

**MALAYSIAN CINEMA AND
NEGOTIATIONS WITH
MODERNITY:
FILM AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

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requirements of Napier University
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This thesis is dedicated to three special women:
Inez, for the initial inspiration; my mother, for
confirming that university was the right choice;
and Antonia, for keeping me going when things
were at their very worst.

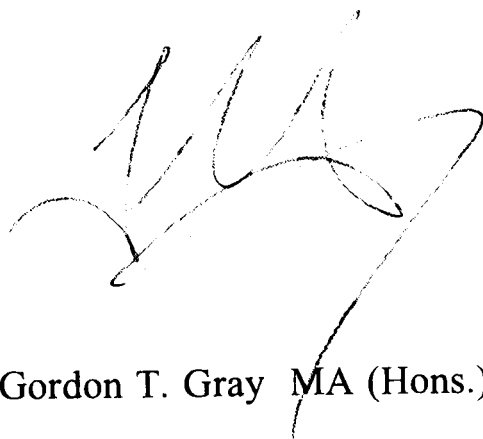
DECLARATION

This thesis was submitted to Napier University, Edinburgh for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The work described in this thesis was carried out initially under the supervision of Professor Paul Willemen (then of Napier University) and Dr. Janet Carsten of the University of Edinburgh, and latterly under Professor Desmond Bell of Napier University and Dr. Carsten. The work was undertaken in the School of Design and Media Arts.

In accordance with Napier University regulations governing the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the candidate submits this thesis as original unless otherwise referenced.

During the period of this research one paper has been published. Details are presented below.

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Abstract

This thesis examines Malaysian cinema in the context of the various processes and discourses of modernity. Analysing the processes of modernity which Malaysians are engaged with provides a crucial theme by which to demonstrate how various socio-political ideologies, institutions, and mechanisms may be promoted, rejected, or otherwise negotiated. This negotiation takes place in both Malaysian society and the cinematic representations of that society. Therefore, two discrete disciplines have been incorporated, those of anthropology and film studies. In the course of the thesis, discourses of modernity, encompassing processes and institutions, are addressed in terms of existing ethnographic literature, my own ethnographic research, and in the analyses of contemporary films. The introduction of an ethnographic background for the society in which the films are produced opens new vistas for film analysis. However, while the injection of anthropology into a film study has been a major concern, the importance of the reverse is also argued. Further, this thesis provides a multiple rendering of analyses, arguing that, as a symbolic media and/or art form, cinema is inherently open to alternative readings, 'mis'-readings, and re-readings. One of the goals of thesis is, through a different synergy between film and anthropology, to provide some alternative answers to the ever-present question haunting the Malaysian cinema industry, namely "Why aren't our films successful?"

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Introduction

'It's over for now,' said Hawk. 'Settle for that. That's the trouble with legends; we demand they have a neat, comforting ending. The truth is rarely that obliging.'

(Simon R. Green *Beyond the Blue Moon* 59)

Overture

There is a scene in the Malay-language film *Suami, Isteri dan...?* ('Husband, Wife and...?', Pansha 1996), in which we are watching the male and female leads speaking together. The action takes place in the house of the woman's parents, with the woman's mother present. At a certain point during this scene, the camera shifts from inside the house, as if we were present in the room, to outside the house, framing the shot through a window. This shift has the effect of placing the viewer outside the house as well, looking at the couple through the window. This camera shift is notable as it breaks the flow of the narrative, and our subjective positioning. This particular shot, filming an interior scene from outside, framed through a window or door, occurs frequently in Malay language films, tele-movies, and tele-dramas, often enough to draw the attention of a non-Malaysian viewer. In one regard, this thesis is the result of my attempt to make sense of this particular stylistic within Malay-language cinema. At the end of this thesis, we will return to this scene, and examine it in light of the information provided through the course of my analyses of Malay cinema and negotiations with modernity.

Negotiations with Modernity

In the city of Madurai, cinema is everywhere. Glittering billboards advertise the latest films, and smaller posters are slapped on to spare inches of wall space. Movie songs blare from horn speakers and cassette players at weddings, puberty rites, and temple and shrine festivals. Tapes of movie dialogues play at coffee stalls, while patrons join in reciting them. Rickshaws and shop boards are painted with movie stars' pictures. Young men and women follow dress and hairstyle fashions dictated by the latest films. Younger children trade movie star cards, learn to disco dance like the film actors, and recreate heroic battles in imitation of their

favourite stars. Fan club members meet in the streets to boast about their star and make fun of his rival.

The visual and aural presence of cinema in this part of South India [...] is matched by one of the highest production and filmwatching rates in the world (Dickey 1993: 3).¹

The above quote illustrates quite clearly, concisely, and graphically what the situation for the Malaysian cinema industry is *not*. In contrast to the South Indian example above, the Malay language cinema industry is relatively small, producing between 7-12 feature films a year, and even within this body of work only one or two of those films will make any dent in the box-office Top Ten lists. While Malay-language films in the 1950s and 1960s did indeed inspire elements of devotion, this is most emphatically no longer the case. In Malaysia film actors and actresses do not become stars - stars become film actors and actresses. And while the exploits and tastes of these celebrities may be projected through glossy entertainment magazines, their imitability is seldom due to their status as actors or actresses. While commercial success is not the ultimate measure of credibility, critical acclaim (either global or national) has also eluded most Malaysian films and filmmakers. When discussing Malay cinema with members of the general public, the response was typically, "Why would you want to study that?" Further, I often confronted the assumption that I am interested in the 'Golden Age' period. Notably, this latter point was also evident in conversations with contemporary filmmakers and other industry personnel. In many ways this very lack of 'success,' rather than being constrictive, was liberating for this thesis.

As one of the prerequisites for gaining research permission from the Malaysian government, I was asked to provide an evaluation of the cinema industry

¹ As much as possible I have tried to reference appropriately to the authors. For instance Malay names (Amir Muhammad for instance) will be generally be found under the personal name (A - Amir in this instance) rather than the patronymic (M - Muhammad). Chinese names, for different reasons, are likewise. Khoo Kay Kim will be found under Khoo rather than Kay or Kim. In instances such as Francis Loh Kok Wah, the first Chinese name is used, Loh in this case. For the most part, the citations should direct the reader to the correct point in the bibliography (Amir Muhammad 1995; Loh Kok Wah 1982).

for FINAS - the National Film Development Corporation (Gray 1998). Aspects of this evaluation, an exercise in policy studies rather than ethnography, have been integrated into this thesis. One of the factors conditioning the genesis of the following work is that, as a result of this cross-cultural encounter, there were particular questions being asked of the ethnographer, particular relations being formed within this context, and certain requirements to be met. The locus for these issues and relationships to manifest themselves was the Malaysian cinema industry. But perhaps I am 'jumping the gun' somewhat, as the subject of this research has yet to be explained.

Thesis Goals and Agendas

If, as was mentioned above, Malay language cinema is far from people's minds in Malaysia, this is doubly so outside the country. Indeed, one of the goals of this thesis is to 'introduce' a little known cinema industry to a wider, if initially academic, audience. While this addition to our general knowledge is important in itself, there have also been benefits to expanding our knowledge of this *particular* industry. Other Southeast Asian cinema industries, such as that of the Philippines or Thailand, have enjoyed some degree of international exposure and critical appreciation. The Malaysian cinema industry shares certain characteristics with these other Southeast Asian cinemas, namely that they are relatively small industries caught between global players such as the cinemas of Hollywood, Bollywood, and Hong Kong, but has not shared the same appreciation. Explaining why this is the case involves an analysis of the particular political-economy of Malaysia and Malaysian cinema. It also requires attention to social factors such as gender and urbanisation, associated with the specific experiences of modernisation in Malaysia. The mention of social factors brings up another goal for this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to ground the analysis of Malay language cinema in an understanding of Malay-Malaysian social groups and cultural formations. In the case of this thesis, that understanding came about via the process of ethnographic fieldwork. I could not, and in all conscience would not even if I

could, insist that every EuroAmerican theorist/critic of non-EuroAmerican cinema should attempt ethnographic research. However, to ignore or resist any appreciation of the socio-cultural specifics of film production is to spurn invaluable possibilities of meaning and analysis. In the case of this thesis it is the social and cultural contexts of Malaysian filmmakers (for example their socio-economic positionality) which is discussed and analysed. By doing so, insights have been gained into the Malaysian cinema industry itself and, perhaps more importantly, into the product of that industry. This is not an idle point, as it questions the often uncritical application of 'Western' derived film theory onto non-EuroAmerican cinemas, and questions the assumption of a common knowledge regarding 'Western' cinemas (either in terms of production or analysis). To demonstrate the usefulness of integrating anthropology and film studies, with their diverse epistemologies and methodologies, is therefore, another goal of this thesis.

Modernity is itself one of those terms which are endlessly mutable, often used by cultural and social theorists, but not so often explained. A further goal of this thesis, therefore, is to discuss our concept of the formations of modernity, how these formations impact upon the lives of Malaysians, and are themselves in turn variously lauded, reviled, assimilated, or domesticated in Malaysian society. In short, how modernity is negotiated. These negotiations provide much of the analytical material for this thesis, and not only in terms of 'real' Malaysian life, but also in Malaysian 'reel' life, i.e. as portrayed in the cinema. In combination with the points made in the preceding paragraph, it is also the case that Malaysian filmmakers are members of Malaysian society and must undertake their own specific negotiations in and through their medium. The particularity of the filmmakers' positions, vis-à-vis modernity and other Malaysians, is one of the key elements of analysis in the thesis.

The positionality of filmmakers is not the only way in which modernity and film interact within any society. To return to a more philosophical analysis of modernity, the dynamics of modernisation, such as capitalism or individualisation,

are themselves inter-linked and interdependent. These interdependencies result in the unsought intrusions of other elements. Capitalism, for instance, depends upon certain ideas/ideals of the individual and therefore the introduction of capitalism will also introduce aspects of individualisation, such as rhetorics of human rights or freedom of the press. What is more, the processes of modernity also bring with them disjunctures, such as new conceptualisations of individuation conflicting with other 'traditional' ideas of the person. These disjunctures themselves show up as slippages, and this is another arena in which the analyses of Malaysian cinema and of modernity inform each other. To provide specific examples of these slippages, and to analyse the disjunctures and slippages in terms of what they tell us about the relationships of filmmakers, Malaysians, and indeed Malaysia, with modernity, is a further goal for this thesis.

Before going on to provide an outline for this thesis, I feel it may be helpful to stipulate what this thesis is not. The mention of the words film and anthropology in combination frequently brings to mind notions of either the 'ethnographic film' or 'audience/consumption studies' approaches. This thesis adopts neither of these approaches. I am principally concerned with investigating commercially-based feature films, and the socio-cultural milieu of the producers of those films. I address both the Malaysian film industry itself and its filmmakers as a social group. The other thing that this thesis is not, is an audience/reception study. While the Malaysian cinema audience (or as is the case here, audience *in potentia*) is a crucial element of the analysis, it is not the primary focus of this study. Issues surrounding the reception activity and 'meaning-making' of the Malaysian audience are, for this thesis, important in regard to what they tell us about Malaysian films and filmmakers. My concern is not to criticise either of these two avenues of research, which have made significant contributions to Media Studies, but rather to clarify from the outset what this thesis is intended to accomplish, what its goals are, and therefore where methodological and field boundaries have been drawn.

Thesis Outline

The overall structure of the thesis aims to progressively narrow the focus and analyses, moving from the broadest of philosophical questions around modernity, through to the specifics of Malaysian society and culture, and the formation of the individual within this context. Ironically, as will be argued throughout the thesis, these broad philosophical topics have much to say regarding our understanding of that smallest of social groups - the individual. The thesis also becomes more 'filmic' as it progresses. Although the second chapter is devoted to the Malaysian cinema industry, it does not specifically address the content of the films produced in that industry.² In Chapters 3 through 5, particular films are discussed and subsequently reanalysed as new and/or differing anthropological information is introduced. While in Chapter 3 and 4, films are discussed as discrete units, in Chapter 5 an analysis of filmic modes of representation is employed instead. This latter strategy was adopted in order to compare similar representations across films. Reanalysing the films is not simply a stylistic device, but serves to affirm one of the points made in regards to film, namely that film is itself a symbolic creation. But again, I am starting to get ahead of myself. In terms of their structures, Chapters 3-5 begin with an ethnographic background to the subject matter (urbanisation in Chapter 3, gender in Chapter 4, and the family and the individual in Chapter 5), which is followed by an assessment of that background in terms of the field-site. The ethnographic assessment is in turn followed by film analyses, which are undertaken with regard to the information presented in the chapter. The film analyses point out arenas where the films do, or do not as the case may be, coincide with 'reality.' The following section provides a more detailed outline of the chapters and their contents.

² There are exceptions, where examples of issues such as censorship are exemplified via particular films, but the content of films is not of primary importance within the chapter.

Chapter 1: Modernity and Modernisation

Modernity, as will be argued in various places in this thesis, is an often used but seldom defined term. We 'know' what we mean when we use it, but that meaning is often not the same the next time we employ the term. Our frame of reference shifts, and so too does our heuristic. This fluidity of referent is not simply due to sloppy thinking, but is inherent to 'modernity.' Within critical discourse, the term is an essentially contested one, at the core of theoretical debate within social sciences. Chapter 1 focuses upon 'pinning down' modernity. What the concept means, how it came to be, and how and/or where it is employed. Perhaps the key message from this chapter is that modernity is not a point in time. We/they did not become modern on 15-05-1901 (to pick a date at random), rather 'modernity' is a strategically implemented, discursive device.

Modernity is not simply a philosophical abstraction, however, but impacts upon the daily lives of people around the world. Another argument put forward in the chapter is that the various dynamics of modernisation are linked. What this means is that these institutions come 'bundled' with assumptions and expectations, and these are not necessarily anticipated or desired. While the institutions of modernity introduce disjunctures, these unanticipated 'bundles of assumptions' compound the disjunctures and are potentially even more disruptive by virtue of their very unexpectedness. To put some anthropological 'meat' upon our philosophical 'bones,' modernity as a concept is tested in relation to Malaysia, literature, and film.

Chapter 2: Malaysian Cinema History³

Whereas Chapter 1 provides the reader with the socio-theoretical scaffolding of my project, Chapter 2 discusses the concrete historical development of the Malaysian cinema industry. This discussion entails not only the technological and artistic

³ Throughout the thesis, Malaysian cinema industry and Malay language cinema industry are used synonymously. I will discuss the reasons for, and ramifications of, this usage at the end of the Introduction.

developments operative within the industry itself, but also traces the impact of wider social and national changes on Malaysian cinema. The, often fraught, relationship between the production and non-production (exhibition and distribution) elements of the industry are also discussed. Further, political-economy and artistic concerns of the Malaysian cinema industry and producers are likewise analysed over the course of the chapter.

Chapter 2 in combination with Chapter 1 provide the background for the more ethnographically grounded analyses which follow in the remaining chapters. Chapters 3-5 review relevant ethnographic research, incorporate the findings of my own fieldwork, and address the issues of urbanisation, gender, and the family and the individual in and through my analysis of Malaysian cinema.

Chapter 3: Urbanisation

The discussion of urbanisation details an analysis of an ongoing process in Malaysia, wherein government policies, social mores and conventions, and the processes of modernity find a fertile home. Beginning with the aftermath of the 1969 communal riots, government socio-economic policies sought to create a Malay entrepreneur class. This group would, almost by definition, be urban and middle-class. 'Middle class' is a problematic term, both within and outwith Malaysia, and one of the goals of the chapter is to provide a workable, and Malaysian, definition for the term.

Urbanisation in the context of Malays is in certain regards a relatively recent phenomenon, although urban dwelling was by no means unknown to Malay people prior to the 1970s. The second section of the chapter undertakes to provide some understanding of where the new urban classes have come from. In the case of Malaysia, this is the village (*kampung*). Most of the ethnographic material on Malays has tended to focus on the *kampung*, and therefore there is a rich store of material available in regard to life-styles and world views.

Much of the remaining first half of the chapter discusses the changes brought about by urbanisation. A key point made here is that these changes are not 'just'

physical, but entail shifts in symbolic conceptualisation and the role of the urban (and the rural for that matter) within the imaginary. The elite and non-elite visions of urbanisation and modernity, and the disjunctures engendered by the subjects of these visions, provide material through which to analyse Malay-language films. The remainder of the chapter is given over to these analyses.

Chapter 4: Gender

The chapter on gender begins with the necessary admonition that 'gender' includes both men and women, rather than a single 'marked' category - women. This is of importance in considering the change to gender roles and rules. These changes do not affect only one group, and in the case of Malay gender relations this is certainly true.

As with Chapter 3, Chapter 4 also returns to the *kampung* to analyse some of the values and ideals from which change is occurring. To this end, the gender socialisation process is outlined, and the discourses and praxis of gender relations are discussed. Two principle social frameworks are featured in this section, marriage (both in terms of partner choice and the ceremony itself), and *shame*.

The following section in Chapter 4 focuses upon the changes in gender relations invoked by particular aspects of modernisation. One such change is that the discourses and counter-discourses surrounding the move into a more Western-oriented capitalist society have exerted a double bind upon women. Women are exhorted to be consumers and producers (and indeed producers of consumers), but they are also expected to be the moral instructors and guardians as well. A further example is the phenomenon of second marriage. The analysis of women's fears in regard to a perceived increase in second marriage, seeks to explain how and why gender roles and capitalist expectations have combined to encourage this particular institution.

Chapter 5: The Family and the Individual

Chapter 5 is different from the earlier chapters in two ways, first in that it involves the discussion of two intertwined institutions, the family and the individual, and second in that rather than analysing three films, filmic portrayals are discussed in terms of their modes of representation. As the institutions are intertwined, and as the individual forms such key constituent of modernity, it became a strategic choice to combine the two in a single chapter.

The chapter begins with a general discussion of Malay kinship, particularly in the rural context. One key point is how the importance of kin ties has carried over into the urban milieu. While certain traits and ideals have migrated with little change, others have had to be negotiated anew, and remain in negotiation. As with gender relations, the family is also in flux, with new patterns and institutions developing. Portrayals of the family in Malay language cinema are analysed in four separate modes of representation: writing-out the family; representing the family; working around the family; and structuring the family. While these modes certainly differ in their approach to the family, they share a similarity in that what ties them together is their engagement with the individual - i.e. issues of autonomy, which as we see in Chapter 1 is one of the key elements of modernity.

The remainder of Chapter 5 discusses the individual, both in general philosophical and in specifically Malaysian terms. Throughout the course of the chapters, it becomes evident that the individual is one of the principal sites of disjuncture, as represented in the cinema. Being at the forefront of modernity, the individual also becomes an important site of negotiation in Malaysian 'real' life, either politically or socio-culturally. Rather than analyse particular depictions of the individual, or modes of depiction, various previous analyses are themselves re-analysed in the wake of the new information provided.

Thesis Background

The first two sections of this Introduction have provided the goals for the thesis, and an outline of how those goals are to be carried out. The current section, and the section to follow, will provide the various 'backgrounds' to the thesis. The academic or epistemological background to the work will be presented in this section. What I have attempted to do in this section is to provide enough information for a film person to appreciate the epistemic groundings of the anthropological elements to this thesis, and vice versa. The methodological frame for the thesis is addressed in the section following this backgrounding.

History

One of the arguments made throughout this thesis is that the past, present, and future are not discrete entities, that they exist in relation to one another, and impact upon one another. The history of Malaysia is a case in point. Malaysia's history as a colony of not one but three separate European powers has left a mark upon contemporary politics as well as social discourses (Mahathir Mohamad 1997 [1970]; Syed Hussein Alatas 1977; Hirschman 1987; Zawiah Yahya 1994; Shamsul 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996). While I incorporate recent historical events in this thesis, knowledge of the history of Malaysia has been of vast importance in understanding the contemporary situation. One of the most useful general historical work is that by Andaya & Andaya (1982). More specialised works include those focusing on issues such as nationalism and colonial policy (Khoo Kay Kim 1972; Roff 1974), education and colonial policy (Roff 1974; Stevenson 1975), administration (Roff 1974; Shamsul 1986; Khoo Kay Kim 1995), or urbanisation and trade (Khoo Kay Kim 1972; Reid 1983, 1989; O'Connor 1995). More contemporary history, particularly post-1969, is covered by a range of disciplines including politics and economics (see for instance Gomez & Jomo 1997) and a variety of Malaysian social commentators (Lee 1990; Rehman Rashid 1993; Salleh Ben Joned 1994; Karim Raslan 1996a, 1996b; Amir Muhammad *et al.* 1998; Ziauddin Sardar 2000). As the

old aphorism goes, 'nothing comes from nothing,' and in the case of Malaysian history, this is certainly true. Although in the thesis I will concentrate on the twentieth century, the earlier history of the Malay peninsula may help to shed some light on the influence of the colonial period upon Malay ideas of identity and nationalism.

