OCCIDENTALISM IN THE MALAY WORLD: THE WEST THROUGH THE EYES OF ABDULLAH MUNSHI

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Abstract

This article is about how the West was imagined, described and reproduced by Abdullah Munshi. Thus far we have encountered descriptions of the non-Western world by the West, which includes that of the Malays by European travellers, scientists and colonial scholar-administrators. It is thus also critical to appraise knowledge of the occident from the other and an ambivalent self such as in the person Abdullah Munshi. Abdullah's writings were journalistic and sociological in nature. The production of his writings under conditions of early colonialism has not been sufficiently studied from the perspective of self and the other, Western and non-Western. As such, this article is significantly the first of such studies on Malay intellectual history. Abdullah's autobiography, the *Hikayat Abdullah*, is used to identify a form of Malay Occidentalism. In a sense, this article plays a cataloguing role indicating the scope and character of the Malay imagination of the West. It presents part of the larger study aimed at developing a framework on Malay attitudes and representations of Europe and Western civilization.

Keywords: Colonialism, occidentalism, orientalism, other, printing, self

Introduction

This essay is about how the West was imagined, constructed, described, projected, and represented by the scribe in Abdullah Munshi (1796–1854). As the West has, since early modern times,[2] imagined and produced that part of the world called the Orient, including much on the Malay world and the Malays, it is critical to appraise the knowledge of the Occident produced by their "other." In this instance, Abdullah, was both the object and subject of study. He was within Malay society, and external to it. He was Self and Other at the same time.

Hence, we see the manner by which the West is perceived and constructed by Abdullah. This facet of scholarship is almost non-existent in its coherent form. What is significant is that we deliberately engage with images of Self and Other, not only where the West is Self, but also where the West is Other. Hence, this essay traces and analyses the intellectual history of the Malays. It is significantly the first of such studies based on non-fiction Malay sources. Abdullah's autobiography, *Hikayat Abdullah*, the most significant of his writings, is studied to identify a form of Malay Occidentalism. In a sense, this essay plays a cataloguing role indicating the scope and character of the Malay imagination of the West. It presents part of the larger study aimed at developing a framework on Malay attitudes and representations of Europe and Western civilization.

The sentiment in Malaysia (and elsewhere in mainstream discourse too) is that occidentalism is a derogatory word which smacks of a scandalized form of knowledge about the West. And many a Malaysian academic have qualms over using the word "occidentalism" and "occidentalist," even labels describing certain scholars as "occidentalists" were deemed to be false and inaccurate. An unencumbered definition is that "occidentalism" is a discourse and a corpus about the West or the Occident produced by the non-Western world; and an "occidentalist" is one who studies in the sense of investigating and revealing the Occident resonating from his consciousness of identity through intellectual production and consumption.

The *orang putih* (white man) and *barat* (the West) are Malay identification markers of the West produced at the popular and intellectual levels in Malay society, both affirming and negating at the same time. In close proximity to Malay society is the Thai *farang*, which was argued as an occidentalizing project conceived and proceeded with through Siam's historical and cultural experiences with or against the West.[3] Throughout the Malay narrative, there has been instances of the Malay constructing and of producing knowledge about Europe and the West.

This may be referred to as "occidentalism." To grapple with "occidentalism," we need to be engaged with its Other, that is, "orientalism." We have to place it against the other side of the same coin. Edward Said's 1978 book titled *Orientalism* could also have been most aptly known as "occidentalism." But occidentalism should not be seen as a program for revenge.[4] It cannot be so because it does not exist in the same conditions that has produced orientalism.

While Hassan Hanafi in his essay titled "From Orientalism to Occidentalism" describes orientalism as having been the *Victim*[5] of historicism from its formation via meticulous and microscopic analysis indifferent to meaning and significance, occidentalism is its counter, developed in the Orient in order to study the West from a non-Western perspective.[6]

To this effect, if "orientalism" refers to the ways, manners, methodologies, discourses and institutions constructed and produced the entity called "the Orient", "occidentalism" is the binary opposite of that processes. And that refers to the constructions, corpus, discourses, images, positions and views about the West, Europe, Europeans, European civilization, Anglo-Saxon history and society, or the geographical area that we call the Occident. This also include the geocultural and geopolitical areas and domains that we call the Occidental world.

