

The Native's Independence Rhetoric in Translation: Shahnon Ahmad and Noorjaya

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ABSTRACT

Nations are narrated into being; bearing this concept in mind, this research analyses the works of two native Malay writers that have been translated into English and how their writings show the rhetoric of independence that was used in order to gain independence by the Malays in the Malay Peninsula. It will also look at the cultural and emotional effect of the translated independence rhetoric that has been lost through translation. This essay will be read using a postcolonial lens made famous by Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha. Via this lens, it will analyze how the Malay postcolonial culture has been translated into English. Todd Jones's essay "Translation and Belief Ascription: Fundamental Barriers" (2003) will be used to analyze the text. It will be argued that how epistemology is used to ascribe belief and how cultural epistemology has been translated into the English language via Shahnon Ahmad's "A Merdeka Tale" and Noorjaya's "The Quest for Langkasuka". The translation of cultural epistemology is successful in both the texts because the translation of the text can be easily understood. This understanding permeates especially in the cultural and historical effects.

Keywords: Nations, Malay, postcolonial, lens, epistemology.

Introduction

This essay analyses the rhetoric of two Malaysian writers who are Malay by race. The Malays are natives of Malaysia. Thus, it discusses how the native's rhetoric that deliberates the idea of independence and its history that is translated into English, the language of the British colonizer. This essay concentrates on the effects of translation of fictional texts that are historically based which discusses the Malays and their colonized state, and their quest towards independence. Colonial historical writings on Malaya written by colonial officers like Richard Winsted and Anthony Burgess were written at the peak of colonialism. Their conceptions about the Malays and their rulers were very different from that of the 20th and 21st century Malay and Malaysian native intellectuals' point of view. This essay sets out to look at how the Malay native's rhetoric has been translated into English

and the effect of this translation on the meaning and the gist of the text.

Nations are narrated¹ into being; bearing this concept in mind, this research will analyze two native Malay writers that have been translated into English and how their writings show the rhetoric of independence that was used in order to gain independence by the Malays in the Malay Peninsula. It will also look at the cultural and emotional effects of the translated independence rhetoric that has been lost through translation. This essay will be read using a postcolonial lens made famous by Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha. Via this lens, the essay will

¹This idea sprouted and came into being from the author's readings of Bhabha, H. K. (1990). *Nation and narration*. Routledge, Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge and Bhabha, H. K. & Hassan, J. (1996). *Aladdin's gift*. York University Press.

analyze how the Malay postcolonial culture has been translated into English. Todd Jones essay *Translation and Belief Ascription: Fundamental Barriers* (2003) will also be used to analyze the text. It will be argued that how epistemology is employed to ascribe belief and how cultural epistemology has been translated into the English language via Shanon Ahmad's "A Merdeka Tale" and Noorjaya's "The Quest for Langkasuka". This essay will look at the difficulties that the text has gone through in translating culture.

The Postcolonial Lens

Postcolonialism and postmodernism are two important theories that must be used to discuss postcolonial literatures generally. According to Halimah Mohamed Ali (2011) (pp. 2-3):

Postcolonialism came into being after World War II because of "new economic importance" of recently independent countries and "the rapid spread of communications and international business during the last third of the twentieth century" (King: 3). The famous postcolonial text *Empire Writes Back* (1989) defines postcolonial as a term that is used to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft et al., 1989: 2). It is also stated that literatures from all previous colonies should be placed under the label postcolonial (Ashcroft et al., 2002: vii-ix). It can be deduced that the advent of postcolonial or postcolonialism is due to the freedom gained by former European colonies and was born in the 1940s when colonies began to gain their independence.

Since Ashcroft suggests that literature from previous colonies should be placed under the umbrella of postcolonialism, thus it is appropriate to discuss the chosen texts as postcolonial texts. This is because they were written by authors that are postcolonials, who are citizens of Malaya/Malaysia. This country was once under the colony of the United Kingdom.