Although ultimately British colonial involvement in Malaysia was to prove disastrous in terms of Malay autonomy, it appears that initially the involvement was welcomed (Andaya & Andaya 1982: 105; Khoo 1995: 62-63). The British traders offered Malays an escape from the monopolism of the Dutch East India Company, and:

only a year after [Penang's] founding all Malay rulers of standing had written to Light [the officer in charge of Penang] in an effort to gauge English willingness to lend them material aid. Perak saw the British as a potential ally against the Bugis of Selangor; Trengganu and Kedah hoped for assistance against Siam; Sultan Ibrahim of Selangor, Sultan Mahmud of Riau-Johor and the new Bugis Yamtuan Muda, the exiled Raja Ali, all anticipated support against the Dutch (Andaya & Andaya 1982: 105).

The Dutch suffered defeat during the Napoleonic wars, and ceded over of their Southeast Asian territories to the British for temporary safekeeping in 1795, leaving the British with free reign in the archipelago. During the period 1795-1824, Melaka and Batavia (Jakarta, the Dutch capital in the Indies) were left to stagnate. First Penang, and then Singapore, became the pre-eminent trading centres in the area. In 1824 the Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed which separated the Malay Archipelago into two separate spheres of influence, divided by the Straits of Melaka. The treaty meant that some culturally Malay areas, such as the east coast of Sumatra, were cut off, and the polity of Riau-Johor was finally sundered, aiding in the establishment of the modern states of Johor and Pahang (Andaya & Andaya 1982: 122). In 1826,

Singapore, Melaka, Penang, and Province Wellesley (the strip of mainland opposite Penang) became the Straits Settlements, and the British base in Malaysia (1982: 123).

From 1826 to c.1870, the British were involved in a process of gradual expansion into the Malay political field. The mechanisms by which this was accomplished are outlined in various sources (see for instance Khoo 1995: 42-46, 55-79). As such, for this period I wish to concentrate of the more indirect processes by which the British established themselves in the peninsula. For instance, the move towards plantation agriculture, and the increasing importance of mining led to demographic changes. Though Chinese migrant labourers had been coming to Malaysia since the 1400s, and had been increasing in numbers since the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth they came to dominate production in the plantation and mining industries (Andaya & Andaya 1982: 136). Moreover, these immigrant workers were now staying. The Chinese population, however, also brought with it problems, chief among them being a virulent factionalism. The Chinese secret societies became increasingly involved in the endemic civil wars taking place amongst Malay rulers, at various times in various peninsular states. Matters were exacerbated by European involvement and the destabilisation of the various entrepôt. The situation was such that the British could justify their interventions in Malaya as 'restoring order' (Andaya & Andaya 1982:76). This justification was also transformed into a colonial discourse on their 'civilising mission' in Malaya, bringing the benefits of a 'proper' model for governance, law, and values.

Arguably, the colonial policies of the British resulted from the very ambiguousness of their intentions. It could be presumed that they had learned from the experiences of the Portuguese and Dutch to some extent, as their policy of indirect rule kept them out of costly conflicts, for the most part.⁴ Between the 1870s and early 1900s, the Protected Malay States (most of the west coast) were ran

⁴ Even when the colonial government did take direct action, they managed to work within the Malay power structures, as the rulers they backed were 'legitimate' if not necessarily the most popular choice.

nominally by their respective Sultans, but in fact by British Residents (Stevenson 1975: 193). Many of the specific policies of the Residents were aimed at maintaining the status quo; (compliant) Sultans in charge; British traders trading, Chinese and Indian labourers labouring; and Malays rice-farming (Stevenson 1975: 193; Shamsul 1986: 20-21; Khoo 1995: 157-202). To deal individually with policies such as agriculture or education is problematic, as they tended to be specific to times and places (Stevenson 1975: 193). Kelantan and Terengganu for instance did not become wholly colonial states until the 1900s, and Johor avoided having a Resident until 1914. However, idiosyncratic British policies do share a degree of commonalty in that they were very much *laissez-faire*. Indeed, the only group that the British took an active interest in was the nobility. The British administrators saw an ideological as well as practical need for the incorporation of the ruling class into the new bureaucracy (Roff 1974; Andaya & Andaya 1982). It is also suggested that the British, predominantly upper-middle to upper class Englishmen, also had a degree of admiration and/or empathy for the Malay nobility (Stevenson 1975: 194).

With the expansion of colonial bureaucracy, and the subsequent scope for employment, English-language became important to Malays in the 1900s. Public employment, for instance in government bureaucracy, remains a Malay 'stronghold.' From discussions with informants, this field remains a desired career path. The Malay nobility began taking on, both outwardly and inwardly, British values and lifestyles, which further alienated the nobility from non-elite Malays (Roff 1974: *passim*; Andaya & Andaya 1982: 174-175). British colonial policies also had the effect that neither of the developing nationalist ideologies of the time, Malay or Chinese, included the other. Indeed, it is argued that the British introduced the idea of communal and/or ethnic groups, whereas previous discourses of identity were more regionally-based, for instance as Javanese or Bugis (Shamsul 1994: 3-4; see also Hirschman 1987). The ramifications of this continue to have consequences to this day. Further, the Malay alienation from other ethnic groups, the schism between Malay nobility and non-elite, and the increasing emphasis on Islam as principal

signifier of Malay identity (especially in rural areas and along the east coast), combined to form further cleavages in Malaysian society. Upper-class Malays, who had more interaction with Europeans, formed a distinct nationalist ideology, one geared towards a 'nation-state' (though still communally determined), whereas Malays from the left and the Islamic faction formulated their anti-colonial activities and discourses upon different ideologies (Roff 1974; see also Shamsul 1995a). As the preceding point implies, one arena where the various Malay nationalisms agreed was in terms of the Malay aspect of their agendas.

The Second World War saw the departure of the British and the incursion of the Japanese. For various reasons, such as the Chinese being at war with the Japanese, the Malays were to some extent actively courted by the Japanese. The Malays were, again to a degree, co-opted into the Japanese occupation, which has also had a significant effect upon contemporary Malaysia, as it provided more fuel for communal mistrust. The accusation that the Malays co-operated with the Japanese, while the Chinese suffered under the Occupation, and/or were the only ones who fought against the Japanese, is still occasionally unearthed. As a brief addendum, though one to have tragic consequences for Malayan and Malaysian history, the principle force opposing the Japanese was the MPAJA (the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army). The MJAPA was primarily Chinese, and evolved into the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), who continued their activities against the British, and on into post-Independence Malaysia. The Emergency, as the civil war was termed, lasted until 1960. Aside from the human and economic losses which resulted from this period, there was yet another disastrous outcome:

But there was a subtext to the anti-communist campaign that would long haunt Malaysia, for the communists, and their supporters in the civilian population, were predominantly Chinese. [... This] added yet another layer of resentment against the Chinese. By then, their community, with its merchants and middlemen, had already been portrayed as

rapacious exploiters of the poor, innocent Indigene. Gone was the image of the Chinese as tireless worker, enduring an arduous life with stoic stamina, scraping by on the edge of starvation, saving every cent he could for the sake of a better life in some distant future. In its place: the predator, the vulture and, in his heart of hearts, the patriotic point-man of Red China (Rehman Rashid 1993: 57).

After the return of the British colonial government following the Second World War, the need and desire for Malayan independence became evident (Roff 1974; Shamsul 1986, 1995a). The initial plan put forward by the British was for a Malayan Union, where the Straits Settlements (Penang, Melaka [Malacca], and Singapore) and the Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang) would be enjoined with the Unfederated Malay States (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johor), and grant equal rights to all Malaysians. This proposal led to a widespread anti-Malayan Union movement, from which UMNO (the United Malays National Organisation) was formed, and became the leading force for an independent Malaya (Shamsul 1995a). The leaders of UMNO at this time were predominately from the aforementioned elite variety of Malay nationalists, though the grass-roots of the party was comprised of bureaucrats, teachers, and rural Malays. The other main communal groups also formed their own parties, the MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) and the MIC (the Malayan Indian Congress). The three communal parties joined together to form the Alliance, and with independence in 1957, the government.

As much of Malaysia's ruling elite, post-Independence, were British educated (largely from the British-founded Malay College), it may come as no surprise that the new country's rulers maintained the *status quo*, even through the additions of the Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah, and confrontations with the Philippines and

Indonesia.⁵ It was not until 1969 that the *laissez-faire* style of governance was to end.

During the federal elections of 1969, the Alliance, especially the MCA, lost seats to opposition parties. Supporters of the opposition took to the streets, as did government supporters. The resulting riots of May 13 1969 ensured that Malaysia could not remain the same. The old guard, such as Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, was removed, and new policies were introduced. Whether or not the riots were merely a justification for pre-arranged measures, or were indeed the seeds of those changes, new policies did come about. The most important of those changes were measures aiming to appease the demands of Malay nationalists, both inside and outside the government. These measures were taken on both economic and socio-cultural grounds. In the economic sphere the New Economic Policy (NEP), initiated in 1971, sought to bolster national unity;

by "eradicating poverty", irrespective of race, and by
"restructuring society" to achieve inter-ethnic economic
parity between the predominately Malay Bumiputeras and
the predominately Chinese non-Bumiputeras (Gomez &
Jomo 1997: 24).⁶

The eradication and restructuring were to take place via measures to re-distribute control over the national wealth, so that *Bumiputeras* could achieve ownership of 30% of Malaysian corporate wealth (Malaysia 1971). To achieve these targets, massive changes to the Malaysian economy were entailed, which included 'increased state intervention and public expenditure' (Gomez & Jomo 1997: 24).⁷ As Shamsul argues, the NEP was not simply an economic policy, but one of a parcel of measures

⁵ Sarawak and Sabah were added in order to increase the 'Malay' population in Malaysia, as with the inclusion of Singapore the percentage of Chinese and Malay citizens was roughly equal. Neither Indonesia nor the Philippines were happy about this move, as they saw these territories as their own.

⁶ *Bumiputera* translates literally as 'princes of the soil,' but is usually glossed as 'sons of the soil' or simply as a person indigenous to Malaysia (in this case that is taken to mean Malay-Malaysians, though there are indigenous people, who are termed *Orang Asli* - literally 'original people')

⁷ For the varied interpretations and analyses of the NEP, see also Lee 1990: 488; Shamsul 1994b: 13-15, 1995: 10-12; Gomez 1996: 135-137; Jones 1997: 112; etc

aimed at furthering Malay nationalist agendas (1994b, 1995a). The NEP, therefore, had socio-cultural and political aspects, and was itself aligned to other measures with a more straightforward socio-cultural agenda. In terms of the former, the NEP instituted, or at least paved the way for, a wide range of pro-Malay affirmative action policies, aimed at 'fast-tracking' Malays into business and education (Shamsul 1994b).

The NEP was bolstered by the introduction of the National Language and National Cultural Policies. These policies spelt out the dominance of Malay language and Malay culture in the Malaysian nation-state, and that it was upon them that the state was to be based (Kua Kia Soong 1990; see also articles in Kahn & Loh Kok Wah 1992). The election of Mahathir bin Mohamad as Prime Minister in 1981, signalled another change in government agendas. Mahathir had been side-lined from UMNO for his outspoken views, as put forward in *The Malay Dilemma*, principal among them being that Malays had to be 'brought out' of their backwardness as a 'race,' particularly in regards to other Malaysians (1997). The economic recession of the mid-1980s resulted in changes to the government economic policies, such as de-nationalising many of the recently nationalised industries (Jomo 1995: 1-10), and the *dakwah* (Islamic revivalism) movement has also forced the government into changing its approach to Islamic matters (Jomo & Ahmad Shabery Cheek 1992: 88-91; Hussin Mutalib 1993: 34; Peletz 1993: 81). These and other issues of the more recent past are discussed throughout the thesis.

Malaysia and Modernity

Ethnographic work in Malaya/Malaysia, particularly those works researching Malays, has tended to focus upon villages rather than cities. Indeed, there is a venerable tradition to uphold in this regard. Some of the colonial works which are of ethnographic interest were not necessarily written by ethnographers *per se* (Roff 1974; Zawiah Yahya 1994; see also Shamsul 1995b: 3-5; Watson 1996). More formally ethnographic works of both the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods were also largely village-oriented, and helped to establish a focus which has

remained. Work by anthropologists such as Rosemary and Raymond Firth, eschewed the more 'exotic' interests, such as magic, to analyse the more quotidian matters of family and social economies (Firth, Rosemary 1966; Firth, Raymond 1966). This focus on the everyday was to be maintained (Gullick 1958; Djamour 1965). Even those works which deal with the seemingly exotic, such as *latah* (mass hysteria), argued that this was a particular manifestation of more prosaic forces, namely a weapon of the weak to deal with employment conditions (Ackerman & Lee 1978; Lee & Ackerman 1980; Ackerman 1991).

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, there are logical reasons for this focus, primary being that most Malays in the colonial and immediate post-Independence period did live in villages (Zaharah Hj. Mahmud 1970; Brookfield *et al* 1991). While to some extent contemporary ethnographers have continued to focus upon the villages (Wilder 1982, 1995; Raybeck 1986; Shamsul 1986; Peletz 1988, 1993, 1996; Carsten 1987, 1989, 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 1997), this is not to say that *modernity* has passed them by. As will be argued in Chapter 3, 'modern' and 'urban' are socially constructed as synonyms, which is not to argue that the two concepts are in fact synonymous. Indeed, for those working on issues of gender relations (Ong 1987, 1995; Ackerman 1991; Sandborg 1993; Ong & Peletz 1995), art and culture (Razha Rashid 1990; Kahn & Loh Kok Wah 1992), or the family (Karim 1990, 1992; Rudie 1993, Carsten 1997), the processes of modernisation in Malaysia, be they in the city or the village, are crucial components to their work. To find out about the city *per se* however, we more often have to look other than at the anthropology shelves. While the city is socially constructed as *the* site, if not exemplar, of modernity in Malaysia (Gray 1999), specific discussions of 'the city' are to be found in works on political-economy, media, and other issues which are more often expressly linked to the metropole (Zaharom Nain 1994, Mustafa Anuar 1994, Gomez and Jomo 1997, Jones 1997; Yeoh Seng Guan 1997), or to works on Chinese and Indian-Malaysians (see for instance Nonini 1998). This is not to suggest there has been no work done on urban Malays. There have been important

urban-based works on kinship and social organisations (see for instance Provencher 1971, 1972; McKinley 1975), religious revivalism (Nagata 1982, 1984; Shamsul 1982, 1983, 1995; and Hussin Muttalib 1990, 1993), and gender (Ong 1987, 1995; Ackerman 1991; Sandborg 1993; Ong & Peletz 1995). One of the criticisms of much of this work is the lack of specificity regarding class identity, which has led to some problems in the analyses put forward. Further, there has been considerable demographic change, at the very least, since many of these works have been published. The work to follow seeks to build upon that which has gone before, and to respond to the changes which have occurred in the interim. Be that as it may, scholars have called for more, and more articulate, work on issues regarding urban middle class Malays (Kahn 1996). I have attempted to address Kahn's pleas in this thesis.

Film

One of the principal components of this thesis is that of film. I have taken seriously Chow's call for an anthropology of the cinema, particularly as she discusses how an interdisciplinary approach might benefit both film and anthropology (Chow 1995: *passim*; see also Ruby 2000: 1-5, and *passim*). In the following section, I will provide a sketch of the 'state of play' of film studies and an examination of those areas where film studies and anthropology have already established useful synergies.

The most modern of all the arts, cinema is fittingly the most dependent on science and technology. The twentieth century's dominant art form was born out of the nineteenth-century predilection for machinery movement, optical illusion and public entertainment (Parkinson 1995: 7).

While the above statement is far from axiomatic, it nevertheless points out certain critical issues relating to film, one being that it has a historical lineage. Parkinson traces this legacy on one hand back through optical toys predicated upon the brain's perceptual threshold (film's 24 frames per second), 'below which images

exposed to it will appear continuous' (1995: 7), and on the other to magic lantern and *Fantasmagorie* exhibitions (Comolli 1985: 47-55; Thompson & Bordwell 1994: 4-12; Schwartz 1995 297-317; Gunning 1995; Williams 1995: 10-11). The 'birth' of the cinema arrived with the combination of these two legacies, and the opening of the Lumières' *Cinematographe* in 1895 (Thompson & Bordwell 1994; Parkinson 1995). While early cinema retained certain characteristics of the pre-cinema, such as its focus upon 'attractions' or spectacle (Gunning 1995: 116-117; Neale n.d.), it also rapidly developed its own narrative code (Parkinson 1995: 17-19; Thompson & Bordwell 1994: 19-20; cf. Kolker 1998: 13-14).⁸ Indeed, the 'slice-of-life' films of the Lumières' were distinguished by their 'basic narrative pattern of beginning, middle and end' (Parkinson 1995: 17). Increasingly, the *mise-en-scene* became 'remotivated' to serve the narrative (Neale n.d.).

The development of narrative tools such as cross and reverse angle cutting⁹ led not only to an increasing sophistication of the narrative aspect of the cinema, but also to an increasing engagement of the spectator into the diegesis (Neale n.d.).¹⁰ Arguably, while American early cinema (most notably D. W. Griffiths) focused upon individuated characters (through close-ups and eye-line matches), European cinema concentrated upon issues of space, movement, and setting (compounded by cinematographic and editing techniques such as long and medium shots, montage, and more fixed viewpoints - with the camera consistently changing between 90 and 180 degrees (Neale n.d.; Parkinson 1995).¹¹ With the 'importing' of European directors by Hollywood studios from the 1930s, these two styles began to merge.

⁸ In referring to one of the first filmmakers to intercut different scenes (Porter's *The Life of an American Fireman* 1903), Kolker states that there is a suspicion that the intercut scenes were actually constructed years later by distributors, and were actually a succession of shots, as was 'the norm of the period' (Kolker 1998: 13-14).

⁹ Cross-cutting is the alternation between different sequences of action to make them appear to be occurring simultaneously. Reverse-angle cutting is the alternation between shots almost 180 degrees opposite, such as when two characters are speaking to one another.

¹⁰ Interestingly, 'cinema' also went from a fairground and music-hall attraction aimed predominately at lower class audiences, to increasingly accommodating a more up-market audience in fixed urban spaces (Neale n.d.; Kaplan 1998: 272).

¹¹ The 'Hollywood' code for cinematic narrative is as much a product of economic considerations (standardisation and the ability to be easily replicated and mass produced) as artistic endeavour (Kolker 1998: 18).

The narrative and aesthetic codes and conventions which developed during the studio period of Hollywood cinema (1927-1941) have become standards for other film makers to either learn from or react against, such as with Neo-Realism or French New Wave (Kolker 1998: 21-22).

Film theory has also undergone considerable development over the course of time, however, some of the current modes of criticism can be traced back to the interests of early theorists. Here I will briefly touch on three theorists dealing with film in the 1920s and 1930s. Eisenstein was a Russian filmmaker as well as analyst, and dealt with the actual films and their construction.¹² Building upon the idea, if not ideal, of *montage* (the juxtaposing of shots to create meaning), Eisenstein elevated editing over cinematography (Parkinson 1995: 72-78; Kolker 1998: 15-17). Indeed, for Eisenstein, cinema (or more particularly montage editing) could be employed as a language (Nowell-Smith 2000: 11). Kracauer and Benjamin on the other hand were less interested in the construction of the films than in their reception, their apparatuses, and the ideologies embedded within the cinema industry (Kracauer 1960, 1983; Buck-Morss 1992; Gunning 1995: 127-130; Hansen 1999).

As we shall see later, the concerns of film-as-art and film-as-medium continued over time, as Lapsley & Westlake state (speaking of film theory in the 1960s and 1970s):

Nor was there anything new about a desire to analyse the social functioning of cinema, as this had been one of the two main preoccupations of writing on cinema since its beginnings. (The other was the validation of cinema as art, which, having dominated criticism up until the arrival of post-1968 theory, made an emphasis on film's social effects

¹² Vertov, discussed below, another of the great early Russian filmmaker/theorists, was the opposite case to Eisenstein, as Vertov made films to demonstrate his theories rather than his theories explicating his films.

seem novel.) (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: vii; see also Nichols 2000).

