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CHAPTER 1

Adat Perpatih and Malay Ethnicity:

A Report from the Field in Jempol, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

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Introduction: A Personal Journey and Discovery

As someone who was born and bred in the *Adat Perpatih* (AP) system, which is a form of the matrilineal system, the natural inclination is to claim expertise. However, I am going to do just the opposite. I'm not an expert on AP system. My knowledge about the system is not specialist in nature, like, for instance, the kind that every AP clan leader has. Relatively, my own knowledge on the AP could be considered as 'average'–in the sense that it is incomplete or partial–like most members who belong to the AP community, both in Negeri Sembilan and Naning of Malacca. Nonetheless, because I have been trained as a social anthropologist, I have acquired, through systematic learning and reading, an above average knowledge, compared to my fellow AP village folks, on the different matrilineal systems around the world, including my own. In that sense, 'returning' to the AP, to attempt an academic study, like so many anthropologists have done before me, is indeed a very challenging task, but enjoyable all the same.

The findings from the field research that I shall present in this chapter may not be that interesting to many readers and researchers, within and outside Negeri Sembilan. They are however useful to give us some indications, no more no less, as to the present state of affairs of adat politics, as well as politics that surround adat communities in Negeri Sembilan, based on a case study research conducted over a period of 6 working months spread over 18 months in the administrative district of Jempol. However, I believe, it is the historical dimension included in my field research that may interest the readers, particularly on the whole enquiry of the construction of Malay identity and its relationship with 'colonial knowledge'[1] where I am advancing an argument that present-day Adat Perpatih is a colonial construction because it is 'highly textualised' and not 'oral' as in its original form.

The motivation underlying this research effort is uncomplicated. I have embarked, since 1988, on a major sociological reexamination of Malay identity under the theme 'identity formation and contestation in Malay society.'[2] Although I have conducted various field trips to a number of research locations throughout Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah, most parts of the research and the subsequent resultant analyses have been derived from secondary sources. This is yet another of those brief field-trip researches conducted but focuses into a topic that I have never done before. I'm interested to examine the role of the AP in the construction of postcolonial Malay ethnicity, one that has been alluded to but have not been explored exhaustively by recent scholars or experts on Negeri Sembilan.[3]

I shall begin my exploration and analysis by outlining my own understanding of the general picture of the authority-defined version of Malay ethnicity and present some responses from the everyday-defined perspective contextualised in a longitudinal and historical dimension. The second part shall deal with the prevailing view about Malay ethnicity in Malaysia to help us place Malay ethnicity in the

AP context. The third part presents an analysis of the data I have accumulated from the field research to update our knowledge on Malay ethnicity in the AP context, to delineate the new patterns from the old and to critically examine the possible future trajectory of the new patterns. The findings are presented in the form of a set of queries.

Arguments on Malay Ethnicity: The Role of 'Colonial Knowledge'

There are two major schools of thought in the theorization about ethnicity. On one side, there is the 'essentialist' approach that argues ethnic traits are innate (essences) both in the individual and the *'ethnie'* as a social group–that has been adopted, wittingly or unwittingly, by analysts to explain the formation of ethnicity as a social identity. On the other side, it is the 'constructivist' approach that proposes ethnicity is not innate but rather learned or constructed, and most 'ethnicities' have been created as a result of intersecting historical, cultural and social factors at a particular moment in a culture's life and history. Both approaches have its adherents in the context of explaining about Malay ethnicity. However, both approaches are dependent on almost the same corpus of knowledge called the 'colonial knowledge' to make and advance their arguments. Let us now examine briefly, how 'colonial knowledge' has been detrimental in the construction of the modern Malay identity.

In Malaysia, most historians and other scholars in the humanities accept 'colonial knowledge' as the basis of Malaysian and Malay history. Moreover, they do so in what seems like an almost unproblematized manner, even though politico-academic attempts are being made to 'indigenise' Malaysian history and the 'Malay' viewpoint has been privileged. Such attempts are admirable, and yet it is good to realize that this emphasis on the Malay perspective

has been primarily motivated by a 'nationalistic' need to reinterpret history, and not by the urge to question the ways historical knowledge per se has been constructed. In Malaysia historical knowledge, a crucial element in every identity-formation is still based on colonial knowledge; in this connection, the question of the good and bad sides of the paternalism which informed this knowledge is not a very relevant one.[4]

This silence about the basis of colonial knowledge and its power in shaping Malay and Malaysian historiography is a cause for intellectual and ideological concern, especially in the context of present-day developments of Malaysian studies.[5] Of course there have been numerous discussions among historians about 'western elements' and 'colonial influence' in the writing of 'local history,' but these discussions generally adopt either a 'foreigner vs. local' or a 'Malay vs. non-Malay' stance rather than problematizing the construction and definition of historical knowledge itself. The 'foreigner vs. local' debate is informed, so it seems, by the conflict between 'eurocenterdness' and 'indigenousness.'[6] In the 'Malay vs. non-Malay' debates, the arguments revolve around 'ethnic histories,' such as the need to emphasize 'Malay history' as the basis of 'national history,' on the one hand, and the contribution of the 'Chinese' and 'Indians' on the other.[7] Both, in short, have strong 'ethnicized' tendencies.