Postcolonialism² is a problematic term to define because it is inter-disciplinary, heterogeneous, and diffuse (Lomba: xii). The problems arise because of the distance between the subjects from the situations that are discussed, i.e. colonialism and they are far from the centre, i.e. the excolonizers and their libraries. The peripheral

²The father of postcolonialism is Franz Fanon. He influenced later thinkers like Edward Said, Gayatri Charavorty Spivak and Ania Lomba to name a few. His works that have influenced this research are Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of The Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. Grove Weidenfeld. Fanon, F. (1952). *Black skin, white masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. Paladin.

scholars have difficulty in embodying the colonizer's intelligentsia and the motives that triggered colonialism. Postmodernism is another factor that hinders the total understanding of postcolonialism. Since the West especially wanted to distance itself from modernism and its antiquated ideas, postmodernism came into being. The postmodernists in many ways have influenced postcolonial thinkers. These individuals have resisted the colonizer's cultural makeup which was brought to the Other for the purpose of civilization. This cultural makeup also includes the religion that was brought by the West to the Other, i.e. Christianity (Mohamed Ali, H., 2009). The colonial agenda was the quest for Gold, thus, the West used Gospel to gain its Glory. Therefore, the East i.e. the Other rejected the Western Gospel and took up their own ancestral Gospels in order to debunk and deconstruct colonialism. In the case of Malaya/Malaysia, the nation which is predominantly Malay and Muslim, it took up an Islamic way of life as opposed to Western and Christian values that were instilled by the British colonizers in their colonies including in Malaya. However, Western and Christian values do not differ much from Islamic values because Muslims have to believe in the Bible as well as in Prophet Isa too, whom the Christians call Jesus the son of Mary, and believe that he is the son of God. Muslims part ways with this Christian belief. Their faith demands them to believe in the immaculate conception, that the angel Gabriel blew a soul that God (Allah) sent from heaven into Mary (Mariam's) womb who then gave birth to Prophet Isa. Thus, postcolonialism gave birth to an agency, especially religious agency on the part of the natives which then produced independence. The freedom that was gained included the freedom of thought and land. Postmodernism on the other hand when aligned to postcolonial nations did not influence the Third World as much as it did the West.

Mohamed Ali (2011) discusses the connection between postcolonialism and postmodernism. She states that:

Postcolonialism's connection to postmodernism has been a major topic of discussion among academicians. These arguments have questioned the validity of the term postcolonial since it relies so much in the formulation of its discourses on Western based theories (Lomba 1998: xii). Yet, Ashcroft et al. accord the emergence of postcolonial theory to the, "inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenances of post-colonial writing" (p: 11).

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) that voiced "what might be called 'cultural resistance' to France's African empire" (Barry: 192) triggered postcolonial discourse. It gave birth to Edward Said's *Orientalism*

(1978), which inaugurates postcolonial criticism and exposes Western “Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western, and the inferiority of what is not” (Barry: 192). Both texts mentioned above are important for the study of postcolonialism. They represent primary voices that challenged European hegemony of the Other’s politics and culture as well as wealth.

Postcolonialism as discussed above gave agency to the Other. The discourses have always been dissenting voices criticizing the West especially, and those that are aligned to the West and colonialism as well as imperialism. Thus, postcolonial criticism has been labeled as a tool used to, “undermine the universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics” (Barry: 191). Barry argues that:

...universalism is rejected by postcolonial criticism; whenever a universal signification is claimed for a work, then, white, Eurocentric norms are being promoted by a sleight of hand to this elevated status, and all others correspondingly relegated to subsidiary, marginalized roles (Barry: 192).

Barry describes postcolonial criticism as works that contrive to grant nonwestern literatures an identity and to distance it from the western all-embracing ideal.

Third world writers and thinkers have played multiple roles in the elitist societies that were created by the Western colonizers in their colonies. The famous postcolonial writer and critique Kwame Anthony Appiah once argues that:

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present of Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa (quoted in Loomba: 246).

Appiah’s skeptic statement about the postcolonial can be refuted in many ways especially vis-à-vis Malaysian postcolonial writers. Postcolonial critiques, writers, and thinkers are no longer the elites who were a minority among the natives that were created by the West to rule over the Other on behalf of the colonizers. Postcolonial writers used to be Anglicized and were middlemen that traded and sold their own culture to the world, especially the Western world. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy that are of Indian descent can be labeled

as panderers to the West. The West views them only as presenters of the Other, and their own people see them as presenters of the West, and their fictions are their own versions of the Other that they want to see and present. However, much has changed since Rushdie’s produced his Booker Prize winner *Midnight’s Children* (1981). Many third world postcolonial writers write to upgrade their nation and culture and to instill local values into their newly independent countries. Most of these writers fought hand in hand with freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah in order to gain independence. Writers like Shahnon Ahmad took up the style of Indian writers like Mulk Raja Anand to produce writings that will help their nation to make sense of themselves. The influence of Anand’s works through novels like *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) can be traced in Shahnon’s *Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan* (1966). While Anand criticized the West more than his people and country, Shahnon Ahmad took up the project of criticizing the West as well as his own people. His rhetoric has always been sympathetic towards the people, but a harsh critique of the political establishment.