The second half of the above quote refers to another generation of film theory, that surrounding the French New Wave, and perhaps most particularly the ideas of André Bazin (Kolker 1998: 15-18; Nowell-Smith 2000: 11-12).¹³ In some ways Bazin is the antithesis of Eisenstein, as he promoted the *mis-en-scène* and the long take as opposed to the montage. Bazin and others involved with the *Cahiers du cinéma* helped to establish the groundwork for cinema studies (*auteur* theory being a prime example), and set the stage for the New Wave (Kolker 1998: 15-18; Parkinson 1995: 185-187). As Lapsley & Westlake argue this aesthetic concern formed the basis of film theory during the 1950s and early 1960s (1988: vii). Basis is not the same as only however, and there remains one further strand to discuss before moving on, and that is the Frankfurt School, of which Adorno and Horkheimer are perhaps the two most famous examples. Their position was, roughly speaking, that mass or popular culture are ideological tools of dominance which subjugate 'the masses' (Adorno 1991; Adorno & Horkheimer 1993; see also Dickey 1993).

For various reasons, such as the political activism in universities in France, theory in the 1970s took a turn away from film-as-art (Lapsley & Westlake 1988; Nichols 2000). With this turn to issues of ideology, the need to understand how film worked as an ideological tool became foregrounded. Structuralism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism provided answers. Marxist theories are amongst the most significant, as well as ubiquitous, theories within the academy. Marxism also enjoyed a Renaissance in the 1970s and it would not be much of an exaggeration to suggest that it would be harder to find theories without any engagement with Marxism (or at least engagement to the level of arguing against Marxism). Figures such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1991), and Althusser (1971, 1984) are important in the history of

¹³ Italian Neo-Realism, to which Bazin also served as an inspiration, arguably also has a place in this discussion, but it could be seen as much an ideological exercise as an aesthetic position. Neo-Realism did however have a significant effect upon both the French New Wave and Hollywood (Parkinson 1995: 151-154).

film theory, as their positing of the media as purveyors of ideology and apparatuses of the state lent credibility to the cinema (a goal as we have seen attempted for film-as-art), and by extension to the work of film theorists (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 8; see also Kaplan 1998: 273). Indeed, once raised, the issue of 'how film works' (in the Marxist sense in terms of ideology) has remained foundational to film theory and critical analysis (Nichols 2000; Nowell-Smith 2000: 8; *cf.* Perkins 2000). Marxism was, however, not the only theory attempting to establish how film works.

Building upon the earlier work of Saussure, structuralists and semioticians set about constructing the building blocks of filmic meaning, as was being done in other disciplines. Metz is one example of this project (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 32-48; Nowell-Smith 2000: 12-13). Metz' attempt to create a scientific semiotics for the language of film may now appear misguided, and indeed his project changed over time (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 42). However, the work of Metz initiated a set of intellectual arguments, both between himself and others, and between others. Eco and Heath, for example, attempted to introduce cultural and social ingredients to Metz' more 'sterile' undertaking, while Willemen and McCabe, writing against one another, attempted to problematise the relations between text, ideology/signifier, and subject (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 32-62; see also Silverman 1983). These and other battles helped to ensure that placing attention on *meaning* became one of the main trends in film theory (Nichols 2000; Nowell-Smith 2000: 9).¹⁴ Semiotics also helped to 'open up' the theoretical discourse to ideas of the signifier, which was also of importance to psychoanalysis-derived theories.

Freud and Lacan are two more key figures for the development of film theory in the 1970s. Overlapping with Marxism and semiotics, and in fact employed by both (as well as by feminist theorists, as we shall see below), psychoanalysis-derived theories were critically influential. The application of psychoanalysis to cinema is by no means new. In particular, the productions of Hollywood (the 'dream factory') were amenable to psychoanalytic interpretation, displaying as they did, the

¹⁴ As Nowell-Smith goes on to argue, possibly too much so (Nowell-Smith 2000: 16).

familiar repertoire of Freudian motifs. Freudian ideas, or the more Freudian of Lacan's reworking of Freud, were central to Mulvey's classic work on 'the gaze' in mainstream cinema (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 67; Williams 1995: 1-3). In this work Mulvey argues that fetishism and voyeurism are combined within the narrative of mainstream cinema to create desire and control - the male gaze, in order to negate the threat of castration by the female object of that gaze (Mulvey 1975).

By the late 1970s, it had become a kind of orthodoxy of much feminist and ideological film criticism that all dominant cinema was organized for the power and pleasure of a single spectator-subject whose voyeuristic-sadistic gaze became a central feature of visual domination (Williams 1995: 3).

Included in this orthodoxy would also be the work of Baudry and his cave-dwelling (regressive) cinema audience (Baudry 1986), as well as Heath and Metz (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 77-88; Williams 1995). It would be uncharitable to leave the reader with the view that this was the full sum of psychoanalysis' contribution to film theory. The issues raised by this arena of criticism highlighted the audience (even if in a reductive way), the subject, and 'identification.' Further, theorists such as Rothman (1988) have provided more nuanced readings which remain based upon these theories. One of the main problems with psychoanalytic theory, as with semiotics and Marxism is indeed that they 'tended towards totalising philosophical or scientific quests for big truths, whether truths of history and revolution (Marx, Althusser), self and identity (Freud, Lacan), or language (Saussure, semiotics)' (Gledhill & Williams 2000: 5; *cf.* Nichols 2000).¹⁵

The aforementioned 'Grand Theories' have begun to be employed in more nuanced forms (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 105-156), having been questioned from both within and outwith the discipline. The employment of Foucault, Barthes, and

¹⁵ Nichols suggests that we should be careful not to 'treat film theory as congealed dogma' but as historically sited process, with positive as well as negative consequences (Nichols 2000: 34-35).

Derrida added new levels of analysis on issues of authorship and ideology (Lapsley & Westlake 1988: 123-127), voices such as those of Gunning and Crary (Williams 1995: 9-12), or Willemen (1995) have refined the way we conceive of issues such as spectatorship and subjectivity. Further, investigations of non-Hollywood and/or non-European cinema have also raised questions about the applicability of 'Grand Theories' (see for instance Willemen 1990, or Shohat & Stam 1994). Particularly in the case of the latter, there have been appeals for, and attempts at, a more sophisticated knowledge of the contexts of production, be that social or cultural (Heider 1991; Sen 1994; Chow 1995). As has been suggested above, most of these paths are in the 'meaning' side to film studies, where I would also place my own work.

From outwith the discipline proper, audience studies (typically on television audiences) by those within media or cultural studies (see for instance Morley 1980, 1996a; Ang 1985; or the volume edited by Allen 1995) have challenged ideas about the 'receptive-ness' of the audience. This body of work has built upon that by Williams, Hebdige and Hall, regarding the ability of 'sub-cultures' to appropriate the medium an/or the message, for their own uses and agendas (Dickey 1993: 11-12). Reception studies are one of the two main areas where anthropology has engaged with film (for examples of reception studies within anthropology, see Kent 1985; Dickey 1993; Miller 1995b; Larkin 1997; or Hansen n.d.), the other area being ethnographic film. While the present work is not a consumption/reception study, some of the issues and methodologies are similar. Taking Dickey's work for example, her interest lies in 'what the audience makes of the medium' (1993: 5). Investigating the specificities of life amongst the urban poor in south India, she analyses Tamil language films, their genres, the fan clubs that surround actors in Tamil films, and the impact they have upon their audience, from the perspective of that audience. For reasons that are made clear throughout the thesis, this was not my project. Where Dickey's work is in some ways an analysis of juncture (between

cultural producers and consumers), this thesis is about disjuncture, attempting to address the failure of the Malay-language cinema to satisfy its audience.

Most of the approaches to film have, to this point, typically engaged with film *per se*. Within this thesis I also deal with the cinema *industry*, and therefore there remain two important approaches to discuss, 'National Cinema' and policy studies. Both of these approaches are represented in the body of work, albeit small, by Malaysians on Malaysian cinema. Works by Rajah Ahmad Alauddin (1992), Hatta Azad Khan (1997), and the film critic/director Mansor Puteh (1994a, 1994b), for instance, are in the 'National Cinema' mould. Their works share many of the approach's strengths and shortcomings. In brief, 'National Cinema' studies attempt to establish 'the various phenomena which trigger the birth of film industries trying to establish not only films with local form and content but also to develop a style and idioms different from that of mainstream Hollywood' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 13). This definition illustrates some of the problems and the benefits of the approach. One of the principal benefits of 'National Cinema' is that it highlights the macro level of analysis, such as government policies and subaltern movements. 'National Cinema' deals with issues outwith the scope of more micro level theories, such as auteur theory or psychoanalysis-based theories. One of the principal drawbacks of 'National Cinema' is a tendency to essentialise, involving a flattening of 'culture' or indeed 'nation.' At worst, this can lead to a rewriting of history, where aspects of the cinema industry in question are 'written out' in order to fit this essentialised picture of events. In regard to Hatta Azad Khan, there is an argument that in his attempt to create a 'National Cinema' narrative for Malaysia, he has diminished the role of non-Malays in the industry, particularly that of the Indian directors.¹⁶ The potential faults of the 'National Cinema' approach are especially poignant in Malaysia, where there has been a state-imposed definition of 'national culture' (the National Culture Policy 1971), and where ethnicity and communalism have been politicised (see Postscript below).

¹⁶ This view was also expressed by some of my industry informants.

Policy studies are prevalent amongst research carried out by members of Communication or Media departments, as well as by state-funded or private enterprise agencies. This type of study forms the bulk of works on Malay-language cinema. As the name suggests, policy studies tend to focus upon the role of government rules and regulations, quantitative analyses of cinema/cinema audiences, and statistical documentation. Grenfell (1979), Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan (1988), and much of the work contained within *Cintai Filem Malaysia* (1989) exemplify policy studies. These works provide documentation that the concerns of those in the Malaysian cinema industry are indeed justified, with demographic and regional analyses of audience constitution and numbers (see for instance Appendix 1). What this type of study does not provide however, is an analysis of the factors underlying these trends. For instance, as one informant posited, married Malays are not going to the cinema because of the expense, particularly with a family. Demographic statistics concur. In the 1980s, 70% of the cinema audience in Malaysia was in the 15-30 age group (Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: 158). However, this does not explain why these people are making this particular choice regarding their disposable income, or as importantly, why others are *not* making the same choice. For that type of explanation we need to look elsewhere.

Film and Anthropology

One of the areas where anthropology engages with film is the arena of ethnographic film. Indeed, many of the issues surrounding ethnographic film, particularly those regarding the interpretation of another culture and/or visual system, are applicable to the work in this thesis. Therefore, this section will include a brief commentary on ethnographic film, and will tease out the arguments in the development of ethnographic film which have had an influence on visual anthropology in general, and this thesis in particular.

That there has not been a closer connection between anthropology and film is intriguing, as the two are of similar 'age' and provenance, and early anthropologists were quick to see the benefits of film as a documentary tool (Morphy & Banks

1997; Grimshaw 1997; MacDougall 1997; Ruby 2000: 41-66). Indeed, one of the main reasons for the development of film technology (as opposed to the cinema industry) was due to film's ability to 'capture' movement which the eye cannot (Richter 1986: 42-44; Parkinson 1995: 12-15; Ruby 2000: 41-43). Documentary films developed out of this capacity, alongside one other aspect of early film technology, the ability to use film for the collection of 'facts.' The latter of these points was to have had a lasting impact upon the ideals and ideologies surrounding the development of ethnographic film, and indeed visual anthropology (Winston 1995; MacDougall 1997).

Two filmmakers of the 1920s stand out in regard to the development of documentary film, Vertov (*The Man with a Movie Camera* 1929) and Flaherty (*Nanook of the North* 1922). Whereas Flaherty's depiction of the Inuit conformed in certain ways to fiction film conventions, in that it had a narrative, Vertov's camera was intended to 'take pictures of the actuality - the everyday life of ordinary people. This raw stuff of life could then be transformed into meaningful statements' (Ruby 2000: 170; see also Richter 1986: 48-50). Rather than entertain people, Vertov's idea was to use the camera to raise people's consciousness, one means of which was to let the audience 'backstage,' and the cameraman features heavily in *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Flaherty's camera was also an ideological tool, one which was intended to portray the people featured in the films as they saw themselves. In *Nanook of the North* Flaherty created a participatory ethnographic film long before these ideas became topical (Ruby 2000: 67-93), however much his films were dramatised histories (Richter 1986: 48-51; Asch 1992: 196; MacDougall 1992: 90-91, 101-02).

Although this is not to say much, anthropology more than any other science, natural or social, has employed film as a tool. Ethnographic filmmaking has kept almost exact step with realist documentary and its precursors from the very beginning of cinema (Winston 1995: 170).

For the anthropologists who were early to the film scene, the film camera was idealised as useful for two reasons, to study movement (for example Boas) and for *salvage* ethnography, that is to record the 'rapidly disappearing' cultures of various peoples around the world (Winston 1995: 170-180; Morphy & Banks 1997: 6-9; MacDougall 1997: 282; Ruby 2000). The latter of these two ideas still retains some currency. The work of Gardner (*Dead Birds* 1964), for instance was conceived in this vein (Ruby 2000: 95-113).¹⁷ Other ethnographic filmmakers were more nuanced in their portrayals, Rouch (*Chronique d'un été* ['Chronicle of a Summer'] 1961) and Asch (*The Feast* 1968, *The Axe Fight* 1971) even began investigating the possibilities of collaborative filmmaking and reflexivity respectively.

The spectre of Realism continues to haunt the field of ethnographic film, and indeed visual anthropology. While films are regarded as cultural and otherwise specific artefacts, they continue to be constructed and evaluated by the mandates of Realism (Winston 1995; Loizos 1997: 81-84). This remains true for the films discussed here. If films are analysed for meaning, as was discussed in the section on film theory above, a conflation between 'meaning' and 'reality' can, and frequently does, occur (Nichols 2000; Nowell-Smith 2000). Conversely, if insufficient attention is paid to the particularities of socio-cultural modes of representation and expression, we render our analyses and representations invalid, and possibly ludicrous (Hendry 1997). Within visual anthropology, these issues have been acute, and ethnographic film has often borne the brunt of criticism (L. Taylor 1994; Nichols 2000).

The 'crisis of representation' that hit anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s was particularly critical of visual anthropology (Faris 1992; Kuehnast 1992; Edwards 1993; Taylor 1994). One of the strategies undertaken in order to circumvent this crisis was to give the camera to the subject, either as a method of eliciting the subject's world-view (as with Worth and Adair's 1972 study) or as an empowering activity (Chalfen 1992: 222-223). These attempts have met with

¹⁷ If indeed we can regard Gardner's films as ethnographic (Banks 1992: 124-125).

limited success, while the image of the 'Indian with the video camera' has now become a cliché (Moore 1994: 127-128).

Ruby is pessimistic regarding the current status of visual anthropology and ethnographic film, while guardedly optimistic about their futures (Ruby 2000: ix-64). A future agenda I wish to pursue, is to work towards is a closer interrelation between theory and practice within visual anthropology, a point also argued by Morphy & Banks (1997: 13-15). Particularly in the teaching of filmmaking, where too often the teaching of practical skills takes place outwith any discussion of the theoretical issues surrounding them, and as importantly, vice versa. With a closer integration between theoretical issues and practical skills, we may help to provide reason for Ruby's optimism.

While ethnographic film is an important aspect of attempts to analyse visual systems of representation, it is not the only one.

One agenda of visual anthropology is to analyse the properties of visual systems, to determine the properties of visual systems and the conditions of their interpretation and to relate the particular systems to the complexities of the social and political processes of which they are part (Morphy & Banks 1997: 2).

In the following section, I will put forward a different approach to the analysis of visual representation, particularly filmic representation.

Methodology

The previous section saw a discussion of the background for the thesis, in this section the research leading to the thesis will be discussed. To this effect, the methodology of the research will be outlined, and the pros and cons of the research, in both general and specific terms, will be addressed. At the end of the previous section, there was an unspoken question posed, namely that how can film be analysed in terms of meaning, if it is not 'real'? I have also only hinted at the

theoretical tools engaged with in this thesis. The following section will also address these issues.

As a symbolic medium, film is not in a one-to-one relationship with reality, in other words film may be 'realist' but it is never 'real.' In this regard, the works of Black (1962) on metaphor theory and Haiman (1985) on iconicity, have been of benefit in providing a useful way of engaging with film. Briefly, Black's approach to metaphor proposes certain necessities for a 'successful' metaphor, principle amongst these are that metaphors must be *understood* in order to be effective (1962: 5-6, 29, and *ibid*). Haiman makes an analogous argument in regards to iconicity, namely that the less of a one-to-one relationship a symbol has to its referent, previous knowledge of the symbol becomes increasingly necessary (Haiman 1985: *ibid*). There are two consequences of applying these theories to film. The first of these is that as a symbolic/metaphoric medium, meaning is not 'closed,' but remains open to various (contested) interpretations, re-interpretations, and appropriations. Furthermore, both as a symbolic medium and as a constructed artefact, there are *layers* of meaning embedded in the films (watch a film without sound, for instance, to get an idea of how much meaning comes via the dialogue, sound-track, and incidental sounds). These 'layers' add to the overall message but remain 'open.' The second point is that, somewhat paradoxically, there are limits to how *unreal* film can be and remain 'meaningful.' The latter point does not, in itself, answer to what extent a film may push the boundaries of symbolism and remain 'meaningful.' To answer this question, two more theoretical positions need to be introduced.

Rajadhyaksha's 'four looks' of the cinema provides part of the answer to the questions posed above (n.d.). The four looks are: from the camera to screen; from the screen to the audience; from the audience to the screen; and the audience members amongst themselves. The four looks are inter-linked, and inform one another. For this thesis, it is the connection between the second and third looks which is of particular interest. Rajadhyaksha argues that the diegetic, and by implication the filmmakers, and the audience must 'donate' a part of their subjective

position to the other, to form what amounts to a third, shared, subjective position. So far, this is relatively similar to the positions of Black and Haiman, namely the necessity of some common understanding. Rajadhyaksha's argument also has many similarities with Bakhtin's *dialogism* (Holquist 1990: 12-13, 40-41, and *ibid*). However, what Rajadhyaksha has done, is to provide the particular locus for the construction of that shared understanding between film/filmmaker and audience.

The location of the space for common understanding does not tell us the basis for that understanding. There are various methods and theories for apprehending that basis, some of which have already been outlined in the previous section. In this thesis, I am arguing that anthropology may provide another mode of analysis. From the standpoint of film study, the addition of socio-cultural background adds a new and significant layer (or indeed layers) of meaning to the readings available (Chow 1995; Ruby 2000). In this respect, the importance of the 'cultural embeddedness' of film becomes overt, as phenomena do not merely reflect society, they are part of society (Latour 1993). The extension of Latour's argument is that, as the producers and consumers of phenomena are also part of that society, the basis for Radjadhyaaksha's shared perspective may be located in society. To this effect, the analysis of film-as-text can only take us so far. However, with the addition of another layer of understanding, namely of socio-cultural factors, our understanding of film may also take on another layer. To attempt this new mode of analysis, to access the arena of the metaphor, to ascertain the basis for the shared subjectivity, a particular form of research was conducted.

The research for this thesis was carried out in Malaysia over the course of one year (November 1997 to November 1998). There were two brief hiatuses, for two weeks in February 1998 and one week in April 1998. The month of May 1998 was spent in Edinburgh, for the purposes of consulting supervisors and to rectify some financial problems. Fieldwork was carried out in a lower middle class housing area towards the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. As is noted in the chapter on urbanism, this is housing area is relatively new, although by no means one of the most recently

built. There were several reasons for choosing this particular area, the main being that I had the opportunity to stay with a Malay family. It is a common procedure in Malaysia for a family to 'adopt' a university student (Peletz 1996: 20-23; Carsten 1997: 4-6). Foreign researchers aside, this practice may be employed to enable a rural student to attend school in the city, or to facilitate a city student's research in a village. The family I stayed with was relatively young, the eldest child being towards the end of secondary school and the youngest child still in primary school. In many ways my 'foster family' epitomised the newly urban Malay family; both parents were in full-time employment in mid-level bureaucratic jobs, retained close ties with their natal kin, and are practising Muslims (see Kahn 1996). Indeed, it was my experience living with this family, and contacts with similar families in this and other areas, that occasioned much of the resultant trajectory of this thesis. As an instance, I had initially envisioned the ethnographic side of the fieldwork to be more of an audience study, but for reasons outlined throughout the thesis, this was not to be a major aspect of fieldwork. A further aspect of the fieldwork involved engaging with film industry personnel, such as film students, film directors, and officials at FINAS.