In other words, Malaysian historiography is a site of ideological struggle involving different interest groups (ethnic, foreign, academic, political, and so on), an articulation of the 'unfinished' cultural/ethnic nationalist project in Malaysia. The situation is reminiscent of Ernest Renan's famous essay "What is a Nation?" in which history is placed at the center of the 'nationalist project': the past requires a careful and selective interpretation, and in this process, Renan argues, 'getting history wrong' is the precondition of nationalist history since it requires not only a collective remembering but also a collective

forgetting. This forgetting 'is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality.'[8]

Following the discourse on Malay identity in Malaysia, one could argue that the colonial methods of accumulating facts and insights and the resultant corpus of knowledge have been critical in providing not only substance but also sustenance to the endeavor of writing about 'Malayness.' The sheer volume of 'facts' that have been accumulated and amassed by the British on, for instance, traditional Malay literature and the modern history of Malaya/Malaysia has established the hegemony of colonial knowledge in Malaysia's intellectual realm, where the discussions about 'Malay identity' are taking place. Milner has demonstrated in a very convincing manner that even the 'political' discourse (perhaps one might say: 'discussions about identity') among prewar Malay writers-cum-nationalists was mainly informed by or conducted within the framework of colonial knowledge.[9]

Relevant here are the methods of accumulating facts that resulted in the formation and organization of the corpus of colonial knowledge. The approach anthropologist Bernard Cohn developed to make British rule in India more understandable is extremely useful. The British managed to classify, categorize and connect the vast social world that was India so it could be controlled by way of so-called 'investigative modalities,' devises to collect and organize 'facts' which, together with translation works, enabled the British to conquer the 'epistemological space.'[10]

An investigative modality includes the definition of a body of information that is needed and the procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, ordered and classified, and then transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes, and encyclopaedias.[11] Some of these investigative modalities, such as historiography and museology, are

of a general nature, whereas the survey and census modalities are more precisely defined and closely related to administrative needs. Some of these modalities were transformed into 'sciences' or 'disciplines,' such as economics, ethnology, tropical medicine, comparative law, and cartography. Their practitioners became professionals. Each modality was tailored to specific elements and needs on the administrative agenda of British rule; each of them became institutionalised and routinized in the day-to-day practice of colonial bureaucracy.

The 'survey modality,' which is the most critical, encompassed a wide range of practices, from mapping areas to collecting botanical specimens, from the recording of architectural and archaeological sites of historic significance to the minute measuring of peasant's fields. When the British came to India, and later to the Malay world, they sought to describe and classify every aspect of life in terms of zoology, geology, botany, ethnography, economic products, history, and sociology by way of systematic surveys; they also created a colony-wide grid in which every site could be located for economic, social and political purposes. In short, 'surveys' came to cover every systematic and official investigation of the natural and social features of indigenous society through which vast amounts of knowledge were transformed into textual forms such as encyclopaedias and archives.

The next most important is the 'enumerative modality,' one that enabled the British to categorize the indigenous society for administrative purposes, particularly by way of censuses that were to reflect basic sociological facts such as race, ethnic groups, culture, and language. The various forms of enumeration that were developed objectified and stultified social, cultural and linguistic differences among the indigenous peoples and the migrant population, and these differences were of great use for the colonial bureaucracy and its army to explain and control conflicts and tensions.

Control was primarily implemented by way of the 'surveillance modality': detailed information was collected on 'peripheral' or 'minority' groups and categories of people whose activities were perceived as a threat to social order and therefore should be closely observed. For surveillance reasons, methods such as anthropometry and fingerprinting systems were developed in order to be able to describe, classify and identify individuals rather accurately for 'security' and other general purposes.

The 'museological modality' started out from the idea that a colony was a vast museum; its countryside, filled with ruins, was a source of collectibles, curiosities and artifacts that could fill local as well as European museums, botanical gardens and zoos. This modality became an exercise in presenting the indigenous culture, history and society to both local and European public. The 'travel modality' complemented the museological one. If the latter provided the colonial administration with concrete representations of the natives, the former helped to create a repertoire of images and typifications, if not stereotypes, that determined what was significant to European eyes; architecture, costumes, cuisine, ritual performances, and historical sites were presented in 'romantic,' 'exotic' and 'picturesque' terms. These often aesthetic images and typifications were often expressed in paintings and prints as well as in novels and short stories, many created by the colonial scholar-administrators, their wives and their friends.

These modalities represented, according to Cohn, a set of 'officialising procedures' which the British used to establish and extend their authority in numerous areas: " . . . . control by defining and classifying space, making separations between public and private spheres, by recording transactions such as sale of property, by counting and classifying populations, replacing religious institutions as the registrar of births, marriages and deaths, and by standardizing languages and scripts."[12]

The colonial state introduced policies and rules that were organized by way of these investigative modalities; thus, the locals' minds and actions were framed in an epistemological and practical grid.

It should be obvious that Cohn's approach could very well be relevant in analysing developments in the Malay world. The Malay Reservation Enactment 1913, to mention just one example, could serve as a very revealing illustration for this relevance: the Enactment defined, first, who is 'a Malay'; second, it determined the legal category of people who were allowed to grow rice only or rubber only; and third, it was bound to exert a direct influence on the commercial value of the land. This particular Enactment was instituted in the state constitution of each of the 11 *negeri* on the Malay Peninsula separately, and in each constitution, it offered a slightly different definition of who was a 'Malay.' For instance, a person of Arab descent was a Malay in Kedah but not in Johor; a person of a Siamese descent was a Malay in Kelantan but not in Negeri Sembilan. It could be argued, then, that 'Malay' and 'Malayness' were created and confirmed by the Malay Reservation Enactment. However, there is more to this: the Enactment also made 'Malay' and 'Malayness' contested categories.

