatives', his host tells us – and the very ambivalence of that sentence may be the heart of Malayness, and of Malay writing.

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