My adopted family in Malaysia comprised the sister and brother-in-law of a colleague of mine, and their children. As my adopted parents were only a little older than myself, and I was obviously different ethnically, this provided scope for a lot of 'playing around' with kinship terminology and relationships. At times my 'sister' would refer to me as if she was my 'mother,' for instance when she joked of having a 'white' son and a 'brown' son (who was still my 'nephew'). On another occasion, the youngest boy was asked if he wanted his 'white' father (me), or his 'brown' father. Nevertheless, living with a family involved a great deal of both pleasure and frustration. For every trauma, such as having your video of a hard-to-get-hold-of Malay film taped over with a Japanese cartoon, there were lovely highlights like being the recipient of a surprise birthday party, or a getting a Christmas card to help stave off homesickness. Living with a family also meant being involved in daily

activities, such as preparing meals and shopping, playing badminton with neighbourhood children, and becoming involved with local gossip and friendships.

Daily life quickly became just that. The husband, my 'brother,' worked for a university that was located some distance from the house, so he was up earliest, and back home latest. My 'sister' also worked, but as her office was close to the house (they had moved from a house close to the university to their present location for this very reason), she could make breakfast and prepare lunches for the children. The children were all at school at the time of research (the oldest girl is now at university). A neighbour helped out with some of the household chores. During the week, most of the family would be back for afternoon tea, and to prepare the evening meal. As all the children were of school age, and both parents were working, I could unashamedly adopt a Malay male lifestyle, and spend most of my day away from the house. Following afternoon tea, it was time for showers and for the family's evening prayers. Generally, prayers took place upstairs, but if guests were present (aside from me), the women would pray upstairs and the men in the living room. When guests were staying, the men's prayers were typically informal, with conversations taking place while others waited their turn to pray. My 'brother' and I would often take care of washing the dishes, but did not typically help with preparing food, beyond peeling onions or chopping up chickens. My 'sister' was/is a very good cook, and meals were a pleasure. During the meals, some small talk took place, with each of us relating the days events. After the meal and clean up, the children would do their homework, and we would watch television before going to bed.

My 'sister' has a further ten siblings, most of whom are married with children. At various times throughout my field work, this net of relations meant that I had informants throughout peninsular Malaysia, engaged in a variety of occupations, lifestyles, and life experiences. Though my family, and their extended family, I also became acquainted with their friends and colleagues, expanding a large circle of informants even further. Further, during this period Kuala Lumpur

(KL) suffered a severe water shortage, and this provided an opportunity to meet more of the neighbourhood residents than may otherwise have been possible. Besides providing the opportunity for engaging in conversations and formal and semi-formal interviews, I was also invited to weddings and other life cycle events, not to mention on occasion becoming involved in the preparations for the *kenduri* (feasts) for some of these events. I can not over-stress how much of this thesis is the direct result of living in Malaysia, engaged in daily life with a family.

The methods employed in the course of fieldwork involved a combination of qualitative approaches and archival research. Primarily, findings to do with social issues were arrived at through engaging in the daily lives of the family I stayed with, as well as their families, colleagues, and neighbours, not to mention my own professional colleagues and friends. The period of my research was perhaps somewhat 'opportune,' as during that year: the Malaysian economy was in crisis; the arrest, trial and imprisonment of former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, took place, and the *Reformasi* movement was at its peak. The processes, discourses, and counter-discourses of modernity were thrust into the public consciousness. As such, the concerns of this thesis were the subject of daily debate amongst Malaysians.

The phrase 'participant-observation' is as problematic as it is hackneyed and vague, yet the ideals and potentialities of this paradoxical methodology remain at the heart of ethnographic research (for discussions of ethnographic research, see Clifford & Marcus 1986; Sangren 1988; Hammersley 1992; and Ruby 2000 amongst others). The process of immersion in a culture and involvement in the subjective stances of others has been key to the execution of my fieldwork. Informants involved in the film industry were typically available for limited periods, and therefore interviews, whether formal interviews within established parameters, or informal interviews *in situ* (for instance at the coffee-shop after film seminars), became the necessary strategy. I was fortunate to become involved in the *Apresiasi Filem* (Film Appreciation) seminar series hosted by FINAS, serving as a discussant

twice during my fieldwork. This involvement provided an opportunity to engage with film industry personnel in a different milieu than that necessarily of researcher to informant. This backstage pass (Goffman 1959), as it were, provided significant insight into the ideological and socio-cultural backgrounding of industry personnel. This insight was of critical benefit to both this thesis and to the research report I was requested to compile for FINAS (Gray 1998).

There has been little written about the Malay-language cinema industry. I have discussed some of those represented within the thesis in an earlier section. However, what this means is that in terms of the chapter on the history of this industry I have had to rely upon a few key (although contested) sources. To 'flesh-out' this information, I conducted the interviews discussed above, particularly with the longer-served members of the film fraternity. I also attempted to glean as much information as possible from other documentary sources, such as newspapers, magazines and journals. This aspect of the research focused upon historical documents relating to the film industry, particularly those of less researched periods, such as the 1910s-1930s and the Japanese Occupation. To this end, I conducted archival research at the National Archives and the National Library, both located in Kuala Lumpur.

Something that will be evident to the reader is that I have chosen not to identify my informants. Rather than employ pseudonyms I have decided to simply refer to 'informant/s.' I am aware that this is a problematic solution, as it can be read as refusing to relinquish authorial control and refusing my informants their voices. I feel however, that this decision is the most ethical in regards to protecting the confidentiality of my informants and the members of my adopted family. In this respect, I have also decided to keep the exact specification of my field site anonymous. In all cases, the responsibility for the views within this thesis are squarely upon my shoulders.

Evaluating the Research

Research is by nature a partial enterprise. The dialectic relationship between theory and field conditions the outcome of the research, as is indeed the case with this thesis. With this proviso in mind, I will try and provide an evaluation of the research in this section.

There were some limitations to the research. I have discussed a couple above, but to clarify, the initial stage of research was difficult, as it was a period of dealing with bureaucracy, both of the government and the film industry. While the bureaucratic needs of the state or institution are understandable, this period was nonetheless frustrating. There is also the issue of my command of Bahasa Malaysia. As most of my informants and industry/official contacts spoke excellent English, it was difficult to gain any more than a very basic ability in Bahasa Malaysia. While for the purposes of interviewing and other forms of discussion, this was not generally a problem, for the purposes of detailed film criticism, my level of fluency remains insufficient. Part of the reason that I have focused on the visual aspects of film, has been due to this very reason. This is problematic, but I do not think it undermines the research, as the importance of the levels of meaning conveyed visually is particularly crucial in film, as opposed to other media such as television (Ellis 1982). One of the advantages to ethnographic research is that there was always someone available to provide alternative reading and correct misinterpretations. Nevertheless, I feel that this remains an area to be rectified, and ideally future research(ers) will undertake to address this issue.

Living in a metropolis also has its own problems, traffic and other logistic considerations being paramount. The housing area I lived in was relatively well served by public transportation (on which the sight of a Westerner provided some source of comment) it was nevertheless occasionally an ordeal to arrange meetings, visit the National Archives, or attend events. The amount of time spent in traffic jams or waiting on buses was significant, and meant that some research activities were intermittent. Kuala Lumpur is where the film industry is sited however, and the

situation was the same for my informants, and various means of 'working around' the problem were usually found.

Engaging in a new field has both benefits and shortcomings. Principally, there is a lack of precedent material for reference. While this might seem a 'good thing,' there is a down-side, in that there is little in the way of guidelines and research to address (talk back to, or to shore up arguments). Most of the material on the Malay film industry is either on the 'Golden Era' of the 1950s and 1960s, or discusses the political economy of the industry. While both of these are important and necessary, it leaves some large holes for subsequent scholars to fill. The lack of previous material also means that there is far less to 'take for granted' regarding the reader's knowledge of the field.

Finally, upon my return to Britain I experienced periods of financial difficulty. While this is nothing new or surprising in the life of a student, it did have some consequences. One of those was that my plans to consult colonial records for information on issues such as the production of propaganda films during the Emergency had to be shelved. Specifically, I was hoping to ascertain whether or not the production of documentary/propaganda films during this period had any influence upon the feature film industry. This is another area within the research that needs to be taken further, either by myself or future researchers.

All of the above might leave the reader with the sense that fieldwork was a trial. Nothing could be further from the truth. For each of the problems encountered, there have been advantages to both the subject and locale of the research. Principally, the openness and eloquence of my informants made this thesis possible. The patience and helpfulness of various industry personnel, officials, and general public was chastening and illuminating in equal measures. Living in a family environment was one aspect of research which was particularly rewarding, and the source of some of my fondest memories, as well as most productive sources of information.

While there was a lack of certain material, there remains a large body of work on other aspects of Malaysia and Malays to incorporate. The arenas of political-economy and articulate social commentary, including some unexpected sources - such as the cartoonist Lat (whose work appears on some of the title pages), provided a broad foundation from which to build. Perhaps the most important source of information remains the people, and the views, arguments, and ideas of my informants aided immeasurably in developing this thesis. Finally, I mentioned above how a lack of previous research was a hindrance, but conversely, that same lack also provided a breadth and scope for the formation and articulation of ideas and arguments which may not have been as possible in a more widely covered topic, such as Indian cinema.

One aspect of the research, which may not be apparent, is why I felt a new mode of analysis was necessary when there already two synergies between film and anthropology; ethnographic film and consumption studies. Why, in effect, did I set out to combine two disparate discourses, when there may have been a more productive or informative methodology? One answer to this question is that I felt that the works of Sen (1994) and Chow (1995) were invigorating and challenging, in a discipline that can at times be insular and sterile. A further answer is located in a theoretical and ethical desire to incorporate the two disciplines in a new way, or at least to attempt that incorporation, rather than to tread old paths in a new milieu. The final answer is that this was also the path that my research led towards. It is difficult, although not impossible, to attempt a consumption study of non-consumption, however I felt that there was another methodology by which to address the question posed so frequently by Malay filmmakers; "Why are our films so bad?"

Was this project worthwhile? It would be instructive to attempt a similar project where there is a different relationship between the producers and consumers of a cinema industry. This thesis is in many ways about disjunctures, and the biggest disjuncture was at times the gap between cinema makers and their audience. This has had an impact upon the thesis and its findings. One thing I can say is that the

research and the outcome of that research have been personally fulfilling and informative. As I have stated elsewhere, the hope for this thesis was to demonstrate a different mode of analysis for film, and to make manifest Latour's arguments concerning how we conceptualise cultural phenomena.

Postscript

There remain a important 'loose end' I would like to tie up before proceeding. I have mentioned that this thesis is not about ethnographic film, nor is it a consumption study. To this I would add that this thesis is about Malay-language film (and generally Malay filmmakers) and Malay-Malaysians. I have been very conscious that *Malay* film and *Malaysian* film are not synonyms, however, in terms of the feature film industry (cinema), for historical and political reasons, these two are inseparable. I do not intend this as a justification or defence, but I realise that it may be read as such. The communal situation in Malaysia is such that:

knowledge, irrespective of philosophical and theoretical grounding, has been used directly or indirectly as an instrument to advocate an ethnic cause or to launch purportedly "an objective, scientific critique" of an ethnic group or to justify the interest of an ethnic group or sub-ethnic-group (Shamsul 1996: 447).

An issue as much for 'well-intentioned' foreign scholars, this 'ethnified knowledge' (1996: 448) informs much of the social science writing on Malaysia. Although I run the risk of appearing to engage in a 'conspiracy of silence' in not discussing issues such as non-Malay participation in, and access to, the feature film industry, I feel that this complex and precarious arena would be best dealt with explicitly rather than as an addendum to other issues.¹⁸ When the reader comes across 'Malaysian cinema' in reference to the Malay-language feature film industry, that phrase should now

¹⁸ I have expressed my opinion on this matter elsewhere (Gray 1998).

hold a double meaning, one of which is linked to the scope of what *Malaysian* means in this case.

Chapter 1: Modernity and Modernisation

The world about us has changed and is continually changing at an ever-accellerating [*sic*] pace. So have we. With the increase in media coverage and information technology, we see more of the world, comprehend its working a little more clearly, and as a result our perception of ourselves and the society surrounding us has been modified. Consequently, we begin to make demands upon the art and culture that is meant to reflect the constantly shifting landscape we find ourselves in. We demand new themes, new insights, new dramatic situations.

We demand new heroes

(Alan Moore, 'An Introduction' to Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*).

Introduction

The concept of 'modernity' is a key one across a range of philosophical traditions, as well as within anthropology and film studies. Thus, a consideration of 'modernity' is at the core of this thesis. Closely related to modernity is the issue of subjectivity, which is a key one amongst the disciplines under discussion. In the philosophical tradition, at least, subjectivity is at the very heart of 'modernity.' With this in mind, I would like to begin this chapter by quoting Amir Muhammad on the subject of Malay films of the 1970s:

The story-lines, freed from the restrictive studio system, could flirt with more daring subject matter. [...] *This freedom, coupled with a desire to show how prosperous Malays have been since the NEP*, meant that we got to see a lot of one-piece swim-suits and revealing cocktail dresses. Characters could now cavort in their own swimming pools rather than boring old rivers (Amir Muhammad 1998b: 52; emphasis added).

As this quote suggests, the producers of Malaysian cinema increasingly began to depict certain, in this case officially-ordained, aspects of 'the modern' within their films. In the above example, these aspects were the socio-economic benefits accrued by Malays via the New Economic Policy (NEP). Through the course of this chapter, and indeed throughout the thesis, I wish to investigate the negotiation of differing versions and/or visions of 'the modern,' and the possibility that these negotiations are enacted in the public arena of the cinema. In order to accomplish this, some basic parameters on the discussion need to be established, such as what is meant by 'modern' and 'modernity.' A more detailed discussion of modernity and modernisation will therefore follow below, developing issues associated with defining these terms.

It is not my intention to attempt a definitive overview of all the debates, over all the various disciplines and over all their histories, surrounding the issue of modernity. Rather, I would like to provide a brief background to my own theoretical positioning and argument concerning the topic. As such, the following discussion is not exhaustive, but is intended to lead to a productive articulation of modernity in general terms, employing Western examples, and in the more specific cases of Malaysia and Malaysian cinema.

Making Modern

At the risk of pedantry, the explication of *modern* and the related terminology, modernity and modernisation, becomes necessary largely due to their very 'common-sense' status. We all know what 'modern' means because we are 'modern.' It is this same assumption, or other like assumptions which probably leads to the often loose usage of the terms mentioned, and to the, perhaps unconscious, practice of denying 'modernity' (or post-modernity) to others (Morley 1996b: *passim*). Up to this point I have employed the phrase 'the modern' as a heuristic marker, which refers to that self-same 'common-sense' definition of modernity, i.e. capitalism, democracy, and the nation-state. Though this model is highly problematic, it is also (rightly or wrongly) the default 'yard-stick' - serving as the model to either work towards or against. Many of the world's leading nation-states, such the United Kingdom, and most transnational businesses and agencies (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) are ideologically based upon, and in certain cases proselytize, this model. As such, its employment or deployment is far from 'value-free.' In practical terms, however, *realpolitik* ensures that this also becomes the preeminent 'goal' for nation-states classed as Second or Third World, even if the ideological objectives are

not necessarily shared.¹ This is not to argue that the above is the only definition of 'modern' available or possible, nor that this model must be accepted *in toto*, merely that it is the 'winning' model at this time. As we will see, this has implications beyond that of how 'democratic,' or economically 'open,' a particular country is. Further, as this model is the basis for 'real world' government policy, discursive agendas, or indeed wars, it also forms part of the foundation for the theoretical arguments of this thesis.

'Modernisation' will refer to the historical or 'practical' aspects of the move to 'the modern,' i.e. social, political and economic reforms. However, modernisation also includes a more ephemeral 'bundle' of assumptions and/or expectations, inherent to the processes of modernisation, and that is both the result and the prerequisite of these processes. I will be discussing this point in more detail below, so for the moment I merely wish to clarify my usage and to signal a problematisation of another 'common sense' term. 'Modernity' is also imbued with a 'common sense' definition and usage. The term is usually taken to refer to a fixed moment in time where there is/was a tangible and discrete shift to 'the modern.' However, modernity, in this thesis, is taken to mean that point in time where there is a perception of, or discursive agendas developed upon, a shift to 'the modern.' Further, both the realisation and the discourse may involve that of a *lack* of 'modernity,' either in whole or in part. For example, consider the following rhetorical question posed during the BBC Radio Four *Crossing Continents* programme, discussing the crisis facing the Catholic Church in Ireland; '[c]an [traditional, Christian] Dublin survive the onslaught of modernity?' (15-7-1999; hosted by Rosie Goldsmith).² Modernity is a *process*, rather than a fixed end-point.

¹ For example, the binding together of financial aid with political or economic reforms, as is the case with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United States; or acquiring favourable trading relations with First World nation-states.

² This quote is abounding with levels for analysis, but of primary interest is the assertion that a modern European nation-state should still be faced with the 'onslaught' of modernisation.

In the formulation thus proposed, democracy would fit into the sphere of modernisation, as a move towards a 'modern' form of authority and political control. This move includes the formation of political, bureaucratic and social institutions. However, there are, also, subjectivities related to the individual and the nation-state; an individuated, rational subject with inherent rights and obligations to civil society. This subject is both assumed by, and is the basis for, democracy. 'Modernity' relates to the site of discourses surrounding the awareness of a 'break' with past institutional manifestations, such as feudal or autocratic. These sites may be coterminous with their respective modernising activities. The French and American Revolutions, where the 'bundles' of individual freedoms and equality/egalitarianism were employed as ideological tools, illustrate this point. The revolutionaries created more widespread discursive arenas surrounding these issues. However, the construction of these sites may also occur long afterwards. When discussing the long-term development of democracy, various points in time, and various contexts, are positioned as being 'when we became modern' (the signing of the Magna Carta, Henry the VIII and the creation of the Anglican Church, the French Revolution, and etc. have all thus been mooted).

Developing Modernity

Debates regarding modernity have a long and distinguished history, and remains a prime focal point for arguments both within and outwith the academic community. A prime incidence of this, and in direct relation to this thesis, would be the 'Asian Values' debate.

Described briefly, the 'Asian Values' debate centred upon a series of claims and counter-claims vis-à-vis the universality of Western liberal/humanist socio-political ideologies. Ironically, the flashpoint for the debate was the less-than-liberal

essay by Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993), though Frances Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis (1992) also raised the occasional eyebrow (Lingle 1996; Mahbubani 1998).³ The upshot was a debate over aspects of western liberal thought, such as free press and individual liberty. Proponents of Western liberalism, such as Christopher Lingle, engaged with the proponents of 'Asian Values,' such as Kishore Mahbubani.⁴ Mahbubani, in a series of articles published in the early 1990s, questioned the uncritical acceptance of various liberal/humanist dogma, and proposed that there was another path available for Asia and Asians. Mahbubani and others of the 'Singapore School' (Lingle 1996: 30, and *passim*) advocated 'a period of strong and firm government' necessary for Asian countries (Mahbubani 1998: 48), and that liberal criticisms of 'authoritarian capitalism' or 'authoritarian democracy' were counter-productive and dismissive of the specifics of Asian society. Asian nation-states could be modern without being Western or liberal (1998: 115-137). In terms of this latter point, the 'Asian Values' proponents claim that economic modernisation could, and more importantly-should, take place outwith social and political modernisation. The response to the Asian Values proponents were various counter-challenges to the values espoused by the 'Singapore School,' principally that their arguments were fundamentally the acts of 'would be losers' seeking to protect the *status quo* (Lingle 1996: 37), and that attempting to control individualism and democratisation through the censure of the press and draconian legislature is ultimately futile.