The most powerful and most pervasive by-product of colonial knowledge on the colonized have been the idea that the modern 'nation-state' is the natural embodiment of history, territory and society. In other words, the 'nation-state' has become dependent on colonial knowledge and its ways of determining, codifying, controlling, and representing the past as well as documenting and standardizing the information that has formed the basis of government. Modern Malaysians have become familiar with 'facts' that appear in reports and statistical data on commerce and trade, health, demography, crime, transportation, industry, and so on; these [illegible]accumulation, conducted in the modalities that were

designed to shape colonial knowledge, lay at the foundation of the modern, postcolonial nation-state of Malaysia. The citizens of Malaysia rarely question these facts, fine and often invisible manifestations of the process of Westernisation.

What I have briefly sketched here is the 'identity of a history' since these 'facts,' rooted in European social theories, philosophical ideas and classificatory schemes, form the basis of Malaysian historiography. It is within this history that modern identities in Malaysia, such as 'Malay' and 'Malayness' and 'Chinese' and 'Chineseness,' have been described legitimised and consolidated.

From Melayu to Bumiputera: Postcolonial Malay Ethnicity

In a recent important essay, loosely framed within Anthony D. Smith's concept of ethnie, Anthony Reid has sketched the different meanings and applications of the terms 'Malay' and 'Malayness' in the history of the Malay Archipelago.[13] Initially, he argued, the terms represented self-referent categories among the peoples inhabiting the archipelago; then, they became social labels that were used by the peoples of South Asia and China, who were mainly traders; and finally, they became social labels that were used by Europeans, namely, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British, who were travellers, traders and, eventually, colonizers.

In the first and second instances, in non-European contexts that is, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'Malay' and 'Malayness' were associated with two major elements, namely, (i) a line of kingship acknowledging descent from Sriwijaya and Melaka and (ii) a commercial diaspora retaining the customs, language and trade practices of Melaka.[14] Kingship (read: *kerajaan* and the royal family) was a prominent pillar of 'Malayness' in the area around the Straits of Melaka; Islam was another pillar because it provided kingship with some of its core values.[15] The commercial diaspora

constituted a group of people outside the Straits of Melaka area–Borneo, Makassar and Java–who defined their 'Malayness' primarily in terms of language and customs, two other pillars of 'Malayness.'

Sociologically speaking, the term 'Malay' covering the inhabitants of the archipelago in the pre-European era were used in both objective and subjective ways. Kingship was used as an objective measure, Islam as both objective and subjective: it was an objective criterion to define the kingship and his subjects (Muslim and non-Muslims) whereas, subjectively speaking, anyone who claimed to embrace Islam could be counted as 'Malay.' Non-Muslims and non-Malays could be labelled as 'Malays,' as long as they spoke and wrote 'Malay' and lived a 'Malay way of life'–meaning certain clothes, following certain culinary practices, and become an integral part of the Malay-speaking trading network. The Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch used the labels 'Malay' and 'Malayness' in much this way. Being merchants first and rulers second, their main concerns were materialistic. They were not active propagators of their national values and ideas but, rather, framed their presence as a 'civilizing' force within a vigorously religious orientation.

In the tradition of merchants and sailors trading across oceans, the preparation of detailed inventory lists of people and things, including cargoes, was a routine exercise for the Portuguese and Dutch merchants and captains. To be able to do this, they had to devise ways of classifying and categorizing not only the contents of their ships, but also their crew and their trading partners. That is how, for example, Dutch harbormasters recognized Chinese,' 'Javanese,' 'Bugis-Makassar,' 'Balinese,' 'Madurese,' 'Arab,' and 'Malay' captains, sailors and merchants. They mainly followed local labels, and made no conscious attempt to reconstitute or redefine labels and identities according to some preconceived western notion. Thus, both the objective and subjective local concepts were embedded in social labels. This precolonial process left 'Malay' and

'Malayness' unchanged and unquestioned.

Anthony Reid argues that the subjective aspect of Malay and Malayness, as observed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, allowed a distinct plurality in the subsequent composition of the category of 'Malay' since it was 'exceptionally open to new recruits from any background.'[16] He concludes that 'Malayness' 'can be seen to have evolved towards the idea of *orang Melayu* as a distinct ethnie.' The evidence of this plurality, however, allows for alternative constructs; witness, for instance, the fact that the British reconstituted the meaning of 'Malay' and 'Malayness,' and almost completely ignored its ethnie sense.

Rather like the British modes of operation in India described by Cohn,[17] British activities in Singapore and beyond involved a distinct understanding of the local population, in particular of the 'Malays' for whom they fostered special feelings of friendship as early as the days of Raffles. Inspired by the Enlightenment, they operated from the idea that human beings should be classified in a scientific manner. By way of various investigative modalities (such as historiography, surveys, museology, enumeration, travel, surveillance), the British constructed a corpus of knowledge supported by 'facts,' and introduced many names, labels and categories that people in Malaysia regard as natural, self-evident and existing since time immemorial.

The activities of the early administrators are illustrative and prominent. Raffles, for instance, renamed a Malay genealogical description of kings and their rituals and ceremonies, originally titled rather simply by its author as *Peraturan Segala Raja-Raja* (Rules for Rulers), as *Sejarah Melayu*, a name that Malays themselves then began to use as well: he gave that text the English name of 'Malay Annals,' a name that is still used in most scholarly discussions.[18] William Marsden, the author of *History of Sumatra*, declared that the Peninsula was the place of origin of the Malays; as a result, the

Peninsula was given the name of 'Malay Peninsula,' a name that was subsequently translated into Malay as '*Tanah Melayu*' (lit. Malay land), with far-reaching consequences.[19]

Above all, it was Raffles' path-breaking essay, entitled 'On the Malayu Nation, with a Translation of its Maritime Institution' in the journal *Asiatic Researches* that set the tone for the subsequent discourse on Malay and Malayness amongst the Europeans–and, later, amongst the Malays themselves. Raffles wrote: "I cannot but consider the Malayu nation as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states lying between Sulu Seas and the Southern Oceans."[20]