Shahnon Ahmad and his contemporaries’ rhetoric can be described appropriately through Patrick Williams’ ideas. Williams asserts, “The ending of colonial rule created high hopes for the newly independent countries and for the inauguration of a properly post-colonial era, but such optimism was relatively short-lived, as the extent to which the West had not relinquished control became clear” (Williams 1993: 3). Western influence has continued and can be “located in flexible combinations of the economic, the political, the military and the ideological (but with an overriding economic purpose) ...” (Williams: 3). Therefore, postcolonial critics have a problem with the term postcolonial. If the ideological influence is still present, then literature from postcolonial nations may be reiterating western thought and enhancing western influence. However, Shahnon and Noorjaya proved that their rhetoric differs from generally elitist postcolonial writings. Both writers write for their people and nation in order to educate and instill local cultural values as well as local color into their writings.

Translating Culture

This section discusses the theory of translating culture by Todd Jones (2003). According to him:

Translation is hard. Anyone who’s ever tried to converse beyond asking for directions in a language other than one’s own is well aware of this. Many scholars have written about

how much is lost in the process of translating one language to another. Venuti has even described this process as being like “terrorism,” in its ability to “reconstitute and cheapen foreign texts” (1991) (Todd Jones, 2003: p. 45).

Based on Jones’s arguments above, this essay, as stated in the introduction, will look at the difficulties that the text has gone through in translating culture.

Translating cultures also means ascribing beliefs to an audience that does not know the mother culture/original culture of the text. Jones discusses the idea of ascribing beliefs. He argues that it “...is a much more difficult epistemological task than is commonly appreciated and is especially difficult in the sorts of situations that translators are in (Jones, 2003: p.45). Jones argues that a translator who uses his own language which he labels as “home language” cannot successfully understand and explain what the Other believe in or translate it using his own language. Unwittingly, Jones argues, the translator changes the meaning of the text because he cannot translate an *alien belief ascription* (Jones, 2003: p.45). Thus, it can be deduced that a text that is not translated well will have problems in putting forth and translating alien beliefs from the original culture and language into a foreign language.

Translating cultures is a process of uncovering beliefs, especially foreign beliefs. Todd argues that this is a difficult process. According to him the belief system which is a state of mind that is unobservable is difficult to translate (Jones, Todd 2003: p. 16). Translation of cultures means translating belief ascriptions that are psychological mindsets. The translation of psychological mindsets is indeed a very difficult process because the culture is often a way of life and it becomes embedded in an individual’s psyche by the time he/she reaches the age of 21, and it becomes a way of life.

Jones also argues that we cannot decipher wholly the belief system of an individual that is foreign and exotic. According to him:

A central problem for the kind of belief ascription a translator needs to do, however, is that often the people whose language we want to translate hold beliefs that are quite different from our own. We can’t assume we can uncover the beliefs of exotic people just by imagining what we would believe were we in their shoes (Jones, 2003: p. 52).

It is not enough to assume the Other’s personality in order to translate a culture. Jones argues that we need more than that skill in order to translate a belief system.

Jones describes the problems that translators might face in translating an ascribed belief system that is exotic.

According to Jones, People interested in ascribing beliefs to exotic peoples and translating their utterances can also be thrown off the track by a lack of familiarity with the local conventions about when it is permissible to make assertions using non-literal meta-phorical language. In everyday English, for example, it is quite permissible for us to talk using words that seem to imply we believe that luck is a person determining the outcome of games of chance (Keesing 1985) or that we make decisions with our stomachs (see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Our familiarity with this convention means that none of our compatriots takes this verbal behavior to signal an underlying belief that chance, or decision-making works this way (Jones, 2003: 52).