As such, occidentalism also refers to the engagement, criticism and response to colonialism, of colonial knowledge and about the colonial world by colonized subjects. Simply put, occidentalism are views of the East toward the West. It is any production or reproduction of the non-Western world about the West both as to the discourse, and to the corpus.[7] Abdullah's discourse therefore was not necessarily counter to the European worldview.

Abdullah Munshi as Subject and Object of Colonialism

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, popularly known as Abdullah Munshi (1796–1854) was perhaps the earliest writer and thinker in the world[8] to be critical of both the Malays and the West. "The Father of Modern Malay Literature" is an epithet often ascribed to Abdullah, regarded as a Malay author who lived in Melaka and Singapore during the first half of the nineteenth century. The importance of his work for modern Malay literature has been commented and affirmed by many.[9] Abdullah, through his writings, can also be described as the earliest Malay journalist, whose narratives on his society at that time, constituted a major sociological representation of the era. He was a pioneer sociologist from the Malay world, although not in an academic mode. Two of his works, *Hikayat Abdullah* (*Tale of Abdullah*) and *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan* (*Account of Abdullah's Voyage to Kelantan*) are stories most often singled out as those that form the bridge between traditional and modern Malay writing (Van der Putten, 2006). Written in 1843, the former, first published in Malay (Jawi) script in a lithograph edition in 1849, according to Abdullah, was to establish continuity with Malay literary tradition, such as the *Sejarah Melayu* (*The Malay Annals*).[10]

In the context of Abdullah's views on the West, this essay foregrounds his authorial self as both a subject and object of colonialism/Malay-Muslim community in Melaka. In so doing, it intends to capture the leitmotif of Abdullah's occidental discourse, i.e., how Abdullah produced himself and Western civilization. It is quite inevitable that Abdullah would write about any other subject.[11] This study however attempts to re-examine and re-evaluate his contributions based on his most important work, *Hikayat Abdullah* in light of his relationship to the West and to Western civilization.

Hikayat Abdullah was written in response to a request made by his "beloved White Friend" in 1840. Hadijah Rahmat (2001:218) citing Skinner (1978) and Trail (1981) suggested that Abdullah's friend was the missionary, Alfred North, who attached a document, dated at Singapore in 1843, to a copy of the *Hikayat* which he sent to the Library of Congress in Washington. The document, published by Skinner (1978) throws considerable light on how Abdullah was motivated and influenced by North in writing not only his *Hikayat Abdullah*, but also his travelogue, *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah.* In his

document, Alfred North wrote:

> Sometime after, I suggested to him that he might compose a work of deep interest, such as had never been thought of by any Malay, unless an exception be found in the title work mentioned in *Marsden's Malay Grammar*, page 214. I told him that I had never found anything in the Malay language except silly tales, useful indeed as showing how words are used, but containing nothing calculated to improve the minds of the people; and that it was a sad error into which they had fallen in supposing everyday occurences, and all manner of things about them, too vulgar to be subjects of grave composition; nay, that unless they could be convinced of their error, they could never go forward a single step in civilization. I gave him a list of topics on which it would proper enlarge a little, in writing a memoir of himself, such as the character of his father, his opinions, treatment of children, and the like; then the circumstances of his own early education, and whatever interest he could recollect of his whole life; with these things should be interspersed remarks on the characters of the eminent men he had taught. Raffles, Dr Milne, Crawfurd, and others; on Malay superstitions, schools, domestic life; their rajas, customs, laws, and whatever Europeans would like to be informed of, which would naturally be concealed from their observation. From these genera; hints he has composed a work of singular interest, in beautiful Malay, and in all respects a new thing in the language. He has dwelt much on the character of one of the Malay Sultans of Singapore, and the fortunes of his family. He has taken particular pains to introduce many of the everyday phrases and idioms of the people; so that the book is also a store house for the student of the language (Skinner, 1978:480–81 in Hadijah, 2001).