After the establishment of the Straits Settlements in 1824, Raffles' concept of 'Malay nation' gradually became 'Malay race,' an identity that was accepted by both the colonial power and the Malays themselves, primarily as the result of the growing presence of others whose 'race' was 'European' or 'Chinese.' As early as the 1840s, the writer Abdullah Munshi used the term *bangsa Melayu* ('Malay race' or 'Malay people'), and that term gradually entered the public sphere. The 1891 colonial census recognized three racial categories, namely, 'Chinese,' 'Tamil' and 'Malay.' With the increased immigration of Chinese and Indian laborers to British Malaya in the early 1900s a plural society was created in which the concept of Malay as a race became fixed and indelible.[21] When the founders of the first Malay language newspaper in the Straits Settlement (in 1907) chose the name *Utusan Melayu* ('Malay messenger'), this followed and confirmed colonial knowledge.

English and Chinese schools established at the turn of the century were soon followed by 'Malay' vernacular schools; teaching was in English, Mandarin and 'Malay,' respectively. In the textbooks for 'Malay' schools, the British constructed a distinctly 'Malay' historiography and 'Malay' literature in which 'Malay' *hikayats* were

used to create and implant a certain sense of historical identity and literary taste. The introduction of the Malay Reservation Enactment in 1913 provided a legal definition of 'Malay,' and helped fix the idea of 'Malayness' in the public mind. These activities, supported and sanctioned by the colonial government, gave life to the term and concept of 'Malay,' sooner or later accepted by all social actors.

It is not surprising that 'Malay' nationalism, which developed alongside 'Chinese' and 'Indian' nationalism, had a cultural rather than a political character; the discussions that made the 'Malay race' into a 'Malay nation' focussed primarily on questions of identity and distinction in terms of customs, religion and language rather than politics. The debate and conflicts surrounding the transition centered on the question of who could be called the 'real Malay' (*Melayu asli* or *Melayu jati*), and these frictions inevitably led to the emergence of various factions amongst 'Malay nationalists.' Malay nationalism was most strongly articulated when the British tried to impose their own concept of the 'Malayan nation' by way of the so-called Malayan Union, a unitary state project. Strong protests on the part of Malay nationalists forced the British to accept an alternative federalist order, officially known as *'Persekutuan Tanah Melayu,'* translated from the English 'Federation of Malaya,' incidentally another product of colonial knowledge.

In formulating a Constitution for the independent 'Federation of Malaya,' the 'British,' the 'Chinese' and the 'Indians' had to bargain hard with the 'Malays.' The 'Chinese' and the 'Indians' effectively became citizens of the independent state but they had to acknowledge *ketuanan Melayu*, or Malay dominance, which implied that they had to accept 'special Malay privileges' in education and government services, and 'Malay' royalty as their rulers, Islam as the official religion, and the 'Malay' language as the official language of the new nation-state.

The formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 introduced a new dimension to the understanding and definition of 'Malay' and 'Malayness,' arising from the addition of the Muslim groups in Sarawak and Sabah, such as the 'Dusun' and 'Murut' in Sabah and the 'Melanaus' in Sarawak. Unlike the Malays on the Peninsula, these local groups did not constitute a majority in the states, either demographically or politically, for more than 60 percent of the population consisted of non-Muslims natives and Chinese; in electoral terms, the Muslims could not capture more than 45 percent of the seats in the local legislative assemblies of Sarawak and Sabah. This posed a major political problem to the Malay-dominated federal government in Kuala Lumpur, which had to cooperate with, and attempt to co-opt, non-Malay Muslims as their political partners. In Sarawak, after the downfall of an Iban Chief Minister, Stephen Kalong Ninkan, in 1966 the Malay-dominated federal government in Kuala Lumpur managed to install a government led by Melanau Muslims and supported by local Chinese. In Sabah, the peninsula Malays found a ready partner in Datu Mustapha, who also ruled with the support of the Chinese. The federal government used the term *bumiputera* ('son of the soil') to accommodate the Malays and the native Muslims and non-Muslims of Sarawak and Sabah in a single category.

When the New Economic Policy (NEP) was launched in 1971, bumiputera became an important ethnic category: it was officialized and became critical in the distribution of development benefits to poor people and also the entrepreneurial middle class. The bumiputera, the 'Malays' and their Muslim counterparts in Sarawak and Sabah, achieved political dominance throughout the country with one exception: in the 1980s the Christian Kadazan in Sabah formed their own opposition party, Parti Bersatu Sabah or PBS, that ruled the Sabah state successfully for two electoral terms. During that period, the relationship between Sabah and the federal

government could be described, at best, as tense. Sarawak remained under the control of Muslim natives, called *'Malay Melanaus,'* who confirmed Islam as the single most important pillar of their newly acquired 'Malayness.'

In an attempt to win back Sabah, the leading party in the federal government, UMNO (the United Malays Nationalist Organization), made a historic decision in the late 1980s when it opened itself to non-Muslim bumiputera so that eventually the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional ('National Front') could regain control over Sabah. These developments show that the need to define the borders and margins of a concept can have far-reaching effects on its central content: 'Malayness' as defined by the Malay nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s and implemented and redefined by UMNO, had to be reformulated in Sabah once again, illustrating how flexible the concept or category of 'Malay' is. It also shows that the ongoing discussions about 'Malayness' is at once both important and irrelevant: the concept can easily shift meaning, adapting itself time and again to new situations and making clear-cut statements impossible or incredible.