Since the economic problems of 1997, the debate has died away, but the

³ Huntington argued that there is a shifting of power amongst the world's 'civilisations,' principally from the Western civilisation, to Confucian and Islamic 'civilisations.' Fukuyama, on the other hand, famously stated that with the collapse of communism in Europe, the West has 'won' the ideological battle, hence the 'end' of history.

⁴ It should be pointed out that neither of these two parties were disinterested parties in the debate. Lingle had run afoul of the Singaporean government over articles he had written while lecturing at the National University of Singapore and consequently fled the country (Lingle 1996: 9-34). Mahbubani, on the other hand is a Singaporean civil servant and career diplomat, as well as having sat on the boards of Singaporean academic and political institutions, such as the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the Institute of Policy Studies.

questions raised are of lasting importance. Is Western model of modernity the only one? Is modernisation of one institution, such as the economic sphere, possible without the modernisation of other institutions? Through the course of this chapter, some of these questions will be addressed. Before tackling these questions however, it is time to take a step back, and deal with some of the other issues that surround 'modernity.'

Modernity, Cascardi argues, is inherently linked to the development of human consciousness, specifically that of the self-aware human subject, i.e. subjectivity (1992: 2). The forms, or stages, of consciousness, following Hegel (Habermas 1987: 5), are typically depicted as being: *Ancient* - wherein humans and the universe are indivisible, as in shamanistic or magical beliefs and practices; *Medieval* - where there is the belief that human consciousness is determined by God; and *Modern* - with the focus upon the individuated and self-aware being; the self aware of itself as self. While Weber is a prime example of this tripartite division of human consciousness, this formation has had a profound impact upon the way that thinkers have approached the issues of modernity and subjectivity (Giddens 1971; Kolb 1986; Habermas 1987; Cascardi 1992). The beginning of the philosophical debate of 'modernity' centred on the move from deterministic awareness (Medieval) to self-awareness. To provide an epistemological history for modernity would necessitate a discussion extending back to the Classical period of Plato and Aristotle at least (Flew 1971: 15-38; see also Solomon 1981: 3), however the overt discussion of subjectivity has a slightly shorter pedigree. It is with Descartes' claim that 'I think; therefore, I am,' and Kant's arguments with Spinoza over human consciousness, that the subject *qua* subject becomes formally articulated (Solomon 1981; Caws 1984;

Neuhouser 1990).⁵ Whether or not these were indeed the 'primal moments,' the critical point is that there was, over time, a move away from a deterministic view of human consciousness to that of a subjective view (Habermas 1987). What we typically refer to as 'The Enlightenment' was a culmination of the philosophical points mentioned earlier, along with political and economic discourses developed through thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes (Caws 1979; Cascardi 1992).⁶ However, this is somewhat disingenuous, as the French, English, Scottish, and German Enlightenments were diverse in their approaches and trajectories, and were at times antagonistic (Solomon 1981; Koepping 1995). What justifies the overarching delineation of 'The Enlightenment,' however, is that it is the subject which is of central importance in these discourses, as it provides the foundation for the nation and civil society, which 'placed strong emphasis on the powers of human reason and the importance of science and philosophical criticism' (Solomon 1981: 3-4; see also Koepping 1995: 80-81).

Post-Enlightenment thinkers carried on and developed the debates around the subject along two paths, the hard rationalism of English Liberal/Utilitarian thought, and the idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel (Solomon 1981; Cascardi 1992; Koepping 1995). In either case, however, the subject was no longer an idea needed to be argued, but the assumed foundation for their discourses. Indeed, by the time of Hegel;

the modern age stood above all under the sign of subjective
freedom. This was realized in society as the space secured

⁵ Flew suggests David Hume as 'the first major thinker of the modern period to develop a world-outlook which was through and through secular, this-worldly, and man-centred' (Flew 1971: 84). Flew also mentions that Spinoza is at once regarded as 'the God-intoxicated man' and 'one of the founding fathers of modern atheist materialism' (Flew 1971: 383). Indeed, most commentators have their own favourite suggestion as to the 'father' of modernity, and this in itself is arguably a rationale for the argument to follow.

⁶ As we see even with the mention of these two names, and their diverse conceptualisations of the human condition, there is at least as much diversity as unity in The Enlightenment (see also Todorov 1993: 20-21).

by civil law for the rational pursuit of one's own interests; in the state, as the in principle [*sic*] equal rights to participation in the formation of political will; in the public sphere. As ethical autonomy and self-realization (Habermas 1987: 83).

We had, with apologies to Latour (1993), become 'modern.' Through the course of eighteenth century philosophical thought, particularly amongst idealists, modernity and subjectivity were increasingly constructed as self-referential systems, carrying on the Enlightenment project. Modernity increasingly constructed 'its own normality out of itself' (Habermas 1987: 7; see also Kolb 1986 and Cascardi 1992). Subjectivity was intrinsically involved in these normative processes, creating the situation where 'subjectivistic rationality' became the only forum of authority possible (Giddens 1971: 169-184; see also Kolb 1986: 3-29).

Although the deterministic idea has never disappeared completely, it is the various mutations of the concept of the self-aware human subject (Idealism, Liberalism...) which have held sway in Western sciences and popular thought. However, there was a 'backlash' against Enlightenment thought. This offensive has come from different arenas of thought, discipline, and position. The 'grand discourses' of the Enlightenment have come in for particular challenge, whether this is in terms of power and authority (Foucault 1978, 1982; Clifford & Marcus 1986), the generalising and controlling discourses of colonialism (Said 1978; Bhabha 1990), or the more particular relations of Enlightenment thought to vision and visualising (Mulvey 1975; Jay 1994).⁷ In the philosophical tradition, Nietzsche and Heidegger (amongst many others) brought the underlying self-referential precepts of modernity and subjectivity into question. While Heidegger's criticisms of Enlightenment-esque constructs continue to be influential, he, and those who have followed his lead,

⁷ This is most definitely not intended as a comprehensive listing of all those critical of the Enlightenment or to delineate their individual epistemologies, but to provide a 'taste' of the authors and positions of criticism.

operate mainly from a counter-Enlightenment (or anti-dialectic) stance. That is, they operate within the same paradigm, but take an oppositional stance (Kolb 1986: *passim*; Habermas 1987: 133-134). Nietzsche, on the other hand, attempted to step beyond the dialect evolved through Kant, the Enlightenment, and Hegel (Habermas 1987: 87). Modernity thus is no longer constructed as an epoch, but rather as the latest period in the continuing transformation of human rationality. Subjectivity also loses some of its privilege, and becomes a concept to be surpassed, rather than an issue of ontological archaeology (Habermas 1987: 214; *cf.* Heidegger 1962, 1971, 1972). It is in this context, as well as in relation to other thinkers of 'the modern,' such as Todorov (1993), Latour (1993), Taylor (1995, 1999), and Augé (1995) that the present discussion of modernity takes place.

Modernity, however, entails more than just a shift to self-awareness.

The nature of modernity is marked not only by the emergence of the subject [...], but by a redistribution of the authority of reason and value, by the consolidation of the position of the individual as subject to the authority of the sovereign in the liberal-Absolutist State, by the simultaneous increase in the mobility of the psyche and a heightening of the repressive powers of society, and by a reconception of the relationship between nature and the literary work of art (Cascardi 1992: 24-25).⁸

As such, the instruments by which modernity, the move to 'the modern,' developed, from another arena of debate. For some other commentators, the discussion of modernity, and particularly the 'invention' or development of modernity, is largely limited to institutional structures such as economic rationalisation, development of

⁸ I will return to certain of these issues in relation to the development of modern art forms, particularly the novel.

new manufacturing techniques, or indeed 'sciences of order.' The more 'sociological' approaches to modernity, including work by many anthropologists (applied and otherwise), have tended to concentrate upon these very aspects, and have their roots in the works of Marx and Weber (Giddens 1971; Habermas 1987).⁹ Leaving aside Marx for the moment, one of Weber's fundamental 'tasks' was to explain why rational modernity took place in the West, and only in the West (Garth & Mills 1946; Giddens 1971; Kolb 1986; Habermas 1987). In doing so, Weber argued that the West underwent a process of *disenchantment* during the shift from the medieval to the modern. This disenchantment came via several agencies; particularly science, capitalism, Protestantism, and state bureaucracy (Giddens 1971; Habermas 1987). However, in attempting to explain what he saw as a unique phenomenon (Western rational modernity), Weber ultimately became involved in a project of *explaining away* non-Western rationality (Kolb 1986).

Marx was in some ways even more focused in his theories regarding modernity, as with the base-superstructure argument. Capitalism and the economic sphere *are* the modern world. This situation is both a process of history and an artefact of Capitalism and the Enlightenment's own projects and processes. So, for Marx capitalism/modernity creates its own normative logic, truth, and validity. Indeed, Weber's own project illustrates this point. The very formulation of the questions he was attempting to answer (why rational modernity was limited to the West) was based upon a modernist assumption, namely modernity's own uniqueness (Habermas 1987: 7). While certainly far from 'wrong' these conceptualisations of modernity leave several questions unanswered. How do we account for instances of

⁹ The 'instrumental' or institutional approach to modernity/modernisation has a long history in the applied anthropology canon. A legacy of this approach is the lingering perception of globalisation and or modernisation in narrow black and white terms. Work by Miller (1987, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2000), Appadurai (1990, 1991, 2000), Thomas (1994, 1995), and O'Hanlon (1995) amongst many others have challenged facile renderings of globalisation and/or development, demonstrating how global institutions may be appropriated and strategically re-deployed at the local level.

various institutions which are ideologically positioned as being 'modern,' but which show up in pre-modern, or non-western, societies? How do we explain the seeming creation out of nothingness of these instrumentals; and what happens if aspects of modern society are 'imported'? In hope of providing some answer to these questions, I will make four suggestions, and concurrently, outline my proposal for the framing of modernity.

After Modernity

As mentioned above, I would like to make four proposals for ways in which to discuss modernity/modernisation productively. While these points will be discussed as discrete units, they are inter-related. When the discussion turns to the more specific example of Malaysia, I hope to show how these principles work in practice (and in combination). For the moment however, they will be presented separately.

The first of the four proposals is that we should regard modernity, as much as modernisation, as a *process* rather than a formalistic endpoint. While few, I think, would argue that modernisation is a not process, modernity, as stated previously, is regarded as somehow being a discrete, bounded, point in time. Ironically, this may be a by-product of that very same process of modernity itself :

Insofar as the invention of subjectivity marks the beginning of the modern age by laying claim to an absolute break within time it is aligned to a concept of modernity that is equally abstract and false; for, strictly speaking, there is neither a temporal nor an absolute break, only what amounts to the consciousness of such a break, combined [...] with the attempt to subordinate it to "rational" ends (Cascardi 1992: 69; see also Habermas 1987: 7, 55-56)

The attempt to compartmentalise 'modernity' as developing in some primal moment necessitates the elision of any elements potentially classifiable as modernity within pre-modern societies or periods (Kolb 1986). Even without going into the potentiality for claims of Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism or some form of temporal-centrism which this move engenders, the result is one of an epistemological 'Immaculate Conception.' Jameson discusses this problem in terms of the 'post-modern';

Historical and periodizing questions [...], however, requires attention to the ambiguity of the term postmodern itself, which must designate a whole historical period and its 'structure of feeling' [...], but which risks slipping inappreciably [...] into the rather different sense of an aesthetic style or set of formal properties. The slippage is significant, since it has been argued that much of the content of what has been called, in art, architecture or thought alike, postmodernism is in reality modernist-indeed, that a pure postmodernism may well be a priori impossible as such, always involving the treatment of essentially modernist residues (Jameson 1992: 116).

Perhaps, as we have already seen with Weber, the 'problem' lies in the very formulation of the question. Without the formalism of 'a whole historical period' and 'pure postmodernism' then post-modernism may not be so 'impossible.'¹⁰ If the 'modernist residues' are regarded not as problems, but as inevitabilities (or at least as likelihoods), then perhaps the analyses can also move on to new agendas, such as illustrating and analysing these sites of changes and residues, rather than attempting

¹⁰ Indeed, a 'pure' postmodernism *is* impossible, and as I hope to show, as impossible as a 'pure' modernity.

to delimit what is or is not 'post-modern' and *explaining away* those 'residues' (see also Kolb 1986).

The second proposal is that it may be productive to regard modernity and modernization as 'openings of discourse' in thought and society, creating new discursive spaces in religion, economics, family, and/or sexuality, where various forces, rhetorics, interpretations, and counter-interpretations are brought to bear. The mechanics of these openings will be different, but regarding each as creating discursive spaces for other discourses gets the discussion away from 'first causes.' As an instance, it has often been posited that 'the modern' came with the Enlightenment, however, this positioning dismisses the role of other historical periods and non-European influences. Various groups and individuals involved in the various Enlightenment projects most certainly have had a great deal of influence on contemporary Western society. One instance, and highly topical at the time of writing (with regards to events in Kosovo, Serbia and NATO), is the issue of the 'rule of law,' the highly formalistic legal ethos upon which the judicial and legislative systems of 'modern' nation-states are based. The formulation of this system, based upon ideas of civil society and the individual, was a critical agenda of the French Enlightenment (Koepping 1995). However, this rule-based legal system is intrinsically part of Judeo-Christianity, as well as Islam, which in turn has an antecedent in the Hammurabian legal codes of Babylon. What is more interesting, if not important, is not 'who did it first,' but why did a particular form of law become the dominant referent. To this end, the analysis may benefit from the positing that as part of a historical process and discourse, the form of law in question has precursors both in terms of discursive agendas and socio-historical events. These precursors (such as Christianity, anti-feudal movements, or nascent capitalist and liberal ideologies) opened a site of discourse wherein 'law' as we accept it became

intrinsically linked to other 'modernising' discourses (the individual, the state, etc.). What is more, formalistic legalism in turn would have opened other sites of discourse, such as reconceptualisations of the relations between subject and state (and of 'the modern' itself), which were part of the discursive arenas initially framing the issue of 'law.' Eisenstadt also uses Central Europe as an example in his discussion of the tensions within the programme of democracy and modernity, such as what the boundaries are for the political sphere (Eisenstadt 1996). An instance more closely linked to this thesis, and discussed in more detail below, is the attempt by the *Reformasi* (Reform) movement in Malaysia to reconfigure the relations between authority and the individual.

The third proposal is that modernity and modernisation are relational. As modernity and modernisation are processual, that there is no 'absolute break in time,' they exist in, and as, strategic relations to that which has gone before (and by implication, that which is to come after). This point is in some ways close to that of the previous principle, but differs in the agency of the usage of 'pre-modernity.' As defined above, modernity refers to the site of discourses surrounding the perception of a 'break' with the past. This site is also the locus wherein various groups engage in debates over the necessity, the implementation, and the perceived achievement, of the goals of modernisation - the creation of modern institutions. I should point out here that not all of these contestants are equally powerful, for instance certain elements will have more control of the discourse, particularly in terms of wider spheres of political and socio-economic authority. As strategic tools, the past and historical institutions are particularly useful in the debates over what is, should, will, constitute 'the modern.' As I have pointed out, various commentators position various times and places as being where 'the modern' began. These sites, or at least aspects of these sites, are thus opened to strategic (ab)use. Indeed, as the

aforementioned quote from the Radio 4 programme illustrates, modernisation can take place, or be seen to need to take place, within a modern nation-state as neither modernisation nor a 'modern' nation-state are unified monolithic structures. 'Pre-modern' (or at least that which is deemed 'pre-modern') structures and institutions may therefore be employed as modernising tools (Roff 1973; Kolb 1986; Giddens 1994; Wallerstein 1996). In the process, those 'pre-modern' institutions may themselves be 'modernised.'

Finally, the fourth proposal is that the various elements comprising 'the modern' (particularly in terms of the 'bundles' of expectations) should be regarded as dialectically linked. While the intended change towards 'the modern' may be in, and of, one particular aspect of modernisation, such as economic reform, the introduction (opening of discourse) of this one element leads to changes in expectations and to new discourses. These latter developments may, or may not, have been foreseen by those implementing the reforms.

By deconstructing and subsequently reconstructing the terms modernity and modernisation in this manner, the depiction of either modernisation or modernity as monolithic entities will, hopefully, be avoided. For instance, this formulation allows the conceptual space to argue that 'pre-modern' structures can be used strategically, that is as tactical 'weapons,' in the negotiations over modernisation and modernity. As the 'traditional' structures which modernisation and modernity are operating in relation to are diverse, the 'paths' to becoming 'modern' will/can also be diverse. To what extent the outcomes of these diverse paths will be similar is debatable, but I would argue that while the manifestations or discourses of modernity may be different, the underlying shifts in attitudes and expectations will lead to similar (though as pointed out not identical) outcomes. To return to the example already used, in terms of democratisation, modernity necessitates an individuated subject

who is in particular sets of relations with the nation-state. For various socio-historical reasons (even biographical factors), the relations and expectations of particular subjects to their nation-states will be different. As an instance, within the Malay section of Malaysian society, rural Malays are less integrated into the processes of modernisation than are urban Malays (whether that means less affected is another matter entirely). Within the urban population the lower-middle class are less integrated than are the Malay elite. Chinese-Malaysians are arguably even more integrated than are the Malay elite. An important consideration here is that this tight integration positions the urban Chinese-Malaysians as an internal 'Other,' who, along with the external 'Other' (Westerners), can serve as exemplars of modernity, both in terms of its benefits and dangers.

None of the above is intended to argue that the shift to the modern is necessarily smooth and seamless. The changes inherent to modernisation and modernity will cause socio-cultural, political and economic disjunctures. Regarding modernity, the locus of disjuncture typically surrounds the issue of individuality; and is made manifest in the social and discursive arenas of gender and/or sexuality, religion, authority, and the family. In other words, modernity, and its expectant/expected subject, 'has direct consequences for the problem of legitimisation: some groups in modern society will in fact have more power than others, and yet no group seems more entitled to dominate the rest' (Cascardi 1992: 7). I intend to show how these points are both applicable and pertinent in the following discussion of the process of modernisation in Malaysia. During this same section, I will also show why modernity and modernisation are in a dialectic relationship, whether that is desired or not.

Modernity and Malaysia

The time frame for this section of the discussion will be the period of the 1970s to the present. This is not to say that what went on before this period is irrelevant, indeed far from it. Colonial policies, for instance, affect life in Malaysia to this day. However, for now, the processes of modernisation undertaken during this period provides a sufficient platform for discussion, manifesting as it does several important socio-historical developments and discourses, such as: the creation of a Malay middle-class, Malay urbanisation, religion, authority, language, and culture.

Malaysia is governed by the *Barisan Nasional Baru* (the [New] National Front), a coalition of communally-oriented parties, the main ones being UMNO, a Malay based party, MCA - a Chinese based party, and the MIC - an Indian based party.¹¹ UMNO dominates the other parties in the coalition, and controls the Malaysian government, as it has since Independence (Lockard 1995: 11-12). However, in the 1969 Malaysian general elections, the ruling coalition, and UMNO in particular, lost an unprecedented number of seats to the opposition. Race riots resulted, and led to the overthrowing of the ruling members of UMNO (whose approach to government had been fundamentally *laissez-faire*) by younger party members, including the present Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. After order was regained, and following leadership changes within the ruling coalition, there was a 'tremendous expansion of state intervention and the public sector' (Jomo 1995: 4). The most important of these interventions was the NEP or New Economic Policy. The government intended the NEP to promote national unity by reducing poverty and levelling ethnic economic imbalances, especially between the *bumiputra* and the Chinese-Malaysians. One of the main elements of the NEP was a strict policy of positive discrimination, aimed at increasing the *bumiputra* role in education,

¹¹ The population of Malaysia is composed of roughly just over 50% Malays, around 38% Chinese, less than 10% Indian and the rest *lain-lain* - or 'others' (cf. Hirschman 1993).

employment, and their share of the corporate wealth (1995: 4-5). The NEP has since been replaced, and while many of its earlier intentions have been rescinded, such as the focus on public enterprise (as sweeping privatisation has taken place) the policy of increasing the *bumiputra* share of the economy has remained (Jomo & Gomez 1997).