In the above excerpt, Jones outlines the conventions of translating culture by using nonliteral metaphorical language. He gives two examples of such translation of culture.

However, Jones indicates that translators have to worry about being unfamiliar with linguistic conventions. He argues that translators worry about linguistic conventions, surrounding beliefs, and inference of underlying beliefs in relation to metaphorical phrases. In relation to these, there are inaccurate attributions by translators that Jones thinks are terrifying and common (Jones, 2003: 52). Jones argues about the inaccuracies of translating the culture of the Other due to linguistic inadequacies. Thus, it means that one must be a master of the foreign language in order to be able to translate the culture precisely and adequately.

Jones also discusses the Other’s belief system. He aligns it with translation skills. According to him, a translator has to be able to uncover and communicate their exotic beliefs. The project of doing both is difficult because translators use themselves as models. This is a classical translation theory. In most cultures, this theory does not work. Thus, we have to understand that the foreign readers’ minds do not work like the translators and the native’s mind does (Todd Jones, 2003: p. 56). Therefore, we have to work and translate based on this praxis. Jones argues that even when we use a model to translate from a foreign language and culture most of the time, the model does not work. He argues that this is because the Other’s psyche might not function similarly to the translator’s psyche due to linguistic and cultural differences.

This essay will determine whether this theory is accurate. The translator of both texts is a Chinese woman, Wong Soak Koon that resides in Malaysia and was a literature lecturer. The texts that have been translated have been written by Malays that are sons of the soil (Bumiputera)

of the country. Thus, the translator is familiar with the language, race, and history of Malaysia.

Analysis

This section will discuss two short stories: "Mencari Langkasuka" by Noorjaya and A Merdeka Tale by Shahnon Ahmad. The first story to be analyzed is "Mencari Langkasuka" using the theories outlined above.

"Mencari Langkasuka" is a story that is a reminiscence of the Malayan past. It relates nostalgically to the glorious Malay empire called Langkasuka. This story is the narrator's psychological journey of finding the glory of Langkasuka and a physical journey towards the independence of his country. According to the text:

On the 10th of March 1909, when the border treaty was signed, he and his people had been colonized. That was almost 90 years now. No use remembering all the suffering and humiliation. No need for pointing fingers trying to lay the blame on someone. No need. Because the ones to blame were his people themselves (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 353).

The Malayan colonization and the Siam-Malay (Thai-Malay) colonization began when the British signed the border treaty with Siam in 1909. The narrator states that most of the blame is on his people themselves. Colonization brought suffering to his nation and people. The text shows that they are fighting to redeem their independence.

According to the narrator, the city that he is in which is Alor Setar in a state called Kedah in Malaya (Malaysia) was the seat of Malay civilization, i.e. the centre of the civilization of the nation of people called the Malays. According to the text:

His eyes gazed longingly at a modern city that had been new in the time of Langkasuka, which had once been the seat of a Malay civilization, whose language and culture were Malay, and which had been divided since the 18th century (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 353).

The author describes the narrators longing for independence when he views the city which was once the centre of culture and power of the Malays. He narrates that the Malay's language and culture had been divided and torn apart due to colonization since the 18th century. Historically, it can be dated back to when Francis Light arrived in Pulau Pinang and signed a treaty with the Sultan of Kedah to buy Pulau Pinang from the Kedah

government in exchange for protection for Kedah against Siam. However, when Siam attacked Kedah Francis Light refused to help the Sultan to defend Kedah. That was when the people were torn apart and colonialism began in the northern part of the Malay peninsula.

Due to colonialism of the Siam and colonialism of the British too the Malays were subjugated. According to Noorjaya,

In the colonized southern province, the people lived a life of oppression. Today he sought to leave that boundary behind to trace the origins of the Malays up to Kuala Indera Kayangan, and this afternoon he was here in Kedah to reconnect the broken bloodline, and to close the rift that had developed (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 353).

The narrator has crossed the boundary that was created by the British and Siam for the Malays. Borders and colonizers separated the race. Families that were separated live on both sides of the border in Thailand, Southern Thailand predominantly, and Kedah.

Thus, the narrator states that he has decided to reconnect with the Malays on the Malayan side of the border in order to mend the harm that the British and the Siam had done to the Malay race.