Indeed, Abdullah had worked for North as a teacher and translator. A remarkable symbiosis seemed to have developed between the two men; but North's motives were not entirely altruistic (Sweeney, 2006). In many ways, Abdullah is seen as a controversial figure. He is almost always described as a traitor to the Malays. His identity to the Malay consciousness is not always pleasant. At times, he has been identified as an Indian. His Malayness has much been questioned. He has also been regarded as a slave to Western imperialism. One frequently comes across such views in various writings found in the Malay press and journals. According to

Shaharuddin Maaruf (1988), such judgements on Abdullah is due to several reasons. The first reason cited is due to the history of colonialism and imperialism in the region. The kind of nationalism that has developed among many Malays in reponse to colonialism frowns on all criticism of Malay society. Shaharuddin describes it as "a partisanship that lacks objectivity" (pg. 24). Critics of Malay society run the risk of being regarded as anti-Malay and pro-non-Malays, and Abdullah is a victim.

The second reason offered by Shaharuddin is that Abdullah is regarded as a traitor mainly for ideological reasons. According to Shaharuddin, his thinking is basically reformist, in that he searches for the roots of Malay problems within Malay society itself. Subsequently he is denounced by the dominant Malay elite (pg. 24).

Shaharuddin urges that Abdullah be understood contextually. While it is true that he lived and wrote at a time when consciousness of the injustice of Western imperialism was not high in Malaya (pg. 25), his consciousness of European civilization through his encounters with such figures as Raffles, Thomson and Farquhar should be seen as particularly significant in how he extends the "spirit" of the Enlightenment in Melaka and Singapore. Shaharuddin defends Abdullah as a conscious and direct collaborator of British colonialism, for he died long before the British Forward Movement in 1874. However, it can be argued that subconsciously the notions of social justice, humanity, rationalism, individualism, equality, freedom, reform, progress, human development and leadership advocated by Islam (pg. 25) underlie his work. Although, as Shaharuddin argues, there is a conscious attempt to link Islamic values to social philosophy, Abdullah was also intellectually and emotionally engaged with notions of civilization as derived from European Enlightenment.

Projecting European Civilization

According to Cheah Boon Kheng (2009) in his foreword, *Hikayat Abdullah* is an important record of social and political change of not only Singapore and Melaka at the turn of the 19th century, but also of the southern Malay kingdoms of Johor and Riau-Lingga. But what is significant here is that the *Hikayat* presents a contemporary

Malay viewpoint of the changes of European rule in Melaka, the opening of the British settlement in Singapore in 1819, and the cessation of Singapore to the East India Company.

Abdullah introduced new doctrines from a Europe that was excited with the fresh climate of the Enlightenment, a Europe liberating itself from a higher sovereign authority, and a Europe delivering itself from the disenchantment of nature, the desecularization of politics and the deconsecration of values.[12] I am inclined to locate Abdullah within a particular moment, a time of transition – that of the deliverance of man "first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language." I cite Dutch theologian C.A. Van Peursen, in explaining secularization. He elaborated that it is the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols. It represents "defatalization of history," the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands, that he can no longer blame fortune or the furies for what he does with it. Secularization occurs when man turns his attention away from world's beyond and toward this world and this time (cited in Cox, 1965:244).

In this instance, it is well known that Abdullah Munshi wrote his works in close rapport with missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM), who based their activities in the Straits Settlements. Similar to other parts of Asia and beyond, the missionaries did not make many converts, and focused their endeavours on education and dissemination of "God's word" through the printing press. Van der Putten in "Abdullah and the Missionaries"[13] provides a background of Abdullah's occidental milieu in Melaka. One of the necessary preparations was the establishment of a school system, in which Western arts and sciences were taught along with basic subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. These were expected to change indigenous society and prepare people for the reception of the Christian message. That message must have been imbued in Abdullah – the message of that interconnectedness of "religious truth, social progress, and the advance of scientific understanding," and that "All truth derived ultimately from the same Christian source. Western

learning in India would naturally create the desire for the Christian truth on which it was built."[14]