Malay Ethnicity and Adat: Ideas, Stereotypes and Practice

In this part of the chapter, I wish to address a number of issues relating to the construction, production and maintenance of what I would call as 'adat knowledge,' in the main, the one that has been textualized. As this effort is only a field report I could only outline the central points relating to each issue without giving an elaborate analysis and argument. Each needs further detailed treatment. In that process I shall also present my preliminary findings from the field research I have conducted. The issues are as follows.

- First, that the Adat Perpatih (AP), as we know it now, has a strong 'colonial knowledge' base as well as content.

- Second, that the adat knowledge has been dominated by the 'Rembau story' which has now become the accepted (mis) representation of the AP knowledge.
- Third, that because of the overdependence on the Rembau story, historians and anthropologist have become ahistorical in the way they construct the history and social life of peoples in other adat districts, such as in Jempol where I did my field research.
- Fourth, that though the historiography on precolonial Negeri Sembilan is very poor and vague, the textualized Rembau story has been able to generate a stereotype, including amongst the finest scholars on Adat Perpatih, that Negeri Sembilan is populated by 'Minangkabau Malays' practising and surviving on 'Minangkabau culture.'
- Fifth, that although AP as an oral tradition is dead, inspite of numerous attempts to reinvent it, nonetheless, 'adat perpatih,' along with, 'Malay language,' 'Islam' and 'Malay royalty,' has always been the fourth pillar of Malayness amongst Negeri Sembilan Malays.

Is Contemporary Adat Knowledge Based on Colonial Knowledge?

Based on my presentations on Malay ethnicity in the preceding part of the essay and my previous essays on 'colonial knowledge,' I would argue that the understanding and representation of Adat Perpatih (AP), whether academic or nonacademic, either in the past or at present, has been shaped by colonial knowledge. If viewed from Walter J. Ong's theoretical perspective, Adat Perpatih, in its original form, was never a textual knowledge.[22] AP knowledge and its accumulation had always been an oral one until the arrival of the Europeans, particularly the British administrator-scholars who indeed

were fascinated with the matrilineal system and began documenting whatever they could about the various aspects of AP both for officializing procedure purposes as well as making sure the adat did not disappear with modernization through colonialism. In short, AP became textualized from then on, not for use by the social actors themselves, most of whom were illiterate, but mainly for the learned and the literate and, most importantly, colonial bureaucratic rule.

Indeed, I would further argue that what constitutes as 'knowledge' on Negeri Sembilan's territory, history and society that is available today is largely based on a corpus of colonial knowledge that has now become 'standard reference.' This knowledge was built through the kind of methods termed as 'investigative modalities' by Cohn that he has elaborated extensively in a recent book.[23] It is noteworthy striking that despite the availability of a number of major anthropological monographs on Negeri Sembilan and AP and numerous undergraduate academic exercises, MA and PhD theses, the main 'historical sources' remain to this day those written by British administrator-scholars between 1834 and 1934.[24]

Even the works of local researchers, such as those produced by Abdul Rahman Haji Mohammad, Abdul Ghani Shamaruddin, Samad Idris, and Norhalim Hj. Ibrahim, and foreign ones, like P.E. de Josselin de Jong and Michael Swift, besides using oral sources and ethnographic material, their cases, stories, and analyses about AP and Negeri Sembilan were built and constructed on or around the historical accounts of the same British administrator-scholars listed in this essay.[25]

Without a doubt, contemporary adat knowledge, both the academic and nonacademic, has been built and accumulated upon a base that is a colonial knowledge one. Of course, that adat knowledge was, in its original form and content, an indigenous one. However, the way this knowledge was textualised and 'repackaged,' either for

hobby or for officializing procedure reasons, adopted during the colonial period, has had significant impact on the imaginations about Adat Perpatih itself both upon the practitioners and especially others. What are these impacts? We shall turn to them one by one below.

Is Rembau = Negeri Sembilan?

Another striking feature of the present Adat knowledge is that more than half of the published documents on Negeri Sembilan and AP have been on Rembau, one of the nine states. So much, that "the story of Rembau" has been taken as the story of Adat Perpatih in Negeri Sembilan. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the generalizations on AP, academic or popular, have been based on the Rembau story. The recent published works of Norhalim, Peletz and Stivens provide us the best evidences.[26]

The "Adat stories" or the variations of the idea and practice of AP in other Adat districts of Negeri Sembilan, namely, Johol, Jelebu, Sungai Ujong, Jempol, Terachi, Ulu Muar, Gunong Pasir, Inas, Gemenceh, Tampin, Linggi, and Ayer Kuning, have rarely or never really been told, described or analyzed in equal breadth, depth and detail as Rembau. For that matter there is no agreement amongst scholars and, less so, among the practitioners of Adat Perpatih, as to which are the "nine" Adat districts that made the "Negeri Sembilan," or "nine states." One colonial observer, Newbold, listed Segamat, Johol, Naning, Sungai Ujong, Jelebu, Rembau, Klang, Ulu Pahang (including Serting and Jempol), and Jelai (Pahang) as the components of Negeri Sembilan.[27] At present, the areas called Segamat and Ulu Pahang belong to Johor and Pahang states, respectively although previously they were parts of the nine states.

Such is the dominance of the Rembau story in contemporary Adat knowledge that many seem to think that the history and development of AP in Rembau and Negeri Sembilan are one and

the same, particularly in official and academic discourses. Of course, Rembau's Adat history and that of the Negeri Sembilan are not the same but in new the fact of that so little has been written by the colonial officers and writers on the other adat districts within Negeri Sembilan, almost everyone inevitably depended on the Rembau story for some sort of explanation or model about AP elsewhere in Negeri Sembilan, as mentioned by Stivens.[28] Indeed, the Historical Society of Negeri Sembilan, for instance, has held many seminars on AP, many of which I have attended, which were always dominated by papers presenting various aspects of the Rembau story. One has to go through all the undergraduate academic exercises on Negeri Sembilan to see that the standard reference or benchmark is yet again the Rembau story.