Langkasuka is an ancestral land of the Malays. It exists historically although the name no longer does because it has not been as lucky as Melaka. According to the text:

"A long time ago, the Malay ancestors had built the civilization of Langkasuka from the Isthmus of Kra right down to northern Perak in the south" (Noorjaya, 2009: pp. 353-354). The empire of Langkasuka is described to be from Segenting Kra which is now a part of Thailand until the northern part of Perak. Colonization is a very painful experience for the colonized subjects. The pain can be felt through the text. According to Noorjaya, "Colonized people cannot forget pain and sadness just like that, except when they are free from the fetters that chain them and their souls" (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 354). The pain of colonization and the humiliation that comes with it can only be cured with or through independence. The Malays and the people of Malaya fought hard for Malaya's independence. The plans that transpired before independence can be gauged from the excerpt below.

Noorjaya very cleverly describes how independence was planned. According to the text,

"The Northern Rulers wanted to create a single national identity, which in effect would efface my identity. Doesn't

that infringe on one's basic human rights?" Kusing puts forth many questions which I could not answer. "What should my answer be?" "Show me Langkasuka." "Langkasuka?" "An Independent Malay civilization, stretching from the Isthmus of Kra to Perak". "That Langkasuka had vanished in history." "Langkasuka will not be lost as long as you, my friend, and I are Malays." (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 355).

Independence was created or planned by the royal rulers of the Peninsular because the nation and its people are their dignities. The dialogue is that there is no physical Langkasuka anymore. Thus, the narrator argues that as long as the Malays are alive as long as that the spirit of Langkasuka will remain because the nation and its people are synonymous.

The narrators meandering thoughts lead him into a dream state. He finds himself in the past. According to the text:

Kusing was startled. Suddenly he found himself in a Throne Room. On the throne sat a man who wore the ceremonial garments of a Malay ruler. The man held a long kris and a shorter one was slipped into the sash at his waist. Was he really a Malay ruler? Kusing was familiar with Malay ceremonies. He sat properly cross-legged. But where am I now: He thought. History unfolded in his mind. Kusing was familiar with the history of his people and the kingdom named Langkasuka. He went over it in detail." (Noorjaya, 2009: pp. 355-356).

The narrator cannot place himself in any temporal or geographical location. He tried to use his historical knowledge to make sense of the situation that he was in. He started to mule over his historical knowledge in detail.

The man in the royal dress who is sitting on the throne tells Kusing that he is now in Kedah. The narration states,

"We suppose you are new here in Kedah," the voice of the man on the throne was gentle and kind. These must be the words of a supreme ruler. There were many rulers in Kedah though Kusing, I wonder which one he is. "I am Sultan Muzaffar Shah, this is the kingdom of Kedah Darul Aman. What is your name? Where are you from and why are you here?" That answered Kusing's question. Sultan Muzaffar Syah was the first Malay prince to convert to Islam, he remembered. Now it became clear to him that he was in the year 531 of the hegira calendar. "You have not answered my question," "Forgive me, sire. My name is Ku Husain from Patani, and I came here to find Langkasuka, sire." "Patani? Is not Patani ruled by

a king?" "That is true sire, but a hundred years from now, Patani will be annexed by the northerners and the last king Tengku Abdul Kadir Kamaruddin, will be forced to abdicate the throne." (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 356).

Kusing finds the answer to his meanderings. He is in Kedah and the individual in front of him is the first Muslim ruler of Kedah.

The dialogue between Kusing and the Sultan reveals that Langkasuka will be ruled by his descendants. Kusing then states that the city of Langkasuka was built by his ancestors. According to the text,

"Hmm, we know the ways of these northerners. Kedah, too, will be annexed by them several times in the future, when it will be ruled by my descendants. Err...did you mention Langkasuka?" "Yes, Your Majesty." "The city of Langkasuka was built by my grandfather, Maharaja Derbar Raja, at a place upstream called Sok." (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 356).

Thus, via the text historical facts are translated for us so that we understand our nation's history. Fiction is more widely read than historical texts. History is a closed subject and very objective while literature is fluid and subjective. Thus, Noorjaya, the author very intelligently uses the objective to create something that is fluid and subjective. However, the subjectivity is objectified and authenticated via historical data, historical figures, and temporal space as well as geographical settings.