In describing the West, Abdullah defatalized the Malay self. He was mainly working for European and American administrators, merchants and missionaries in Singapore and Malacca. Inspired by the teachings of his masters when he prepared his primers and textbooks for the newly founded educational institutions in the Straits Settlements, Abdullah makes it clear in his own writings, that, in the name of progress and coherence, the time had come to define the "real Malay", which should be made the solid standard for everyone who used the Malay language. Milner (2002:10) pertinently describes that Abdullah's writings immediately reveal both the potential for vigorous Malay debate and the pervasive influence of colonialism.

We note that print technology has made both Euro centrism and later the occidental discourse of Abdullah possible. Printing, another major missionary activity would have far-reaching effects. Similar to education, the printing press was designed to prepare the "natives" for the reception of Christian truth by means of publications expounding science and general knowledge accompanied by religious tracts.

The period brought the Malay world into Western consciousness, leading to a particular construction of the orient – in what we call orientalism. As we attempt to examine the other side of Abdullah as a colonial subject, i.e. a critical non-passive subject with Europe and the West as his object of observation, we encounter the beginnings of Malay printing in the Peninsular centered in Melaka and Singapore.[15]

What is significant to note is that Abdullah finds it self-evident that a more intensive use of print opened up the road to development and progress. According to Maier (2004:13), Abdullah conceptualized that print and progress demanded of the "real Malay" by the establishment. As an admirer of the West and European civilization, Abdullah realizes the power of print.

In Abdullah's worldview, the space created within the sacred/traditional cosmology of the Malays was interrupted by the practice of *time* and *location*, the former referring to the "now" or "present" sense of it, and the latter, to the "world" or "worldly" sense of it. Thus, the term *secular*, coming from the Latin *saeculum*, means

"this age" or "the present time", and this age or the present time refers to events in this world. It also means "contemporary events". This emphasis on meaning, as we shall see in context, is set on a particular time or period in the world viewed as a *historical process* (al-Attas**,** 1978:14). Abdullah's worldview proposed new principles around which Malay society in the future might be articulated. What is significant is that Abdullah resonated the West, offering insights into the social system which he sought to replace while producing knowledge of a new civilization in that context. Abdullah reflected a post-enlightenment Europe upon the Malay world. Abdullah portrayed the West as benefactor. He saw the occident in print technology and printing.

To Abdullah, print creates the capacity of society to narrate, to tell stories, to organize itself around an identity. This can be seen in Abdullah's preparation and edition of *Sulalat as-Salatin* (*Genealogy of Rulers*). To a European (and ironically given by a European too), the *Malay Annals* was in many ways a strange name for a series of tales without any date or year. Europeans (see for example, Raffles, and Winstedt) as well as Malays, tended to regard it as the most important and most representative work of truly Malay literary genius. The European construction of the Malay existed alongside Abdullah is use of print as a medium for the construction of self, and the Other.

Interestingly, Abdullah's stance could serve as a good illustration of the Bakhtinian thesis (Bakhtin, 1981) that concepts such as authenticity, purity, identity and order, tend to become issues only when outsiders actively interfere in a language that they do not use as their first language – while at the same time, refusing to fully familiarize themselves with that language and everything it stands for. Abdullah was confronted with forms of behaviour and ideas whose supporters, playing relatives, kept him at a certain distance. But they could not stop Abdullah from trying to define their Malayness. Just like his colonial orientalists, Abdullah was eager to understand the rules and regulations of the discursive configuration of the society that he was in (but out of place) and how order was manifested in their speaking, writing and acting, without members of that society being aware that the core of the configuration could (or should) serve as the basis of a common identity, a shared culture, an ethnicity, a nation (Maier, 2004:16).

The milieu in which Abdullah lived and worked, in which philology and hermeneutics were core disciplines, established writing as a stable form of language. The manuscript was preferred over spoken forms. Hence, the unresolved status between what was spoken and what was written. From a Eurocentric perspective, there was confusion. The confusion was organized around a distinction between Malay as a "language of culture" – expressed in manuscripts; and Malay as a "language of communication" – expressed in speaking and later in print in the margins of the Malay world and beyond (Maier, 2004:19).