With the stressed goal of gaining 30% of the corporate wealth for Malays/*bumiputra*, a crucial problem needed to be addressed, i.e. who is a *bumiputra*? To that end, the definition of '*bumiputra*' became an important issue. Further, and at least partially in answer to activist demands, policies such as the National Language Policy (1971) and the National Cultural Policy (1971) were implemented; formally installing Malay language and culture as the official language and culture of Malaysia. It is not just in terms of economics that Malays needed to be 'raised up' (the colonial phraseology is intended), but also in regard to Malay world-views and their socio-economic expectations. The stereotype Malay (rural, placid, tolerant...) began to be perceived as a problem, especially in the face of more aggressive 'races,' such as the Chinese-Malaysians (Mahathir Mohamad 1970: *passim*). Malays, therefore, must also, as with Malaysia, be taught to confront the modern world. Prior to the *bumiputra* push, Malays were largely rural dwelling; as late as 1970 85.2% of *bumiputra* were rural, and only formed a little over 25% of the urban population (New Straits Times 31-08-1991), while at the same time they formed over 50% of the total population. Further, economic and political powers were (and, arguably, still are) held in separate hands, the Chinese and the Malays respectively. Via the NEP, and particularly through higher education and the resultant white-collar employment (both assured through positive discrimination policies), this situation was tackled.

The government, through the NEP, has created new (or disinterred very

old)socio-economic roles for Malays, principally that of an urban middle-class,¹² but this in itself has led to crises of cultural, ethnic, and religious identity (Kahn 1992: *passim*). As an instance, the rapid urbanisation of Malays has meant that a huge number of urban dwellers are either rural migrants or, at most, first generation urbanites. This has posed a severe challenge to 'traditional' life-styles (particularly in the areas of gender and family, which I will discuss in the context of the films), with the outcome that dissatisfactions have arisen almost as fast as the urban population. One area where this dissatisfaction has shown up is in the context of Islam.

It has been suggested that the Malaysian government's *bumiputra* 'push' in the 1970s led to 'uncertainty, even disillusionment, of young Malays over new conditions, and occupational requirements brought by urbanism, economic development, and foreign contact' (Nagata 1984: 55). In particular, the increasing importance of tertiary education, and resultant higher expectations, led to problems for Malay students. Though Bahasa Malaysia had become the official language of university instruction, texts and teaching staff were still English-oriented (1984: 56-57).

[I]n addition to which, the Malay students were often unprepared for the general academic standards required at this level. Anxiety, disillusionment, and the potential failure rate are therefore high and cause many tensions which prevade [*sic*] the atmosphere of student life on campus, for which other expressive and ideological outlets are now sought (Nagata 1984: 56).

Further, as the academic infrastructure was not able to accommodate the increase in student numbers, many Malay students were sent overseas (Nagata 1984: 57; Jomo

¹² See Chapter 4: Urbanism, below.

& Ahmad Shabery Cheek 1992: 79). Overseas, the aforementioned problems were exacerbated by culture shock, the stress of living in a non-Muslim society with sometimes radically different norms, together with problems of loneliness and unhappiness with their new situation (Nagata 1984: 56-57). These circumstances created bonds between Malays and Muslims from the Middle East, Pakistan and Africa, and access to new Islamic authors. These authors, largely from less heterogeneous communities, advocated a return to a 'purer' form of Islam, one based much more closely on the praxis and teachings of the Prophet, and indeed, the formation of Islamic states and societies (Nagata 1984).¹³ Other possibilities for the flourishing of Islamic movements exist. Shamsul, for instance, points out that prior to *dakwah* influences from outside the Malay archipelago, Indonesian 'missionaries' were the most important, as 'the [Malay] students who were involved in *dakwah* were mainly Malay-educated, did not read English and were ambivalent about western education' (Shamsul 1983: 401).¹⁴ The other generator of *dakwah* in Malaysia may have been the Arab 'backlash,' the oil crises of the early and mid 1970s and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Jomo & Ahmad Shabery Cheek 1992; Roff 1987; Hussin Mutalib 1993), which provided a non-Western role model for Islamic states and peoples. It is within this context that Brenner argues that *dakwah* groups are modernising, rather than an Islamic 'revival' or fundamentalist *per se*; that is, a South East Asian version of a modern Islamic identity (Brenner 1996: 673).

What I think is important to take away from the above discussion is that *dakwah* is, principally, an urban, middle-class based movement, with a predominant number of its members university educated. Further, that some permutations of the *dakwah* movement were attempts to operate as Muslims within the modern world,

¹³ Islamic activism was alongside, and indeed often overlapped with, more communally (that is the Malay community) oriented activism.

¹⁴ An interesting counter argument to both of these is that Malaysians activists had originally influenced Indonesians (Brenner 1996: 693 n23).

and can therefore be seen as a form of modernisation.

In terms of authority, this arena was being played out in Malaysia on the streets, on the television, and in the newspapers during the late 1990s. Large segments of Malay and Malaysian society have been discontented with the political/authority *status quo*, especially after the arrest of the former Deputy Prime Minister (and ex-*dakwah*/student activist) Anwar Ibrahim, this discontent spread and became overt. Not only has the discontent become overt, the new debate has focussed on issues of individuated subjectivity, via a protest for personal (political) rights. With the furore over the trial and imprisoning of the former DPM, certain *dakwah*-oriented organisations were again in the public eye. What is interesting is that while the leaders of the movements are as stated above (urban, middle class, and university educated), many of the followers appeared to be from city *kampung* areas (urban, but not middle class or necessarily university educated).¹⁵ While the street protests appear to have ceased, the discontent has led to the formation of a new political party, and to a shift in discourse amongst some of the other opposition parties.

As the issue of authority demonstrates, middle-class dissatisfaction surrounds the failure of the government to allow space for the *unintended* consequences of modernity, for the changes of needs and desires of subjects who are no longer satisfied with past modes of authority, life-style, gender, etc. Subjects who acknowledge the new spaces created by modernisation, and desire the ephemeral spinoffs of that modernisation. This is not to say that the working class is not involved in the discourse. As mentioned above, there does seem to be working class involvement in the *Reformasi* movement, though not at the leadership level. However, it is the middle class which is the most vocal and articulate in expressing a

¹⁵ It would be interesting to find out if this was the case in the past as well.

more general dissatisfaction. I should point out that there are other socio-political reasons for the Malay middle class to be the expressive agents in this discourse. Chinese and Indian-Malaysians are conspicuous by their absence, for instance. Reasons for this would include communal worries over potential actions of the government and of the Malays themselves. As an example, much of the *Reformasi* discourse, although ostensibly about political reform, is couched in religious terms.

In the 1970s Malay dissatisfaction was expressed through various mediums, such as Islam, language, and culture, and was expressed in terms of identity, namely what constitutes being Malay, and what Malay meant in the context of the Malaysian nation-state. While the issues of Malay identity are still important, more recently dissatisfaction has been grounded in the discourses surrounding the failure of economic promises (that economic redistribution of wealth has not reached the 'average' Malay, but has moved to Malay elites) and continuation of outmoded modes of authority.¹⁶ These elements are 'played out' in the very public arena of Malaysian cinema.

Modern Art

Before I address the *Malaysian* element of that last claim, cinema, through a diversion via literature, will be the next point of discussion. Cinema and literature studies have a large area of epistemological overlap, and as literary studies have the longer pedigree, it is with that field which the following section will begin. Further, one of those areas of overlap refers to the issues surrounding modernity, particularly that of the narrative conventions relating to the formation of subjectivities, those of the individual and of the nation state (Willemsen 1995: 101-103).

While film theory, as a body of knowledge, has several theoretical roots and

¹⁶ For a more detailed, though often contradictory, discussions on the shifts in the economic balance, see Jomo and Gomez (1997) and Shamsul (1995a, 1996). Each make the point that economic control has moved from European ownership to control by the Malay elite, but disagree as to how much has left Chinese ownership.

sources of inspiration, two progenitors stand out; literary theory and psychoanalytical-derived theories. As stated above, I will be focussing on the former. The literary studies-informed approach has provided much of the terminology (narrative, discourse, subjectivity, even text) and rhetoric intrinsic to film studies.¹⁷ An important debate within literary studies has surrounded the formation of a 'modern' subjectivity (a self-conscious individuated awareness of the self), with links thereby to 'modern' narrative form and how the story is told/enacted (Bracht Branham 1995: 79-89; McKeon 1987: *passim*). While the dichotomous split between 'pre-modern' and 'modern' is not unquestionable (McKeon 1987; Fujii 1993), as a heuristic device, at least, it has been employed by some of those attempting to delineate a similar shift ('pre-modern' to 'modern') in both literature and the cinema.

In literature studies the move towards modernity - the novel, or modern novel, has been placed at various places and times (for instance compare McKeon 1987 with Bracht Branham 1995), but the manifestation of this shift centres on narrative structures. McKeon, on the one hand, regards the shift from 'pre-modern' to 'modern' literary form as hinging on a re-categorisation of literary genres in combination with the development of a new literary format (the origin of the English novel), the latter of which strives 'both to formulate, and to explain, a set of problems that are central to early modern experience' (McKeon 1987: 20), the former of which may be seen more as a symptom of these existential problems. In short, these epistemological and social problems surround questions of 'truth,' particularly in terms of (narrative) depiction and relation of 'the truth'; and questions of 'virtue,' the relations between social order and its members (1987: *passim*). These points are intriguing in terms of the discussion of film. '[Cinema and TV] are not neutral mechanisms that convey a truth from the world beyond. On the contrary, they work

¹⁷ As with psychoanalytical-derived theories, the literary studies approach has been criticised and/or questioned, but in a far less antagonistic fashion (Polan 1987; Rothman 1995).

very hard and very subtly to convey an impression of truth' (Ellis 1982: 62).¹⁸ Issues of authority, such as who it is that tells the story and/or who sets the agenda, link these two questions, and the establishing of how these issues are to be depicted stylistically (McKeon 1987: 20). The changes in belief, thought and society (feudal to democratic, religious to secular) led to new forms of legitimisation - 'the historical task of the subject was to discover, and if not to discover then to create, a center of value in the absence of any natural or original value-ground' (Cascardi 1992: 43). One way this was achieved was through reason, and the claim to be able to articulate/theorise the world from a purely objective, third-person, point of view. 'The consequence is a social order in which the subject may be imagined as the agent of a series of universal (which is to say, moral) propositions, and also which moral agency is rendered schematic and abstract,' for example the rule of law and civil society (1992: 43). In terms of literature, new (modern) narrative forms were resultant from this shift, marked by 'the repudiation of traditional plots and figurative eloquence; the particularisation of character and background, of naming, temporality, causation, and physical environment' (McKeon 1987: 2).

To a certain extent, Bracht Branham agrees with McKeon's analyses.

It is the change in the "chronotope" of narrative from oral epic to the novel that makes possible a reconceptualisation of the hero, and it is this "re-structuring of the image of the individual ... in literature" [...] that makes the novel's emergence historically significant (Bracht Branham 1995: 82).

Oral/epic characters merely 'played out' their roles, roles which were ethically consistent and predetermined. Further, the narrative 'voice' is uniform, with some

¹⁸ See also Vasudevan on 'virtue,' both in its more everyday meaning and in the way McKeon employs the term (Vasudevan 1991: 7-8).

exceptions, epic characters, no matter their status, share speech forms that are 'stylistically continuous' (Bracht Branham 1995: 82). The characters are individualised by their situations, or (moral) destinies, not by idiosyncratic characteristics or moral incertitudes. Further, neither the (oral) narrator, nor the audience is part of the narrative; the epic is not experiential. For Bracht Branham, via Bakhtin, the shift from 'pre-modern' to 'modern' was not a dramatic Cartesian split, but began with the Greek literary traditions, becoming more overt in the Roman literature, until 'the novel first appears in the Roman Empire rather than in Hellenistic or Classical Greece, Renaissance Spain, or eighteenth-century England' (1995: 87).

While the accounts of McKeon and Bracht Branham differ vastly in their chronological emphases, and certainly in their views as to which aspects of change were most important, they agree that it was a change in subjectivity and (broadly speaking) the narrative structuration of 'modern' literature which differentiates the 'pre-modern' from the 'modern.'¹⁹ Both accounts would also concede that the 'pre-modern' and the 'modern' are not discrete categories, and that 'modern' narrative forms were neither *sui generis* nor did they obliterate the 'pre-modern' narrative form (Vasudevan 1991: 6, 28-34). One of the criticisms of modernity (both epistemologically and in practice) is the valorisation of the atomised individual. This general criticism is reiterated in terms of the modern novel as well:

But only the age of the modern is notoriously the moment in which the individual life is driven so deeply into its isolated "point of view" that it is no longer capable of peeping out over the barrier. Modern relativistic plot, and its fundamental category, the unity of "point of view," only

¹⁹ See Fujii (1993) for a criticism of the underlying assumption of the universality and validity of this conceptualisation.

come into being at the moment of late Victorian individualism, in which the monadic closure of the individual self becomes a desperate case, projecting just such an abstract representational form - a kind of relativistic synchronicity, in which a multiplicity of monads is imagined separately, and as it were from above, in but the most fitful relationship with one another - as its expression and its compensation alike (Jameson 1992:115; see also Fujii 1993: *passim*).

If I am reading Jameson correctly, then the author-narrator thus, of necessity, becomes a character in his or her own work. The author-narrators have become involved in the structuring of the story by choosing whose point of view to promote and at what point in time (Fujii 1993: 3, 4, 30, and *passim*), a kind of Eye-of-God third person narrative. However, as was earlier pointed out, older literary forms have not utterly disappeared and sites of tensions between these forms occur, nor is 'the subject' the monolithic entity we may have believed.

The influence of Bakhtin on literature studies can not be overestimated (McKeon 1987; Lodge 1990; Fujii 1993; Bracht Branham 1995).²⁰ In terms of this thesis his ideas of dialogism and of the value of the spatio-temporal specificity of the 'act' (of speech, literature, or, as we shall see, film) have been productive analytic tools. In particular, two aspects of Bakhtin's theories have proved useful in analysing Malaysian cinema. First, he allows space for those aspects outside what is normally considered germane to analysing a novel (i.e. context). The second is that '[l]iterature is for him a site of ideological contest in which readings can reveal the often tense

²⁰ This is not to claim that either he or his theories are infallible. McKeon point out that he 'digs an implausible gulf between the [...] traditional genres and [...] "the novel"' (1987: 13). Further, his valorisation of the *parole* appears to render him ideologically 'blind' to benefits of including the *langue* into his analyses.

relations between the dominant and dominated subject positions' (Fujii 1993: 30).

Keeping these thoughts in mind, the discussion will now focus on film in general.

Film theorists have also attempted to pin down the 'window of time' where 'pre-modern' and 'modern' cinema parted ways (Abel n.d; Rajadhyaksha n.d: 77; Vasudevan 1991; Parkinson 1995: 15-51). To an extent paralleling the literary theories aforementioned, Abel posits that 'classic' film theory defines 'primitive' cinema as being that of a cinema of attractions, where the sheer spectacle of moving images overrode any story, plot or characterisation (Abel n.d). Examples of this period would be the kinetoscope (or nickelodeon), where individual machines played 'in effect, little more than unedited lengths of footage, no longer than the action itself or the particular strip of celluloid' (Parkinson 1995: 15), the fairground exhibitions of early cinema, and works such as those of the Lumières, the classic train pulling into the station, feeding baby; 'spontaneous 15-20 second slices of life' (1995: 17). The 'modern' cinema, in this formulation, 'involved the discovery and development of an essence of cinematic art [and] privileging the narrative function: cinema "began" in earnest when it took up its "mission" of telling stories, when the specific elements of "film language" were subordinated to a narrative logic' (Abel n.d; see also Parkinson 1995: *passim*). The 'classic' period of Hollywood (and the director D.W. Griffith in particular) was either the founder or exemplar of this 'modern' cinematic form (Abel n.d.). Abel makes problematic many of the assumptions inherent to this stance; the presumption of early cinema's monolithic structure and the American-centrism of the theory being two examples. Echoing McKeon and Bracht Branham, the move from 'early' (pre-modern) to 'modern' cinema was much more processual and, particularly in the cinematic instance, was inherently bound up in the economics of film

distribution and exhibition (Abel n.d; Rajadhyaksha: n.d).²¹ This new control may also have contributed to the 'narrativisation' of the cinema, for very pragmatic/economic reasons, certain elements of cinematic praxis have become *conventions*, and indeed have become regarded as part of the very *code* of cinema (Abel n.d.).²² Further, the increasing sophistication of cinematic equipment and techniques has been attested as contributing to, if not enabling, the switch from the often static tableaux-like 'spectacle' to the 'internalised lecturer' of narrative cinema (Abel n.d.). Very important for the success of this diegetic 'lecturer' (the narrator - implicit or explicit) were the development of various cinematic conventions, such as POV (point of view) shots, eye-line matches, the 180° rule, and close-ups (Abel n.d.).

In many French and American films by this time [early 1900s], everything having to do with the mise-en-scene, framing and editing was being "remotivated," subordinated to a causal narrative chain dependent on such devices as repetition, delay, surprise, suspense, and, above all, closure (Abel n.d.).

In other words, conventions were established eliciting, constructing, and manifesting subjectivity, notably in terms of positioning the narrator, frequently within the diegetic; '[s]imilarly, it positioned an audience differently, engaging the spectator (increasingly individualized) in "stitching" together a spatial-temporal whole and a

²¹ The studios took control of these facets from the exhibitors, thereby retaining their monopoly over final output, previously '[a]ll kinds of practices - variable projection speeds, reedited or re-ordered shots, colors applied to the film stock, accompanying music and sound effects' were in the hands of those actually showing the films (Abel n.d.). See Vasudevan (1991: 3-5, 23), as well as Lent (1990) and Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan (1988) for Indian and Malaysian examples respectively.

²² It may be worth considering, as we have with elements of literature above, what aspects of cinematic praxis (if indeed any) are truly part of the code (inherent and necessary to cinema as a media) rather than convention (those elements which may have become orthopraxy, but are not essential to cinema). To this we would have to, after Bakhtin, add context (the para- and extra-cinematic practices which affect film as an art form). The problem would be to do so without entering into a formalist project of producing 'pigeon holes.'

sequential process of "narrativational knowledge" (Abel n.d.). However, through the subjective portrayal of characters, actions, and events, the audience also both gained understanding of these elements and became involved in the diegesis (Abel: n.d; Rajadhyaksha n.d; Willemen 1995).

It should not come as any surprise that the above is not quite as straightforward as it possibly appears. Rajadhyaksha and Willemen both point out, in different ways, that the Cartesian/Enlightenment subject/subjectivity is neither monolithic nor unidirectional, nor, as Ellis states, has 'modern' cinema completely lost the aura of 'spectacle' (Ellis 1982: 37), i.e. the 'pre-modern.' Rajadhyaksha makes the further point that individuated subjectivity, or especially the presumption of individuated subjectivity, may be inapplicable to non-EuroAmerican audiences (Rajadhyaksha n.d; see also Fujii 1993).

Two issues arise from this: the necessarily shared perspective, that of narrator and audience member (Rajadhyaksha n.d.), would need to be reformulated when the audience is no longer seen as atomised. Further, the reactions and reaffirmations communicated between audience members would need to be taken into consideration (Rajadhyaksha: n.d; see also Sweeney 1994). Where then does this leave 'the subject'? If indeed, the subject is not an atomised hermetically sealed unit, how is that subject/subjectivity then 'written into' the diegesis? Indeed, Jameson asks this very question of cinema using the example of Irony within 'modern' narrative structures - wherein the atomised individuals of the narrative are 'blind' to the various juxtapositions of their fates, though we the privileged reader/viewer (and the omnipotent narrator as well) are well aware of their circumstances. However, as real living beings we are, in our own lives, 'blind' to these coincidences (Jameson 1992: 115). There is the further reminder that not only is the camera another way of producing this sort of 'unreality,' but also that

a filmic "point of view" is less realistic than the other, written kind, since it shows us the viewer along with the viewed and has to include the viewing subject's body in the contents of the allegedly subjective experience, as if to mark the latter as seen by someone (Jameson 1992: 115).