Nations are narrated into being. This is what the author is trying to put forth through his fiction. The narrator states that history educates us. It teaches us the meaning of suffering, i.e. other peoples', of those that have lived in the past. According to the text:

History teaches the meaning of suffering and backwardness in all aspects. The Northern Curriculum artificially created a new national language and culture. What it did in reality was to create a new 'nation' that destroyed the heritage of a great people. (Noorjaya, 2009: p. 358).

The new nation was created through a curriculum, that the narrator labels as the Northern Curriculum. He states that the purpose of the curriculum was to create a new nation that destroyed the heritage of the Malays which he calls great people. Thus, the tradition and religion of the Malays were destroyed because of a nation that was narrated into being through rhetoric and philosophy. The new nation was theorized into being after it was narrated.

In the end of the narration, Kusing finds himself amidst an army of people that were moving northward. According to him:

Suddenly it all happened very fast. Kusing found himself on the vast Padang Jangam. Before his eyes, hundreds of thousands of torches were carried by people accompanying warriors riding elephants and horses. Kusing approached the army. He saw Sultan Muzaffar Syah, Tengku Kudin...and the Malay warriors accompanied by a few hundred thousand people. They were moving north. Kusing followed the great Malay army. Clearly he was no longer searching for Langkasuka, but instead fighting to build a new Langkasuka that had been lost for so long" (Noorjaya, 2009: 358-359).

Thus, the narrator portrays that a nation that had lost its identity through narration, and philosophy is trying to rebuild it with might. The might of the people and its rulers. The search for a Langkasuka was over. Now it was the duty of the people and its rulers to rebuild a nation that is more powerful than Langkasuka on the ashes of the old castles and myths as well as historical facts of a nation state that is long gone but a people that still live on. We have to bear in mind the philosophy of Hang Tuah that surfaces in Hikayat Hang Tuah and Sejarah Melayu, "Tak akan hilang Melayu di dunia". Borders and countries might disappear, but the people and the spirit of the lost nations remain. As long as the Malays live and breathe as long as that the spirit of the great nation Langkasuka will live on and exist.

The next story that will be discussed is "A Merdeka Tale" by Shahnon Ahmad. The narrative begins with these words "Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" "Merdeka" a Malay word which means freedom or independence. In this story, it is also the name of a person.

Merdeka in this story is the name of a beggar. He comes to the house of a child named Yuri. He is depicted to be,

"Only when Merdeka stood straight at the gate, showing his chipped-alms bowl, only then did Yuri react. She would stare at the thin body on the other side of the imposing gate. Really the body was so thin – as thin as a bamboo pole. The hair was thick long and uncombed. The ends of the hair were so knotted and twisted like a piece of old, hardened latex. The eyes were sunken, and the shine was no longer there. And the face, the exposed chest, the arms, the neck and the bottom which were three quarter exposed, were all thickly covered with black dirt, dark blotches everywhere, similar to the saliva stains, the maps, as they are called, found on dirty pillows. (Shahnon Ahmad, 2009: pp. 386-387).

Shahnon through this character criticizes the idea of Merdeka/ independence. This character who is a beggar symbolizes the frailty of the concept of independence. The state or country that is impoverished which is struggling for independence is portrayed via the character. To portray the futility and absurdity of the act of independence the word Merdeka in this text is repeated by a child and a half-senile beggar (386-387).

Shahnon Ahmad is well known for his criticism of the Malaysian way of life and politics. He has always been through his writings as a social critic. This surfaces in the short story discussed in this essay. According to Shahnon Ahmad:

Datuk Mahbub was an old hand at party politics; he had gone through five different eras. "This is an experienced Datuk. During the Japanese Occupation, this Datuk had many samurai swords. During the Malayan Union, it was also this Datuk who spat on many white men. In 1957 it was also this Datuk who climbed trees, shouted and screamed. Now this Datuk has a seat, many wives, and is old" (p. 392).

Datuk Mahbub is depicted as a freedom fighter. He was pro-Japanese during the Japanese occupation, fought against the idea of the Malayan Union that was going to annihilate the power of the Malay Sultans. This man is depicted as vocal and rude. It shows that in spirit he practices the Japanese slogan that 'Asia is for Asians'. In his association with the British colonizers, he used brawn rather than the brain.