Abdullah's legacies, apart from beginning a new genre in Malay letters, had created an environment of printed materials in Malay. The number and variety of periodicals, pamphlets, and books that spread over the Peninsular and the Island were amazing (*Proudfoot*, 1993). There was much excitement over the visual word. Printed materials made Malay writing more public, more visible, more lasting than it had ever been before by letters, manuscripts, and oral performances – the three most prominent manifestations of Malay writing that had conferred feelings of communality.

Clearly, Abdullah was aware of the advantages of print culture. His reflections on the subject are not the only reason why Abdullah is usually presented as one of the fathers of modernity in the Malay-speaking world. In his writings, he also tried to wake his readers up from their slumber, inciting them to fight the declines of Malay culture. Abdullah was convinced that European civilization offered the tools needed to bring this decline to a standstill. In Abdullah's view, the adoption of European thinking and techniques could move the Malays forward.

Abdullah's praise of print was embedded in a set of paragraphs in which he tried to convince his readers how important reading and writing were for understanding a language: "When someone wants to understand his own language, he should scribe for books that are famous for their beautiful composition, for the correctness of their language, and for the praise that people bestow upon them." Maier (2004:212–13) notes that writing and reading Malay, not speaking and hearing Malay, is the basis for understanding a language's essence in Abdullah's view; and the more people know how to write and read, the better.

The *Bangsa* in Abdullah: Returning to and Departing from the West

How Abdullah perceived the "traditional" Malay polity represents the dominant theme in his writings. Historian Anthony Milner's approach in understanding colonial Malays, in particular thoughts and insights by Malay society on the world, is through examining Abdullah's writings. In his book The *Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, Milner, although attempting to "reveal" the Malay polity and how it has been influenced by colonialism, has inadvertently reflected upon the Malay production of the West. What Abdullah produced was not only a colonial discourse on Malay society, but also an occidentalist discourse on the West. Abdullah's writings suggested an engagement with the British and post-Enlightenment life and attitudes in England, and things English.

Abdullah Munshi's principal works were the renowned travel accounts and an autobiography. But there is another piece that has not generally been in our consciousness. This is the *Hikayat Dunia*. He wrote along an ambivalent location, but Milner saw him more of an outsider rather than an insider. Although he wrote in Malay and was well versed in what would later be called the classic of Malay literature, Abdullah was the subject, not of a sultanate but of the British-governed Straits Settlements. He lived in what some might have considered hostile British enclaves in the Malay world of the early nineteenth century. Nor was Abdullah identified unambigiously or primarily as a member of the Malay community within the Settlements (Milner, 2002:12). Abdullah was described as a "Tamilian of Southern Hindustan" and was said to dress in the style of Malacca Tamils (Hill, 1955). The object and subject of Abdullah calls for a redefiniton of the Malay as a category.[16] In Abdullah's writings, he focusses specifically on "the Malays" as a people, not on individual sultanates or communities. Abdullah certainly lived in modern times. Writing was a major means of communication, which was not present earlier. Abdullah had not experienced the domain of the oral tradition.

Abdullah's attitudes towards the Western world manifested the entire being of "becoming Malay" – a *problematique* that could have easily dominated the entire study, for the "Malay" itself, when connected with being "on the move" was also a product of European

history, and at the same time, produced and extended that historical process. The being of Abdullah was central to this observation, for it was in the being of Abdullah that the "Malay" returned to be the subject of redefinition.

In the process, Abdullah produced and reproduced *his* sense of self, identity and ethnicity through the ignorance of the Malays about themselves, and in particular in the dimension of language "because they will not learn their own language or have schools where it may be taught" (Abdullah, pg. 57). He found that not having an education would be insulting to the intelligence. Abdullah had asked: "Is it not a fact that all races of this world, except the Malays, do learn their own language?"