This phenomenon has insidiously distorted and corrupted both the story and history of other Adat districts in Negeri Sembilan. Let us now turn to just one example, what I would call the "Jempol story," the Adat district where I conducted my field research.

Colonial Silences and Postcolonial Forgetting: The Jempol Story

Undang Luak Jempol, or the Adat district of Jempol, in terms of area size, is the largest Adat district in Negeri Sembilan, approximately three times the size of Rembau. In spite of that, one may ask, why has its Penghlulu Luak not made one of the Undangs? The present four are the Undangs of Sungai Ujong, Jelebu, Johol and Rembau. How could Jempol become so big, physically, but not as prominent, politically? I would like to attempt to provide a possible explanation.

At the turn of the fourteenth century, about 400 years before Negeri Sembilan was founded as a confederacy, Malacca became established as an entreport. The presence of the Muar River, facing

the Malacca Straits, was of great importance because of its connection to the Pahang River, which faces the South China Sea. Such connection made it possible for Malacca to have access to Ulu Pahang and Ulu Kelantan, both of which produced much of the Peninsula's gold and jungle products, important to the Malacca-China trade. The Muar and Pahang Rivers were connected through a busy and famous short land-portage area known as Penarikan.[29] This important and strategic area is in the Adat district of Jempol.

Both Thai and Malay sources also mention about a major Thai campaign in the mid-fifteenth century, which the Sejarah Melayu say was under the command of a provincial lord who led his troops overland through Pahang and crossed the Penarikan route to Muar around 1455-56. Whether the campaign was a success or failure it is not known.[30] Chinese records, called *Hai-Lu* (records of the Sea), of the eighteenth century mentions several gold producing settlements in the Kelantan and Pahang interior. Since the search for gold, tin and other local products became more important to the expanding international market stimulated by the industrial revolution in western Europe, the old Penarikan route across the Peninsula remained an important means by which gold and jungle products were carried to the east and west coasts. Around that time, in the 1770s, tin and gold mines were opened in Rembau, Lukut and some other areas in Negeri Sembilan.[31]

What is critical here is the fact that, for about 400 years before a gold mine was opened in Rembau, from the fourteenth century onwards and until the eighteenth century, Jempol, through the land portage at Penarikan, was a strategic and critical area which was linked and integrated to the international trade between Malacca and China, Malacca and the West, and also the western companies in the Peninsula with their home bases in Europe. Therefore, it is not too outlandish to suggest that Jempol, although was not a producer of gold or tin but perhaps have jungle products only to offer, was a

bustling area where people from nearby or afar came to settle or earn a living as porters, traders, shopkeepers, boat repairmen, and a host of other jobs and activities. The Undang Luak Dato' Jempol must have been a powerful and influential person blessed with wealth and riches obtained from the economic activities generated by the Penarikan, hence the large physical area that came under his control.

However, after the British came and expanded its economic activities which led to the signing of the Pangkor treaty in 1874, with its interest mostly in tin found in the west coast of the Peninsula, the famous land-portage Penarikan became irrelevant. Jempol was left on its own, indeed almost sidelined, because gold and tin mines were now opened in Lukut, Rembau, Sungai Ujong, Johol, and Jelebu. Suddenly these Adat districts became more important to the British and so, too, were their leaders. It was not surprising, therefore, that when the British reconstructed the "nine states" according to the needs of the political and economic circumstances then, the four major players were Jelebu, Sungai Ujong, Johol, and Rembau.

Rembau became the focus for the British and Chinese business interests since the discovery of gold and the opening of a gold mine there in 1769.[32] This explains the large amount of historical documents and writings on Rembau, followed by those on Sungai Ujong, Jelebu and Johol, in that order. Except for Dr. Ione Fett, the Australian anthropologist, who did a study on a Batu Hampar clan in Jempol in 1976, there is no other foreign anthropologist or scholar who has conducted any research on Jempol.[33]

The 'colonial silences' on Jempol is therefore understandable. Such silences has led to what I would call the ahistorical tendency that is present in the way Adat Perpatih history has been written. But, the 'postcolonial forgetting' of Jempol is perplexing. Indeed, Jempol as an Adat district was lumped together with other Adat districts, namely, Terachi, Johol, Ulu Muar, Inas, Sri Menanti, and Gunong Pasir to constitute the postcolonial administrative district

of Kuala Pilah. It was not until a decade ago that an administrative district called Jempol was established and gazetted, separating it from the other six Adat districts.

During the field research being undertaken, I was informed that the 12 clans found in Jempol are not identical to those found in Rembau. For instance, there is a Suku Sri Selemak Pahang in Jempol but none in Rembau. The explanation, according to the head of the said clan, is that many families from Pahang, Johor and Kelantan must have come and settled in Jempol over a long period of time due to the Penarikan attraction. According to their family genealogy, they have arrived at least four generations ago. In other words, Jempol, could have been actively receiving migrants, or soujourners, for at least 400 years particularly during the periods when the trade along the east-west river 'highway' was on the upswing, much before the arrival of the Europeans. It is also not improbable that the Minangkabau, knowing their business acumen, could have come to Jempol for the same economic attractions like others. Based on the above-mentioned situations, it could, therefore, be suggested that such circumstances and varieties of peoples from that many places could have configured the clan composition in Jempol quite differently from that of Rembau. However, this has never previously considered, let alone been studied by anyone. This brings us to the next major issue about Adat Perpatih and its communities and also its overall identity.