The presumption that these assertions rests upon (that cinema is somehow supposed to be, or claims to be, real) is a somewhat false one,²³ and that the self-same questions could be asked of other media, such as the theatre. However, this assertion of a failed portrayal of 'the real,' does open a field of inquiry. As Rajadhyaksha, Willemen, and Jameson all diversely point out, there is inherent to the modes of depicting subjectivity in film and literature a 'fragility,' one which opens these media to slippage. When we encounter 'slippages' of subjectivity, of 'voice,' of presentation, of point of view, we are encountering more than incompetence with the narrativational conventions, but also sites of disjuncture. These disjunctures may be on different levels of discourse (intended or unintentional, technical or social or personal). This is not a purely academic point, as these sites of disjuncture also affect the reception of the film or novel, for they interfere with our forming a 'shared perspective' with the text/diegesis.²⁴

I hope that by explicating some specifics of the Malaysian cinema situation, and by introducing society into the equation, I can show how these issues link with the four proposals I put forward earlier. To attempt this feat, I will use particular films to illustrate the loci of disjuncture mentioned above, those typically surrounding the issue of individuality. The social and discursive arenas of gender

²³ While, as was pointed out by Ellis, the cinema attempts to effect portraying 'the truth,' how seriously filmmakers and the audience accept 'reality' remains a debatable issue. I am thinking in particular of the debates over the extent to which an audience is either a lumpen mass blithely accepting all that the various media shovel into it, and the converse, that highly articulate and sophisticated viewers subvert the intended messages to their own ends.

²⁴ This may be an effect intended by the filmmaker.

and/or sexuality, religion, authority, and the family in their Malaysian context will ground the discussion of modernity, and in particular that most problematic of problematics - modernity's expectant/expected subject.

As events in Malaysia in the late 1990s demonstrated, even within a single political party, the vision of modernity is in fact *visions*. Different structural positions within society (for instance class) also give rise to differing interpretations of what it means/will mean to be modern. Throughout the thesis, some of these positions are illustrated, principally though the newly urban lower middle class serve as the bench-mark for this thesis. It is the positionality of the newly urban lower middle class (though they are themselves a far from monolithic entity) vis-à-vis the elite, government, or upper middle class positionalities which provides an illustration of modernity's discursive nature. In short, modernity is being negotiated.

There is a point from which these negotiations are based. As much as I would argue that modernity is not a fixed entity (spatial or temporal - the present-day USA for instance), nevertheless it is a Western modernity which provides the foundational reference point for the aforementioned arguments. That this referent is not necessarily a positive one is clear from the public and private discourses and discussions in Malaysia surrounding 'the West' and/or Westerners. The highly ambiguous perception of 'the West,' the simultaneous envy and fear, is emblematic of the West's own iconic status in regard to modernity. I should point out that for many Malaysians (though by no means all), 'the West' is just that, not Canada, Germany, or the Netherlands.²⁵ While the USA may serve as the epitome of modernity, all of 'the West' is perceived as vaguely equivalent. Throughout the course of the thesis examples of this ambivalence, such as *kampung* peoples' attitude to the city, are discussed. This ambivalence is another point of negotiation.

²⁵ Britain and Japan were colonial powers and are therefore exceptions to this rule.

While this chapter deals largely with the philosophy of modernity, the practical aspects of these issues are also important. This is a crucial point. We are not merely discussing abstract matters, but issues which are important to the daily life, the lived life, of people in Malaysia, and indeed elsewhere. These negotiations are in effect negotiations of life as much as negotiations of modernity. When a Malay informant suggests that the reason for X is that "we aren't a modern country yet," this is not only a rhetorical device/stance to excuse acknowledged or perceived national shortcomings, but is also an expression of the force these issues have in people's thoughts and consciousness. Indeed this is why the aforementioned bundles can cause the sorts of disjunctures they do. This is yet another aspect of modernity to be negotiated.

Chapter 2: History of the Malaysian Cinema



Prelude

The history of the Malaysian cinema industry goes back one hundred years, around seventy years, about forty-five years, and only twenty-five years.¹ While on the face of it, this does not seem either possible or logical, the unique combination of factors constituting the birth and development of the Malaysian cinema lead this type of argument, namely that the positionality of those involved will impact upon the 'reading' of a given situation. While in this chapter, that 'reading' involves historical questions, the question for the thesis regards the 'reading' of film itself. Nevertheless, the aforementioned paradoxical statement serves as an extreme, if not symbolic, distillation of the history of Malaysian cinema.

One of the challenges in writing about the Malaysian cinema industry, particularly its history, is that various factors lead different commentators to very different opinions and interpretations regarding critical events. This is not a phenomenon unique to Malaysian, nor to Malaysian cinematic, history. Any historian will face these issues to some extent. What exacerbates the 'problem' in this context however, is the dearth of primary source material for various time periods in the following historical sketch. Generally speaking, the further back in time we go, the more access to movies becomes limited. However, the immense and continuing popularity of films from the 50s and 60s, means that they are often more readily available commercially than films from the 70s and 80s, and that reference material on this era is abundant. Pre-war movies in particular are seldom available, even in terms of production details such as the director or the production company involved. Further, at particular periods in this history, there is a 'flexibility' as to who is being referred to. For instance, in terms of the popularity of the cinema during the 1920s and 1930s, a precise estimate is hard to come by as different sources use varying

¹ Based on the year 2000.

standards for measuring popularity (audience figures versus length of screening versus box office receipts), and are often talking about vastly different social and communal groups simultaneously. One explanation for this possibly lies within the fundamental changes that occurred in Malay and Malaysian society during the 1970s. However, not to get too far ahead of the narrative, these developments will be addressed at the appropriate place in this chronology. One further source for the above paradox involves the three components of the cinema industry:

What this means is the activities of producing, distributing (importing) and exhibiting films. In the area of film production, the activities of local feature film productions receive wide media coverage. The second area that is also well known by the public is film exhibition. The distribution sector is relatively unknown to the general public even though it is the most profitable one (Mohd. Shariff Ahmad 1989a: 4).

How the history of the cinema industry is delineated, to a degree, depends upon the emphasis placed on these components.

The Early Days

Probably the first 'film' screened in what was then Malaya was a newsreel entitled *Diamond Anniversary Celebrations of Queen Victoria* (possibly Richard John Appledon 1897), in 1898 (Lent 1990: 188; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 58). Lent suggests that the screening was public, and relates reports of audience confusion regarding the medium (1990: 186), whereas Hatta Azad Khan states that it is more likely that the screening was solely for colonial officials (1997: 58). This is an example of the issues commented on above regarding any attempt to provide a comprehensive history. Other early 'pre-cinema' filmic exhibitions included

temporary panopticon exhibitions and amusement park novelties (Jamil Sulong 1990: 1; Lent 1990: 186). Generally, these were open to the paying public, with occasional special performances (Jamil Sulong 1990: 7).² The first cinema built in Malaya was the Alhambra, which opened in Singapore in 1907. The cinema was owned by an Englishman, and screened mostly Hollywood silent films (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 52). An advertisement appearing in *Utusan Melayu* on 5 August 1908 reads 'Live movies with funny pictures which is better and clearest in the world. Two shows every night' (1997: 53). The introduction of cinema to Malaya, like most of the world, was in terms of exhibition. There is therefore an argument for the assertion that the film industry in Malaysia is almost 100 years old. While in itself this is more historically interesting than 'important,' there are a couple of resultant issues that were to be significant to the industry. First is the urban bias; the cinema was introduced into an urban setting, and while there were travelling cinema shows taking 'the medium to the more accessible rural areas' (Lent 1990: 58), it was in the urban milieu that Malaysian cinema was largely to remain.³ The second issue is the composition of the early audience.

While the cinema was introduced into Malaya around the turn of the century, and during the 1910s cinemas were being built in larger towns, it was only after the First World War that the numbers of cinemas and cinema audiences began to increase (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 58; *cf.* Lent 1990: 58). Just how popular cinema was during the inter-war period is open to speculation, but at the opening of a new cinema in Ipoh, over 600 people attended. (*The Malay Tribune* [Perak] 2-3-1938). During this

² As will also be noted in regards to later cinemas, the prices at these early cinematic exhibitions was quite high. Jamil Sulong notes two early exhibitions; one in 1900 where the prices began at \$1, and the other in 1902 where the admission prices for Europeans and Chinese were \$1 (each listed separately however) and for 'Natives and children 25cts.' (Jamil Sulong 1990: 1).

³ There were, reputedly, no cinemas in Terengganu, for instance. 'Once a week a tiny coaster puts in at [Kuala] Trengganu, unloads a sound box and several cans of film for a To-night only show in a thatched shed in the town.' (*The Malay Weekly Mail* 29-9-36). Even in established urban centres, the cinema did not always exist in expected situations, as is shown by this advert for the Adelphi Hotel: 'Roof Garden Cinema-Every Sunday Night' (*Malacca Guardian* 26-01-1928).

formative period, the cinemas' programmes consisted of newsreels, two or three serials and then the main feature, and appeared to have changed every 2-3 days (Malacca Guardian 26-01-1928).⁴ Prices seem to have been quite high, at least at the Rialto in Malacca.⁵ The patronage of films in Malaya at this time was predominantly Chinese. Hatta Azad Khan mentions the figure of 70% for Ipoh (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 53). With hindsight, it is easy to guess who would become the most interested in the industry, at least in terms of exhibition. As stated above, an estimate of the popularity of cinema during the 1920s to 1930s is hard to come by, but the glamorous aura of the cinema had already been established. Pictures of movie stars were frequently carried by the newspapers, not just Hollywood stars but Chinese and Indian as well (see for instance Malay Tribune 04-10-1935 or 05-10-1935). The movie industry must have been deemed profitable as during the 1930s and 1940s the numbers of import/distribution house increased dramatically. What is more, many of these distribution houses began building cinemas and exhibiting their own imported movies. For instance in Singapore there were five distribution houses in 1930, nine in 1932, and '[b]y 1941, the number of film distribution companies [...] had doubled compared to that of 1934' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 60). All the more interesting is that this flourishing took place in the face of government control and censorship (Lent 1990: 186-87). The Theatres Enactment of 1910 'required cinemas to be licensed and films to be passed by local authorities' (1990: 187). In 1923 the official censor was established, and by 1925 12% of films imported into Malaya were prohibited and cuts were made from 90% of all others (1990: 187). The Cinematograph Films (Control) Enactment of 1927:

empowered the official censor to inspect every film and

⁴ An example of the features available, as well as the time it took for Hollywood 'blockbusters' to get to Malaya, is *Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian 1925) opening in 1928 (Malacca Guardian 26-01-1928). However, a number of Hollywood films were actually screened in Malaya before their release in London (Wan Abdul Kadir, in Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 52). This remains true today.

⁵ Upstairs box seats - \$2; upstairs reserved seats - \$1.50; downstairs - 1st class - \$1.20; 2nd class - \$.80; 3rd class - \$.50; 4th class - \$.40 (Rialto Theatre advert, in Malacca Guardian 25-1-28).

every picture photograph, poster or figure advertising a film, and to ban any of these. Fines of up to US \$500 were levied when films did not meet the censor's approval. The law also allowed any police official to enter and search without warrant any premises that were suspected of exhibiting unauthorised films, and to arrest those involved in the exhibition (Lent 1990: 186-87).

As Lent goes on to add, one of the main concerns of the censorship body was that Hollywood films in particular might lead to a lack of respect for colonials and the colonial government (1990: 186). The result is that it was more often American films that were banned. It would be cynical to suggest that this would also aid the market for British films.⁶

There were to be two important consequences of the aforementioned developments: the first was that many of the distribution and exhibition houses were Chinese or Indian owned, and they began to import and screen Chinese and Indian movies respectively.⁷ Indonesian films, specifically Javanese films in the Betawi dialect (similar to Bahasa Malaysia), also began to be imported, to a successful reception amongst Malay audiences (Jamil Sulong 1989: 57; Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 83). The importing and screening of Chinese movies had begun earlier however, and by 1929 there were four distribution houses for Chinese imports (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 59). The second important consequence was that certain of these houses became involved in the third sector of the cinema industry, namely production, and began making movies. Considering the first of these consequences, it transpired that the Indian movies, as well as the Indonesian films, found a ready audience amongst

⁶ In 1926 there was an unsuccessful attempt to impose a quota on foreign film entry into Malaya, with a target of 30% for British films (Lent 1990: 187).

⁷ Going by the cinema listings, the films screened were mostly English-language, with 1-3 Chinese and 1-3 Indian-language films for any given week (The Malay Weekly Mail 29-9-36).

the Malays. Whether this had to do with cultural similarities or not, it quite likely contributed to future developments in the Malayan cinema industry. It is also probably worth introducing a couple of important future players at this point.

During the 1920s two brothers from Shanghai moved to Singapore and began importing and exhibiting Chinese films. Runme and Run Run Shaw initially rented space to screen films, but in the 1930s they began building cinemas throughout Malaya. By 1939, the Shaw Brothers controlled 139 cinemas in Malaya, Indonesia, and Indo-China, and had diversified into importing Indian and Hollywood films (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 64). Of perhaps even greater significance is that they also began to import and exhibit Indonesian films (see The Early Film Era below).

Roughly concurrent with the Shaws were two other cinema entrepreneurs, Loke Wan Tho and Ho Ah Loke. While initially independent agents, the fates of these latter two, in both exhibition/distribution and production, became interconnected. Loke Wan Tho established Associated Theatres, beginning in Ipoh in 1926, and expanding into Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in the 1930s. Loke Wan Tho later bought out another of the early entrepreneurs (Ong Keng Huat), forming International Theatre Limited. By 1957, Loke Wan Tho had 39 cinemas in his stable. Ho Ah Loke, on the other hand, after establishing his cinema chain, later sold his cinemas and joined forces with Loke Wan Tho, forming Loke Theatres Limited. On the distribution/exhibition front, Loke Wan Tho was to form Cathay Film, while in terms of production, Ho Ah Loke initiated Rimau Film Productions. Rimau Film Productions made either two movies (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1990), or three (Hatta Azad Khan 1997).⁸ Rimau later became Keris Film Productions.

⁸ Hatta Azad Khan mentions *Ramli Ramlah* (Jaafar Wiryo 1952/3); *Berbahagia di Singapura* ('Love in Singapore,' Jaafar Wiryo 1952/3); and *Setia* ('Loyal,' A.C Simons 1953) as Rimau productions, (1997: 65-72). In *Daftar Filem Melayu*, these films are listed differently. Two films are attributed to Rimau Film Productions; *Untuk Sesuap Nasi* ('For a Mouthful of Rice,' L. Krishnan 1952/3), and *Bunga Perchintaan* ('Beautiful Love Affair,' L. Krishnan 1951). The three aforementioned titles are attributed to Rimau's later incarnation - Keris Film Productions (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1993 46-47).

The Early Film Era

It was during the 1930s that one of the truly 'landmark' events in the history of Malaysian cinema occurred, the making of the first film in Malaya. Arguably, that first film made in Malaya was *Laila Majnun* (1933), starring M. Suki, Fatimah Jasmin, and Syed Ali Mansoor Al Attas, produced by the Motilal Chemical Co. and directed by B.S. Rajhans (Jamil Sulong 1973: 231). The case is arguable, as there are claims that another title, *Nelayan* (1938, possible director Khairuddin aka Tairo) was the first, and other claims that the date for *Laila Majnun* was actually 1932 (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 25), 1935 or 1938 (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 73 n. 1; Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: 156). Arguably, it doesn't matter which of the two was first, for as Amir Muhammad states;

Laila Majnun (1932) was the first film to be made in the Malay language, but it, together with virtually all films that were churned out in the ensuing years, was so heavily influenced by popular Indian cinema as to be indistinguishable from the original product. The story lines and behind-the-camera talents were literally imported wholesale (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 25; see also Lent 1990: 189).

As Hatta Azad Khan states: 'with Rajhan's *Laila Majnun* the Indian cinema then speaking in about 12 different languages, found another tongue' (1997: 63). Herein, two more elements of that introductory paradox are demonstrated. The birth of the Malayan/Malaysian cinema industry, from the production point of view, was in the early 1930s, and is therefore some 60 years old. However, from the perspective of a Malay industry, that same birth must be postponed until later. This latter point also refers to those changes in Malay/Malaysian society mentioned previously.

While much is not known about the early Malayan cinema industry, some of what is known is that in the early 1930s two Indians, S.M. Chisty (a businessman) and B.S. Rajhans (who had some movie experience in India, but just how much, and what kind of, experience Rajhans had remains open to question), joined talents to produce *Laila Majnun*. The success of Tamil and Hindi films with the Malay audience was likely an important consideration in initiating this endeavour. A side note, perhaps, is that the production company, Motilal Chemical Company, made the lighting then used for filming. Also of interest is that Chisty was said to have 'good rapport' with, and interest in, the performing arts - particularly *bangsawan* [lit. of good birth, aristocratic; Malay Opera] (Lent 1990: 188). Indeed, '[t]he idea of filming *Laila Majnun* could have been triggered through his [Chisty's] association with some famous stars from *bangsawan* and opera, both from Malaya and Indonesia' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 62; see also Jamil Sulong 1989: 56-60; Rahmah Hj. Bujang 1989: 53-55; Lent 1990: 188; and Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 83). Early Indonesian films also capitalised on the extant stars of the day, and these stars were also frequently well known in Malaya (Jamil Sulong 1973: 232; Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 83). The casting of famous *bangsawan* stars, by far the most popular entertainment form amongst urban Malays (Jamil Sulong 1989: 56-60), was perhaps the principle reason for the success of the film. '*Laila Majnun* is based on a *bangsawan* play. Producers, to ensure a box-office draw, based their films on well-loved classics, and cast popular *bangsawan* players' (Jamil Sulong 1989: 56; see also Baharudin Latif 1989a: 45; Rahmah Hj. Bujang 1989: 53-55; and Lent 1990: 188).⁹

Bangsawan is a form of Malay popular drama. It is performed outdoors and typically relates stories of royalty, as the literal translation of the word suggests (Rahmah Hj. Bujang 1989: 53).¹⁰ Spatially, the *bangsawan* stage is arranged much as

⁹ Today famous singers such as Awie, Erra, and Amy Mastura play much the same role - *plus ça change...*

¹⁰ *Bangsawan* productions are now staged only occasionally (Jamil Sulong 1989: 56).

is classical European theatre. The audience and stage characters typically face one another, and the action on stage being viewable through approximately 180°. The action is interspersed with song and dance routines (Jamil Sulong 1989: 58). Dialogue and acting conventions tend to be formal, with the very polite form of Bahasa Malaysia being spoken and courtly gestures and manners being employed by the actors. The narrative is not told from a particular perspective or subjectivity, but rather relates the adventures of the hero and/or heroine (1989: 53). One further convention of *bangsawan* performances of the 1920s and 1930s was that actors were free to *ad lib* and improvise, in certain aspects of their performances. This improvisation did not always fit in with what may be presumed to be 'appropriate' by a Western audience. Jamil Sulong relates an instance: 'Siti Tanjung Perak in the role of Hang Tuan's [a very famous character from Malay mythology] mother in *Hang Tuah* used the Java dialect not because the character of Hang Tuah's mother is Javanese but because Siti is a Javanese' (1989: 59). In other areas, however, the same actors were meticulous in their attention to issues of veracity (1989: 59). These latter points are interesting in relation to the discussion in the previous chapter regarding truth and veracity in relation to 'modern' literary forms.

Laila Majnun was, commercially speaking, very successful. The film, as noted, was an Indian movie (based upon a Persian or Arabian folktale) set in Malaya (Baharudin Latif 1989a: 45; Lent 1990: 188; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 62). Jamil Sulong likened the film to *Romeo and Juliet* (1973: 231). It is quite possible that the film is a remake of *Laila Majnu*, filmed in India in 1922 and 1927, with two versions also released in 1931 (both in Hindi). Considering that Tamil and Hindi films were well received by Malay audiences, this factor would certainly have helped make the movie 'play' well. Chisty and Rajhans attempted to transfer their success with *Laila Majnun* into a production company, Malay Art Film Production. However, their

cinematic talents did not extend to business in the same degree, and the company was later sold (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 63). Along with *Laila Majnun*, there were three other films made in this early period of the Malayan film industry: *Booloo* (Clyde Elliot 1937), *Semarang* (unknown director 1937), and *Nelayan*. There is little known about *Nelayan* and *Semarang*, as the lack of production details illustrates. By implication, it could be concluded that they were not commercially successful. Hatta Azad Khan suggests that they were too 'foreign' in style and content to be acceptable to the Malayan audience (1997: 63). However, as Hatta Azad Khan himself notes, the cinema audience at this time was largely Chinese, so the 'foreignness' of these films is a problematic analysis. It is as likely that these films found difficulty in being screened, as the exhibition and distribution aspects of the cinema industry were already showing signs of becoming monopolised (see The Studio Era below, particularly the fates of independent film production companies).