The notion of a "Malay race" (*bangsa Melayu*) in the context of the Straits Settlements and the British-protected Malay states, was, over time, given new connotations and assumed a formidable potency. According to Milner (2002:12) it subsequently became a less porous category. In retrospect, Abdullah's writings can be seen to have contributed to this new ethnicity. But Milner emphasizes that Abdullah's own ethnic identity was formed in the earlier, more fluid ethnic situation. He notes that the way Abdullah presented or defined himself changed. Interestingly, in his later writings in 1849, for instance, Abdullah used the phrase "we Malays" although a few years earlier he still spoke of "the Malays." Abdullah had apparently excluded himself from the *orang Melayu*. He ultimately began to view and implied the need to see the self and community in alternative ways.

Some Occidental Images

Abdullah portrayed European civilization and the Western system of government as fair and just. In Chapter 5 of *Hikayat Abdullah* on "Major Farquhar in Malacca," he described Farquhar as well-liked by all.

> People of all the four races in Malacca greatly liked Mr Farquhar and were glad to have him as Resident. At that time, Malacca was at peace and much merchandise went in and out, coming from all countries trading with it. Even poor people could earn their living, much more so those already rich. It was rare to find Malacca folk going overseas or elsewhere to earn their living. More commonly,

> men from other countries came to Malacca to make a living, marrying and bringing up their families there, where the customs and laws were good. Each race was under its own "Kapitan," and each "Kapitan" had under him the elders. They settled lawsuits and disputes, or if unsettled they were brought before the *Justisa*. Although the country was English, its laws and customs were Dutch. For instance, proceedings in the courts and the titles of important officials were in the Dutch language (*Ibid*., pg. 64).

Abdullah had great admiration for Farquhar. To him, Farquhar was tolerant, fair and patient. Farquhar, to Abdullah's mind, was a man who treated other men equally.

> It was Mr Farquhar's nature to be patient and tolerant of other people's faults; and he treated both rich and poor alike, never looking on one person as more important than another. If a man however poor and lowly came to him with a complaint he would attend to him quickly and listen carefully, giving advice and direction until the man's mind was set at rest, so that he returned home full of gratitude. Whenever he travelled about in his carriage or on horseback, the rich and poor, and the children too, saluted him and he at once returned the compliment. He was ever generous to all the servants of Allah (*Ibid*., pg. 69).

The image of the European through the examples of a Mr Bean and the English drunken sailors who made the people of Melaka aggravated and alarmed "were held to be typical of the behaviour of all Englishmen" by the peoples in Melaka. It is pertinent to note this as one of the earliest instances of stereotyping – not by Abdullah himself, but on Abdullah's observations of the society in Melaka. An example of the construction of Europe and of the Europeans by the various ethnicities in Melaka at that time, including Malay is of significance here. And Abdullah was quick to use the Malay proverb "Mud on a buffalo would smear the whole herd."

The section titled "Mr Raffles in Malacca" displays Abdullah's production of the Occident. His description of Raffles goes as follows:

> Now as to Mr. Raffles physical features I noticed that he was medium build, neither tall nor short, neither fat nor thin. He was broad of brow, a sign of his care and thoroughness; round-headed with a projecting forehead, showing his intelligence. He had light

> brown hair, indicative of bravery; large ears, the mark of a ready listener. He had thick eye-brows, his left eye watered slightly from a cast; his nose was straight and his cheeks slightly hollow. His lips were thin, denoting his skill in speech, his tongue gentle and his mouth wide; his neck tapering; his complexion not very clear; his chest was full and his waist slender. He walked with a slight stoop (pg. 72–73).

As to Raffles character, Abdullah noticed that he (Raffles) always "looked thoughtful".