Getting History Wrong: Are All Malays in Negeri Sembilan Minangkabau Malays?

One important impact of the Rembau story as well as the 'silences' in colonial history on the eight other Adat districts has been the almost 'unchallenged' assumption that because Rembau was overwhelmed by the Minangkabau migration at some stage of

its history, therefore, like Rembau, the Minangkabau factor has been perceived as critical in the formation of the Negeri Sembilan confederacy. As a result, the identity of the Negeri Sembilan populace as a whole has now been 'fixed,' and taken for granted as being "Minangkabau Malays" because their culture is purportedly based on "Minangkabau culture."

Even in the present hey-day of poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonial studies, this label has never been seriously questioned, both academically and at the popular level. The 'Minangkabau label' has always been accepted by the social actors themselves, and, sadly and especially, by anthropologists who should be more aware of the constructed nature and the artificialness of such labels. Take, for instance, the opening two sentences of Stiven's recent monograph, published in 1996, in which she said:

> This book is about women's lives within the historical encounter between 'matriliny' and 'modernity' in Rembau, in the small Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan. This Minangkabau culture (my emphasis) is one of a very small number of so-called 'matrilineal' societies which have assumed importance in the western imagination out of all proportion to their actual size and incidence.[34]

There are too many questions left unanswered relating to the 'Minangkabau factor' that has not been explained satisfactorily until today, except through the clever manipulation of minimal historical 'facts' or of creative guesswork by extremely innovative social scientists and their peers in the state apparatus.

For instance, for a long time it has been accepted that Negeri Sembilan, as a political entity, with Raja Melewar at the helm, was established in 1773. There is evidence now to show that Raja Melewar was already in Rembau in 1727. The Raja Melewar-Raja Khatib struggle for power, according to surviving Dutch records,

happened in that year.[35] Indeed Raja Khatib, who was sent to Rembau to prepare for the arrival of Raja Melewar on the instruction of Raja Kechil of Siak, was trying hard to unite the different Minangkabau factions in order to oust the Riau-based Bugis in Rembau. It is unlikely that Raja Melewar, who was then said to be about 50 years old, survived the clashes of 1727 and came back 46 years later, in 1773, to be installed as the first Yang DiPertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan at Penajis, Rembau, and was said to have lived for another 20 years at least. If all these were true and actually happened, then Raja Melewar must be around 120 years old when he passed away. However, in treaties signed by the Dutch and the Minangkabau Negeri (in Sumatra), beginning from 1750 onwards, Raja Melewar's name seems to be conspicuously absent. The mystery is further compounded by the fact that the Negeri Sembilan royal family genealogy, where Raja Melewar sits on the top of the family tree, is a disputed one and was said to be the construction of two British colonial administrator-scholars, namely Begbie and Newbold.[36] In 1874, Braddel, another British administrator-scholar pointed out the flaws in the genealogy,[37] which was reconfirmed by another such scholar, Hervey, in 1883.[38] One could argue that Raja Melewar's presence in 1773 looks improbable and the stories about him gets more vague as we have to depend more and more on oral sources. So, even the Raja Melewar 'history' remains a contested one to this day.

Historical evidences and other studies on the Minangkabau people have shown that they have migrated to so many different areas within the Malay world, from Borneo to Sulawesi to Java and to many different parts of the Malay peninsula.[39] But the impression that we get from all the writings on Negeri Sembilan, especially on Rembau, is that the Minangkabau have all decended upon Negeri Sembilan and nowhere else in the Malay world. This is certainly a grave historical misrepresentation or indeed a big lie.

If I may suggest, the only logical reason why they came in droves and stayed on in Negeri Sembilan, and not elsewhere in the Malay world, was because they found that the indigenous peoples in the area (mainly Proto-Malays such as the Jakun, Semelai and Temuan), have already practised an advanced matrilineal system. This evolved into the existence of period which the Minangkabaus found most suitable and comfortable with. The fact that only the local-born aboriginal Biduanda clan, and not any other from the Minangkabau-originated ones, such as the Batu Hampar clan, could provide heirs to all the Undangs of all the adat districts, is a strong enough evidence to support this claim. Therefore, the invitation of a Minangkabau prince to be the *Yam Tuan Besar* was mooted by both the ruling Biduanda clan and the Minangkabaus.

This claim, however, does not diminish the importance of the Minangkabaus' contribution to the construction of what is now known as the Adat culture in Negeri Sembilan. Colonial knowledge, too, is equally important in institutionalizing the Minangkabau position in the making of Adat knowledge in the past and present. The Minangkabau architecture, for instance, must have been adopted by the ruling Biduanda clans as something acceptable, perhaps, because of its sophisticated aesthetics form. Upon closer scrutiny, it is not surprising therefore that most of the Minangkabau-like houses we find in Negeri Sembilan today are those belonging to the Adat chiefs and the elite and rather than the ordinary folks.

The contemporary obsession amongst the postcolonial ruling elites in Negeri Sembilan about anything Minangkabau is related to the more recent state-sponsored exercise of the reinvention of the unique Malay culture of Negeri Sembilan within the larger context of increased consciousness about Malay and Malayness in the whole of Malaysia and 'ethnic culture' as a commodity for tourism.

Is Adat Perpatih the Fourth Pillar of Malayness in Negeri Sembilan?

The advent of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a pro-Malay affirmative action policy launched in 1971 that ended in 1990, has contributed directly to the heightened consciousness about Malay and Malayness in Malaysia and the 'new Malay' identity.