Datin Rahimah is Datuk Mahbub's third wife. She is depicted to give him strength and support throughout his political career. According to the text:

Datin Rahimah was quick to grasp how the *rakyat* would receive her husband each time he visited their kampong [village]. The applause would be thunderous each time he jokes. And this continued from week to month, from one kampong to the next. In fact, even the party leaders and even ministers would burst out laughing. ADUN [Members of the State Legislative Council] meetings, or other branch meetings or even the unofficial meetings with central party leaders would become happy occasions (p. 393).

Datuk Mahbub had the knack of putting people at ease with his jovial character. His wife is very perceptive about his influence on the people and how they receive him.

Shahnon discusses Datin Rahimah's relationship with Datuk Mahbub. The portrayal of Datuk Mahbub and his

third wife by Shahnnon Ahmad is a critique of the Malay elite and political establishment. According to the text:

Some time ago, before Rahimah became Datuk Mahbub's third wife, she remembered reading on the front page about Datuk Mahbub's antics is an ADUN meeting. From this satirical speech, she could not decipher what connection it had with the opposition party. If she remembered rightly Datuk Mahbub also jokes about "filling the stomach, and marrying more". Rahimah barely remembered. In her school, everything was chaotic for it was obvious that there was a joker in the ADUN assembly; in fact, in another newspaper, it was explained that there was a jester in the house of the people's representatives. And this was surely a healthy politics development (p. 394).

Malay politics have always been elitist. However, through the characters of Datuk Mahbub and his third wife Shahnnon Ahmad downgrades it. The political figure that is portrayed by Shahnnon Ahmad is a man who thrives on the Malay culture of having many wives, and this surfaces in his political agenda, as well as through his marriages. He is not a serious man and is depicted as a joker which shows that Shahnnon openly criticizes or mocks the elitist Malay politicians by creating such a character as Datuk Mahbub. This character of Datuk Mahbub when translated into English cannot be easily defined by the native speaker of English who is unfamiliar with Malay culture and politics as well as Islam. The depiction of this character needs to be clearly explained to the native speaker of English who with the advent of independence lost touch with his ancestors' colonies.

The character Merdeka, a beggar, shows us the ills of independence. This man fought hand in hand with Datuk Mahbub to achieve the nation's independence. While a man like Datuk Mahbub has a parliamentary seat and lives in comfort with his three wives and many children, Merdeka lives in poverty and is senile.

When Merdeka came yet nearer, she could see his skeletal body completely uncovered, except for his private parts. His hairs, loose on top was knotted at the bottom almost like the moss-covered plank. His face was thin, and his blood-shot eyes seemed be sunken in the face. His nose was dirty and his cracked lips which were seldom closed tight would reveal a few dirty stained teeth (p. 394).

Merdeka represents the futility of the concept of independence. It shows that independence does not necessarily mean prosperity. Merdeka is only one figure in this story that represents the many other freedom fighters that have been forgotten and that suffer in poverty. Shahnnon in his own way criticizes the opportunist that took advantage of

people like Merdeka for their own ends. These are represented through the figure of Datuk Mahbub.

Conclusion

Bearing the concept that 'Nations are Narrated into Being' this research has analyzed writings of two native Malay writers that have been translated into English and how their writings show the rhetoric of independence. Both writers' fiction has been employed as rhetoric that helped the nation to gain its independence from Britain. The research has discussed and described the Malays in the Malay Peninsula as well as the cultural and emotional effects of the translated independence rhetoric that has been lost through translation. This essay has read the texts using a postcolonial lens created from the works of postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Franz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha. Via the created lens this essay has analyzed how the Malay postcolonial culture has been translated into English. Todd Jones' essay "Translation and Belief Ascription: Fundamental Barriers" (2003) has also been a major help in the analysis of the texts and cultural effects that they have produced. It has been argued that epistemology has been used to ascribe belief. The research has described how cultural epistemology has been translated into the English language via the critical analysis of Shahnnon Ahmad's "A Merdeka Tale" and Noorjaya's "The Quest for Langkasuka".

It can be concluded that the translation of cultural epistemology is successful in both texts because the translation of the text can be easily understood. This understanding permeates especially in the cultural effects and historical effects that are predominantly native to the Malays and Malaysia.

Competing Interest Statement

All authors have read and approved the manuscript and take full responsibility for its contents. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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