> He was very good at paying due respect to people in a friendly manner. He treated everyone with proper deference, giving to each his proper title when he spoke. Moreover, he was extremely tactful in ending a difficult conversation. He was solicitous of the feelings of others, and open-handed with the poor. He spoke in smiles. He took the most active interest in historical research. Whatever he found to do, he adopted no half-measures, but saw it through to the finish. When he had no work to do other than reading or writing, he liked to retire to a quiet place. When he was occupied in studies or conversation, he was unwilling to meet anyone who came to the house until he had finished. I saw that he kept rigidly to his time-table of work, not mixing one thing with another. I noticed also a habit of his in the evening after he had taken tea with his friends. There was an ink-stand and a place for pen and paper on his large writing table, and two lighted candles. After he had walked to and fro for long enough, he would lie on the table on his back staring upwards and close his eyes as though asleep. Two or three time I thought he was actually asleep, but a moment later he would jump up quickly and start writing. Then he would again lie down. This was his behaviour every night up to eleven or twelve o'clock when he went to bed. Every day it was the same, except occasionally when his friends came in. When morning came he would rise and fetch what he had been writing the night before, and walk up and down reading it. Out of ten pages, he would take perhaps three or four and give them to a writer to copy out. The rest he would tear up and throw away (pg.73).

His fondness of European rule (read English) was explicitly expressed. He describes Minto's "polite acknolwledgement" of the colonial subject.

> Never once did I see him draw attention to his high position by his behaviour or his style of dress, though his employees dressed

> themselves like important officials with silk umbrellas and watches and smart uniforms. Several of them annoyed and oppressed people in the market and the shops. People were afraid of them because they were the servants of a high official. They remembered the habits of Malay princes and the well-to-do Chinese. If their employees did anything to ordinary folk, no action could be taken against them. If one of them was killed, seven lives would be taken in revenge (*Ibid*.)
>
> Such deeds and behaviour remained long in the memories of other men, for no one told another and the tale passed around until it became firmly rooted in people's minds (*Ibid*., pg.72).

Conclusion

Abdullah's observations on the process of stereotyping has laid the seeds of Malay Occidental discourse on the West. He was conscious of the phenomenon of public opinion and how a phenomenon might generate popular and intellectual production and reproduction of the other. It is the earliest Malay writing on the Occident.[17] The English language and its speakers were to Abdullah the superior within the European race. Raffles was exemplar, and to Abdullah, a beacon of enlightenment. What we know of the nascent colonial world centring in Melaka and Singapore, came from Abdullah.

Abdullah's image of the West was further reinforced through the "founding" of what he termed as "the Singapore institution", referring to Raffles' intention of building a place of learning. Abdullah's consciousness as subject was on the benevolence of civilization of the West. Raffles was a representative of that civilization. To Abdullah, "Every word he spoke was honest and sincere".

> Never once did he magnify his own importance or belittle that of others... Even should I die and return to this world in another life, I should never again meet such a man (pg. 170–71).

He provided the image of the honest and trustworthy human being. He trusted them to the extent that he appointed Thomsen as his executor ... "my agent, who would send them to my wife and children in Malacca. I added that I drew up this document of my own free will" (pg. 177).

Abdullah had always been impressed with the skill and ingenuity of the white men, "the things I had seen and had heard intelligent

Englishmen discuss until I came to the subject of steamships." He informed us that his friends "became angry and argued with me." They called Abdullah a liar and ridiculed him for telling them that such things existed. They accused him of glorifying the achievements of the English: "You always magnify the prowess of the English and tell us the most impossible things ..." (pg. 206). Abdullah would occasionally delve into the things that were perceived to be "true in fable but not in fact" (pg. 206).

As if addressing a Western audience, he argued on how foolish were the *orang putih* "who argue daily with their Malay teachers, saying that this is right and that is wrong because the grammar-book says so" (pg. 216). In centring the Malay self, he reminds that "every race is the judge of its own language." And again, he cautioned those who got the impression "that the Malay language is very easy" (pg. 217).

Throughout *Hikayat Abdullah*, we have seen how the author characterized the white man. To Abdullah, whom on many occasions portrayed himself as a rational man, the *orang putih* was ever conscious of his scientific mind and worldview.

Notes

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2. See Edward W. Said. 1979, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage. See also Bryan S. Turner. 1994. *Orientalism*, *Postmodernism and Globalism*. London: Routledge, on the historical development of orientalism, pg. 37–38. An example of production of the Malay image by the colonials, see Frank Swettenham. 1895. *Malay Sketches*. London: Bodley Head Ltd.