I would argue that the NEP has brought about not only major economic and social changes in Malaysia, but it has also redefined its politics. The triumph of 'Malay entrepreneurship' through NEP, therefore, must be contextualized within the rival claims to legitimacy, power and piety in the NEP era. Thus, modern Malay entrepreneurship, irrespective of how we want to characterize it either as 'ersatz,' 'rentier' or 'incubated,' implies a tangible victory over alternative and polemic forms of power, be they ethnic, political, class-based, religion, or even, espousing a universally applicable Muslim entrepreneurial culture superior to global or western capitalism. Certainly, demonstrating entrepreneurship holds tremendous legitimizing weight in 'new Malay' identity, to the point it has become almost overloaded and inflated with importance, meaning and value, a kind of meta-symbol. Practising entrepreneurship implies a number of processes.

First, it implies a radical transformation of the Malay worldview, a self-generating move from the *kampung* to the *bandaraya* (metropolis).

Second, it also implies that an important spiritual transformation, one which establishes economic modernity in Muslim terms and framed in terms of concern for the worldly and other worldly consequences of spiritual goodness and for the collective whole, has been used by moderate pro-Mahathir Muslims, led by Anwar Ibrahim, as a strong critique of and challenge to the perceived backwardness of fundamentalist and radical *dakwahism*

and the pressing contestations of Islamic political activists.

Third, it implies class mobility; that is, the move from an elite and aristocratic ascriptive society to, arguably a more 'meritocracy-inclined' one in which any kampung boy or girl can succeed.

Fourth, it implies a vast political transformation, one that allows a kind of openness within the Malay political sphere, now populated by the educated, well-to-do and well-off entreprenuers, that begets internal contestations ridden with 'money politics.' This has led, for instance, within UMNO, the freezing of UMNO's president and deputy president's posts from being open to competition, as if to avoid the entrepreneurship-driven political openness from decentring the core of Malay power. In other words, the 'new Malay' has generated a 'new politics' amongst Malays and subsequently in Malaysia, too.

In the Negeri Sembilan context, like elsewhere in Malaysia, that although the NEP has opened up new discourses on Malayness, the three pillars of Malayness, remain important, namely, *agama* (religion), *bahasa* (language) and *raja* (royalty) wherein most of the discussions are anchored. However, Adat Perpatih is special and unique to Negeri Sembilan Malays, so it has been claimed by both scholars and the ruling elite in Negeri Sembilan. To back this claim and to articulate it openly, the Negeri Sembilan state government has launched and financed various projects and activities related to this move mainly aimed at reinforcing the fact that 'Adat Perpatih' is *the* fourth pillar of Malayness amongst the Negeri Sembilan Malays.

Wherever one goes in Negeri Sembilan today, one would find newly constructed buildings, especially those financed by the state, adopting the Minangkabau architecture style. The Negeri Sembilan 'parliament' or 'state assembly' building is one such physical structure. A series of adat items used in official rituals, such as *tepak sireh* (betel nut and sirih leaves container), *sirih junjong* (sirih leaves

arranged in a container used for weddings and other ceremonies), *destar kelok sembilan* (the royal headgear which has nine layers of cloth), and the like.

The national radio station, RTM (Radio dan Televisyen Malaysia), has a local station called "Radio Tiga, Seremban" which solely caters to the Negeri Sembilan audience. Besides broadcasting the national news, it also offers local news, especially those relating to Adat activities. It also carries special programs of popular Minangkabau music, such as *randai*, and Negeri Sembilan songs and music, such as *cak lempong*, sung in local dialect. The station also organizes talk shows discussing Adat issues involving the public usually in the Negeri dialect.

Other cultural activities include the Negeri cuisine cooking competition and exhibition organized annually and attended by hundreds of spectators at the Negeri Sembilan Museum and Cultural Centre in Seremban, the state capital. These activities and many others carried out through the year are attempts towards reinforcing the uniqueness of Adat as the all-important identity of the Negeri Malays.

Conclusion

This attempt to demonstrate in a very schematic manner is basically how an identity is constituted, in this case 'Malay' and 'Malayness.' More importantly, I have also tried to examine the construction and nature of Adat knowledge, both in historical and contemporary sense, that highlights Adat as the other pillar of Malayness in Negeri Sembilan.

Like most societal phenomena, identity formation takes place within two social realities at once: the 'authority-defined' reality–the reality that is authoritatively defined by people who are part of the dominant power structure–and the 'everyday-defined' reality

experienced by the people in their daily lives. These two realities exist side by side at any given time. Although intricately linked and constantly shaping each other by way of contestation, they are certainly not identical. 'Everyday-defined' social reality is experienced whereas 'authority-defined' social reality is primarily observed and interpreted, and possibly imposed. Both are mediated through the social position of those who observe and interpret social reality and those who experience it.

Woven into the ever-tense relationship between these two social realities is social power, articulated in various forms such as majority-minority discourse and state-society contestation. In concrete terms, social power involves collectives such as nationalist, literary and professional groups, scholar-administrators, academicians, and so on. Their discourses take both oral and written forms.

The discussion of 'Malay' and 'Malayness,' particularly in the context of colonial knowledge and its investigative modalities, has been driven by an 'authority-defined' perspective. Obviously, that perspective is not homogeneous in nature; it is expressed in various views and positions, some even in opposition to one another.[40] For instance, some British colonial officials were openly paternalistic or benevolent in their attitudes towards the Malays, something especially prevalent amongst educationalists, while others were simply authoritarian or even racist. In other words, contestations existed within colonial knowledge, the result of different emphases on the various investigative modalities available. What I have observed in Negeri Sembilan is one such contestation, in this case through Adat knowledge and its postcolonial application.