3. See Pattana Kitiarsa, "*Farang* as Siamese Occidentalism," ARI Working Paper, No. 49. September 2005, www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm.

4. See the arguments and assertions made by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit (2004). *Occidentalism*: *The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*. New York: The Penguin Press.

5. Emphasis mine.

6. See Hasan Hanafi, "From Orientalism to Occidentalism." Internet Document available at http://www.fortschrift-weltweit.de/dokumente/aegypten/fortschrift_aegypten_hanafi.pdf.

7. See *Perdana Online* "Perdana Focus: Dr. Murad Merican." Interview, June 14, 2009. Internet Document available at http://www.perdana.org.my/emagazine/2009/06/perdana-focus-interview-with-pdf-dr-ahmad-murad-merican.

8. Although many have expressed doubts on his ethnicity and identity, this paper identifies Abdullah as a Malay, the tendency to characterize the Malay as a *Peranakan*. The Malay world is here especially referred to as the Malay Peninsula and the Malay Archipelago.

9. Ungku Maimunah suggests that writings on Malay literary history provides Abdullah the authority and credibility as the "Father of Modern Malay Literature". This has hardly been disputed with the only significant challenge being the contention by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas that Hamzah Fansuri's work presents a departure for Malay modernism. To Muhammad Naquib, Hamzah's works demonstrate sophisticated philosophical discourse absent in earlier literary works. However, according to Ungku Maimunah, Muhammad Naquib's viewpoints elicit little interest and does not initiate serious re-evaluation on Abdullah Munshi's position. See Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir (2003). *Readings on Modern Malay Literature*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, especially pg. 30–31. See also W. R. Roff's discussion of the Malay world in Singapore during the time of Abdullah and shedding light on Abdullah's observations. Roff cited Abdullah as saying that other races in the world "have become civilized and powerful because of their ability to read, write and understand their own language, which they value highly." From R. A. Datoek Besar and R. Roolvink (1913). eds. *Hikajat Abdullah* (Djakarta/Amsterdam) in William R. Roff (1967). *The Origins of Malay Nationalism.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. pg. 46.

10. In 1874 an early translation by John Turnbull Thomson was published under the title*, Translations from the Hikayat Abdullah*, but it was found to be unsatisfactory, based only on excerpts and prone to inaccuracies. See Cheah Boon Kheng's Foreword to *Hikayat Abdullah*, translated by A. H. Hill, published as MBRAS Reprint No. 29, 2009. This study is based on the 1955 MBRAS publication of Hill's translation.

11. The conventional thinking about Abdullah, as precisely described by Van der Putten (2006), have varied through time from the extremes of champion of Malay modern thinking to despised collaborator of colonial powers who sold his soul to the missionaries.

12. These are integral components in the dimensions of secularization. And in much of my arguments in this section, I have used the conceptualizations and definitions of Dutch theologian C.A. van Peursen in Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* (1965). Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1978) in his *Secularism and Islam*, extends the argument to Muslims but notes the difference in respect of secularization as happening in the Muslim world and the beliefs of the Western man. Al-attas perspectives on "secular," "secularization" and "secularism" are relevant markers for understanding the European, in relation to the experience in the Malay world then, that Abdullah encountered.

13. Published in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 162-64 (2006:407–40).

14. As argued by one of the missionaries in Western India, In Van der Putten cited from Rosalind O'Hanlon (1985). *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century Western India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [Cambridge South Asian Studies 30].

15. In the initial stages, Malay printing was intertwined with the mission presses. This could be due to the association of Abdullah as the pioneer of Malay printing to the activities of the mission presses when he moved to Singapore in 1822.

16. In this instance, Milner (2008) notes on the growing sense of Malay identity and that of Malayness in Abdullah's milieu. See especially pg. 50–53.

17. Some have labeled Abdullah as an orientalist. But this instance qualifies Abdullah to be an occidentalist, claiming authority on the occidental other. To emphasize, it is Malay writing on the occident and all its ramifications.

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