While the success of *Laila Majnun* undoubtedly influenced the creation of an indigenous production industry, one further factor needs to be considered. Namely, the importation of Indonesian films such as *Terang Boelan* ('Full Moon,' Albert Balink 1938), and *Terpaksa Menikah* ('Forced to Marry,' Krueger 1932). *Terang Boelan*, was pretty much a re-hash of the Hollywood movie *The Jungle Princess* (William Thiele 1936), starring Dorothy Lamour. *Terang Boelan* was particularly successful both in Indonesia and Malaya (Salim Said 1991: 26, 30; Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 83). As noted above, the importers of these movies were the Shaw Brothers (Jamil Sulong 1973: 232).

For whichever reason, local film production did kick off. *Daftar Filem Melayu* [Malay Film Catalogue] (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1993) lists 13 films produced in Malaya between 1933 and the Japanese Occupation. *Mutiara* ('Pearl'), *Bermadu* ('Bigamist'), *Hanchor Hati* ('Broken Heart'), *Topeng Shaitan* ('Devil's Mask'), *Ibu Tiri* ('Step-

Mother'), *Terang Bulan di Malaya* ('Moonlight in Malaya'), *Tiga Kekasih* ('Three Darlings'), and *Mata Hantu* ('Ghost's Eye') were early Shaw Brothers' productions between 1938 and 1942.¹¹ These films all apparently had Chinese directors, and were based upon *sandiwara* (Malay theatre) rather than *bangsawan* (Jamil Sulong 1989: 57).¹² *Menantu Derhaka* ('The Rebel Son-in-Law,' B.S. Rajhans 1942) and *Lepas Perang Dunia Kedua* ('After the Second World War'/'The Second World War is Loose,' no production details), were Tan and Wong Film Company productions made during this same period (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1993: 29).¹³

These movies 'were [...] big hits with the local audience, who were thrilled to see their favourite stage stars acting out family melodramas and mythical tales on the screen' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 21). While popular, bearing in mind the uncertainty as to the exact composition of the audience, these films, and more specifically the directors of these films, were not always sensitive to Malay beliefs and customs. One example Siaw-Hui Kueh gives is of a scene in *Putus Harapan* ('Broken Hope,' B.N. Rao 1953). In the closing scene the hero lifts the dead heroine onto a funeral pyre, whereas; 'the act of lifting a corpse in an almost offeratory gesture - not to mention the cremation - was sacrilegious in Islam' (Siaw-Hiu Kueh 1997: 5; see also Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 80-81).

The typical state of operations for Malay-language productions at this time, and up until the middle to late 1950s and early 1960s, was that Chinese were owners and technicians and Indians were directors. Malays were limited to acting and translation work, i.e. translating the scripts and director's demands into Bahasa

¹¹ *Boelan* and *Bulan* both translate as 'moonlight,' Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia are closely related languages, and differences in spelling results from their different colonial histories. *Boelan* is based on Dutch orthography, whereas *Bulan* is based on the English. To further confuse things, Bahasa Malaysia spelling was 'modernised,' therefore *Hanchor* would now be written *Hancor*. Generally, the old spelling has been retained in the sources, occasionally however titles are 'updated.'

¹² I have not been able to ascertain the differences in style and narrative convention between these two art forms, but Jamil Sulong states that the *sandiwara* inspired films were regarded at the time as being more 'modern' (1989: 57).

¹³ Hatta Azad Khan however states that Tan and Wong (an Indonesian film company) made only *one* film in Malaya, namely *Menantu Durhaka* (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 20).

Malaysia, as the Chinese and Indian film people rarely spoke fluent Malay (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 80; Lent 1990: 189). Lent however states that '[i]ndigenously produced movies in Malaya before World War II often employed Indian and Chinese languages' (1990: 189). I am uncertain as to how accurate this assertion is, however it is possible for non-Malay language films to be 'overlooked' in and by Malay-oriented sources. I refer the reader back to the closing remarks of the Introduction.

It was at about just the time that the Malayan cinema industry was developing, though at this stage still fledgling and attempting to establish an audience, that the Japanese occupied Malaya (1942-1945). During this period, there were no feature films made in Malaya. Having confiscated the Shaw Brothers' studio, however, the Japanese did make two propaganda films, *March to Singapore* (aka 'All-Out Attack on Singapore,' Shingajoru Sokogeki 1943) and *Marei No Tora* ('Tiger of Malaya,' Masato Koza 1943),¹⁴ but most films, propaganda or otherwise, were imported from Japan. Further, contrary to developments in Indonesia, where Indonesians gained access to technical training and equipment (Syonan Sinbun 7-9-1943; see also Salim Said 1991: 31-36), there was no opportunity in Malaya for Malays to get involved in the technical/production side of the film industry (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 66). In short, the production side of the Malayan film industry went into a period of hiatus for the course of the Occupation.

The Japanese Occupation

Production was not the only aspect of the industry affected during this period however. The Japanese also controlled the exhibition and distribution aspects of the industry, and the cinema industry underwent interesting developments during this period.¹⁵ Initially the types of films shown at Malayan cinemas were similar to

¹⁴ In various sources, the latter title is given as *Marat No Tora* (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 66; Amir Muhammad 1998a: 25).

¹⁵ Some of the cinemas seem to have been appropriated by the Japanese, while others remained, at least nominally, under the ownership of Malaysians.

those shown during the colonial period, though with some novel introductions, as cinema listings demonstrate:

At the Gekijos
KYO-EI 'Rebecca'
SYOWA 'Honeymoon in Bali'
USHIDO 'Murder One'
INDO 'Dharti Matha' (Hindustani)
FUYO (For Military Only) 'Den Geki Ni Jyu Gi' (Japanese)
YAMATO 'Yee Wan Yee Yui' (Cantonese)
(Syonan Sinbun 14-12-1942).¹⁶

Somewhat strangely, even Mr. Moto films were shown: 'Peter Lorre's brilliant performance as the greatest NIPPON DETECTIVE of his day' (cinema ad, in Syonan Sinbun 3-2-1943). This begs the speculation that someone's tongue was firmly in cheek. Such speculation aside, the early period of the Occupation bore certain traits. There was an initial continuation of pre-Occupation exhibition praxis, namely the screening of predominately American and British films, with some Chinese and Indian films in addition.¹⁷ As will be shown later in this chapter, this was not to last.

[A]ll film exhibition came under the control of the "kaishas," or official Japanese Occupation government monopolies; the movie exhibition monopoly was given to Eiga Haikyu Sha (the Japan Distribution Co.), with its headquarters in Singapore [...] Japanese films were used in the campaign of "Nipponisation" carried out by the Occupation forces (White 1996: n.pag.).

Other significant developments during this period include the introduction of 'military only' cinemas and the screening of propaganda films. Propaganda, and what

¹⁶ Occupation newspapers typically employed the Japanese dating system, for instance 2603 = 1943 AD. I have continued using Christian dating for clarity.

¹⁷ Another example of continuation of praxis is that only the English language films were reviewed in English language newspapers (Syonan Sinbun 19-3-1943).

constitutes propaganda is a subject in its own right, as a western developed and/or determined media is in itself a propaganda tool. In terms of the present discussion, the screening of Japanese films had a propaganda value, the 'Nipponisation' mentioned above. However, the Occupation government also screened propaganda films *per se* (White 1996; see also Lent 1990: 188).

There are several rationales open to explain the military only cinemas noted in the cinema advert quoted above. As most of the films screened at these cinemas were Japanese, dubbing and/or subtitling would be problematic (this point will be returned to below). It may have been perceived that there was a need to make space for some continuity in the midst of wider trauma, or that the military may have desired a 'touch of home.' A more cynical thought however is that the military only cinemas may have been a manifestation of the low regard in which Malaysians, and indeed Southeast Asians in general, were held by their occupiers. However, 'military only' may have included Malay personnel, and it could be that the cinemas were in or near military bases, and were thus for the exclusive use of all military personnel. This is a question which needs to be investigated.

As mentioned above, increasingly the cinemas were used for screening propaganda, such as films on Japanese industry and war documentaries (see for instance Syonan Sinbun 11-1-1943; or the Malai Sinpo 1-8-1943). An example is the 'indisputably true-to-life record' of the war provided by *The Union Jack is Down* (this is possibly *The Day England Fell*, Shigeo Tanaka 1942) as declared in the Syonan Sinbun (31-8-1943). Increasingly, Japanese films were screened, in combination with the aforementioned propaganda documentaries. On the anniversary of the fall of Singapore, there were even free open air screenings of war documentaries (Syonan Sinbun 13/15-2-1943). As the cinema began to be an overt propaganda tool, it probably comes as no surprise that admission prices fell during

the occupation period.¹⁸ A further, and somewhat subtler, form of propaganda involved the manipulation of British colonial censorship policy. As mentioned above, certain films were deemed to show European people (women in particular) in a bad light and were, therefore, either banned or cut. This policy provided the opportunity for the Japanese government to demonstrate how liberal they were in comparison, as cinema advertisements from this period show. '[T]he British banned film ...' (Malai Sinpo 3-8-1943), and from a Fuyo Theatre ad: '2 British BANNED Films at One Screening' (Malai Sinpo 20-8-1943). Ironically, at approximately the same time as the latter of these examples saw the announcement of a rather more wide-sweeping form of censorship.

The end of August 1943 saw the announcement of a ban on 'enemy films' from 1 September (Malai Sinpo 25-8-1943; Syonan Sinbun 8-4-1943). Further, all enemy films were to be surrendered by 15 September 1943. Possibly to fill in some gaps this policy would leave in the scheduling, a special cinema in Singapore - the Ushio Gekizo (formally the Marlborough) was established for the showing of 'cultural' films and newsreels, as well as educational films 'for your own good' (Syonan Sinbun 8-4-1943; see also Lent 1990: 188). Japanese productions were to be 'supplemented by German, Italian and French films as well as Chinese, Malai [Malayan and Indonesian] and Indian pictures' (Syonan Sinbun 20-8-1943).¹⁹ While this policy was adhered to throughout the country, there were some teething problems.

The overall ban on Allied films created some problems for the cinemas. The first of these is that few of the films were translated (either dubbed or subtitled). A

¹⁸ Open air talkies \$.10, open air talkies at an amusement fair \$.05 day and \$.10 night. Cinema prices: two of the cinemas ran at \$.15, \$.35, \$.60, and \$.80; two of the cinemas ran at \$.20, \$.50, \$.60, and \$.80 (Penang Shimbun 15-02-1943).

¹⁹ There is a bit of sophistry at work here, as although India remained under British control, and was an Allied country, the Japanese were funding a pro-Japanese insurgency movement - the Bose Army. This allowed the Japanese to refer to India as an ally, particularly as they controlled the news media in Malaya.

novel solution to this problem was initiated. Japanese-language films were 'live dubbed' by four people behind the cinema screen to give a running version of the dialogue. Later, Japanese films were subtitled in English (Malai Sinpo 2-9-1943; Syonan Sinbun 20-8-1943). Further, slide shows in Chinese, Malay and English provided synopses. There also appeared to be some problems getting enough Axis-produced films to replace the Allied movies, as the number of shows was cut back. 'In the rural sections, there will be only one show daily and two on Sundays' (Syonan Sinbun 20-8-1943). Not only were the number of shows cut back, but initially at least, some cinemas were no longer showing feature films. By 14 September 1943, two of the six advertised cinemas in Kuala Lumpur were running an entire programme of shorts (identical listings), and one replaced movies with variety shows (Malai Sinpo 14-9-1943).²⁰ While films from Germany and other Axis countries were supposed to replace American and British films, in reality most of the films shown appeared to be either Japanese or Indian, with some Chinese and the occasional Indonesian or pre-war Malayan film. Indeed, little over a month after the ban, half of the advertised films in Kuala Lumpur were Japanese and half were Indian language films, both Tamil and Hindi (Malai Sinpo 6-10-1943).

There is reason to speculate that the aforementioned ban was initiated at very short notice (*cf.* White 1996). The problems with translation and lack of films to replace Allied films suggest that the ban was deployed, or at least announced, precipitously. Be that as it may, if the newspapers of the day are to be believed, cinemas during the Occupation, if not the films themselves, were highly successful.

Nippon Films Prove Very Popular in Syonan [Singapore]

Malai-Hawaii Oki Kaisen [...] proved to the most
popular and drew a crowd of 45,330 people. Over 6,475

²⁰ By September 21 this situation had been rectified and all of the cinemas listed were including feature films in their programmes (Malai Sinpo 21-9-1943).

theatregoers attended the screenings each day. [...] Eikoku Kuzuru No Hi (The Union Jack Is Down) was seen by 40,160 persons-an average of 5,020 people per day. [...] Comparing the box office records of American and British productions with those of Nippon films, it is interesting to note that "When The Daltons Rode" [George Marshall 1940] drew a crowd of 25,501 theatregoers, while 24,702 people paid to see "Blood and Sand" [Rouben Mamoulian 1941] (Syonan Sinbun 14-9-1943; on the popularity of Japanese films in Malaya during the war see also White 1996).²¹

Unfortunately, these same sources do not provide any information on how successful other films shown at this time were, such as productions in Chinese or Indian languages.

From this point until the end of the War, a relative period of continuity seems to have ensued, at least in terms of the cinema industry. The cinema demographics mentioned above appear to have become the status quo for the remainder of the Occupation. There were apparently no major incidents involving or affecting the cinema industry for the next couple of years, though this may have had as much to do with what was or was not being reported at this time. However, neither was there any mention in newspapers immediately after the Occupation of any significant development during this period. As such, the next phase in the history of Malaysian cinema was the end of the Second World War and the return of the British colonial government.

Immediately after the return of Malaya to British control, there was little

²¹ *Malai-Hawaii Oki Kaisen* is likely *Hawai-Marei oki Kaisen* ('The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya,' Kajiro Yamamoto c.1942), as noted *The Union Jack is Down* is likely *The Day England Fell*.

change in terms of the running of the cinemas. Initially, the Japanese names for the cinemas were retained, and Japanese films continued to be screened (see for instance *Malay Mail* 7-9-1945). This situation was not to last much longer though, and by the middle of September 1945 cinemas in Malaya were closed (*Malay Mail* 13-9-1945, 16-9-1945). The suggested reason for the closure is expressed quite graphically in the following cinema ad: 'The ODEON is now RID of Vermins. You can now enjoy your pictures in comfort. Watch for opening dates' (*Malay Mail* 10-9-1945). 'Vermin' was likely being employed as much figuratively as literally:

Picture Houses to Reopen Soon

It was over three years ago that the public of Malaya saw a picture worth seeing. Since then they have had foisted upon them a variety of Japanese and Chinese films only a few of which were entertaining. The majority of these pictures were badly produced propaganda. [...] The cinemas in town are now undergoing cleaning and repair and the managements hope to reopen before long, as there are many old films and some new documentary pictures available in Singapore (*Malay Mail* 25-9-1945).

Indeed the Bukit Bintang Park (Kuala Lumpur) theatres and cinemas had already reopened (*Malay Mail* 19-9-1945). However, the more mainstream cinemas only reopened between 27 September and 15 October 1945 (see *Malay Mail* between these dates). While these dates saw the reintroduction of American and British films to Malaya, the films themselves remained pre-war fare. Indeed, it was mid-1946 before a post-war film arrived in Malaya (*Malay Tribune* 11-6-1946).²² Most of the English-language movies, however, were still from 1942-1943 (*Malay Tribune* 17-9-

²² Post-war American films began to arrive in Indonesia far sooner than Malaya (*Malay Tribune* 5-9-1946).

1946). Prices also seemed to remain much the same, with perhaps slight increases.²³

While the films (and to some extent the cinema prices) remained the same as in the pre-war period, some of the cinema owners took the opportunity to improve the cinemas themselves. The improvements in cinematic technology, at least in terms of exhibition, were prominently discussed as they became implemented (see for instance *Malay Tribune* 7-6-1946). Further, photos of Hollywood cinema stars began to reappear in the newspapers at about this same time (*Malay Tribune* 10-6-46). The films shown were predominantly British and American, with few Chinese or Indian films advertised, and English language newspaper reviews seemed to be only of Anglo-American films. In short, the immediate post-war period for the cinema industry was much the same as the war period with cinema as cheap entertainment/appeasement, a focus on the propaganda value of the cinema, an ignoring of the indigenous cinema industry and its needs, and the promotion of colonial cinemas and technologies, merely with different players.

A further development during this period is the introduction of a colonial film production unit. The unit, referred to as the Crown Film Unit, was likely 'an outgrowth of the Army Film and Photography Unit which came to Malaya with Mountbatten's forces after the Japanese surrender' (Lent 1990: 189). The main role of the unit was to produce anti-Communist propaganda films, evolving over time to become the provider of 'government service information programmes' (Lent 1990: 189; see also Grenfell 1979: 172). As mentioned in the Introduction, I have not been able as yet to ascertain whether Malays, or Malayan peoples in general, were employed by the Unit, or if the Unit in any other manner helped to further Malay participation in the film industry.

The period under discussion, that of the Japanese Occupation and the immediate post-war era, is largely one of hiatus and lack. As noted above, the

²³ Capital prices: \$.20; \$.40; and \$.80, Madras prices: \$.30; \$.60; and \$1 (*Malay Mail* 27-9-1945).

Japanese, contra to their practice and policy in the Netherlands East Indies, did not use/allow their period of rule in Malaya to contribute to the development of Malay cinematic skills and input to the industry (including that of non-fiction cinema). This is not to say that this period was not of any interest whatsoever. The immediate post-war period saw the introduction of documentary film production, as opposed to the production of propaganda films *per se*. Further, the popularity of cinema, as recreational activity, appeared to have increased during this period, and that this popularity extended across classes. As such, it is not surprising that the effort was made to improve the cinemas themselves. As we shall see in the next section, cinemas built in the post-war period were larger, incorporated more technological improvements, and appeared to become even more popular.

For much of the time under discussion (from 1942 until 1946/1947), the cinematic 'diet' did not change from the pre-war period. For instance, the positions of Hindi and Tamil cinemas in Malaya were confirmed, if not enhanced, under Japanese rule. There was, however, also an introduction of new cinematic traditions to Malayan audiences. While the availability and influence of German and Vichy French films seems to have been limited, Japanese films appear to have enjoyed a wide popularity. Incidentally, this continued after the war (Singapore Tiger Standard 5-4-1957; Times of Malaya & Straits Echo 12-8-64). Indeed, there was even a Malaysian film shot in Japan, as is noted in the following cinema ad:

Capital (Shaw Bros.) Penang and Butterworth

Melanchong ka-Tokyo (Holiday in Tokyo)

The First Malay Picture Shot On Location In The Far East

In Tantalizing Eastmancolor.

Shaw's MFP Starring: Saadiah; Aziz Jaafar; S. Kadarisman;

Asao Matsumoto; Motoko Furukawa.

English and Chinese subtitles (Times of Malaya & Straits
Echo 1-7-1964).

The aesthetics of Japanese cinema also appear to have been influential in terms of post-war filmmakers, particularly filmmakers of the 1950s and 1960s (White 1996). The influence of Japanese cinema upon P. Ramlee is often the focus of discussion in this regard (Baharudin Latif 1989c: 64; White 1996; Amir Muhammad 1998a: 26). However, the films of Hussian Hanif are also analysed in terms of a Japanese influence (Mansor Puteh 1994a: 63; 1994b: 31).

One final point is that the overtness of Malay nationalist discourse heightened during the immediate post-war period. While this may appear to have little to do with Malay cinema, the increased vocality of Malay nationalists is attributed, at least partially, with procuring a shift in control of cinema production to Malays in the 1950s (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 87).

The Studio Era²⁴

In the end, it was not long after the end of the war that cinema production resumed in Malaya. It may come as no surprise that it was once again Chisty and Rajhans that were first off the mark (Hatta Azad Khan 1997:67). *Seruan Merdeka* ('Cry Freedom' 1946) was however also the last film that the two made together. Perhaps because of the nationalistic focus of the film it was not a success, either in Malaya or in Indonesia where the film was also released. Aside from the content, it was a problem for any small production company to get its films screened in Malaya, as the cinemas were under the control of the two big players - the Shaws and Cathay-Keris (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 67; Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: 156; see also Jamil

²⁴ Also referred to as the 'Golden Era.' Certainly when speaking to non-industry Malaysians (as well as, it should be said, by many industry people) about Malay cinema, almost uniformly they expected me to be interested in the films of the 1950s and 1960s, and particularly the films of P. Ramlee. The films of this period are frequently shown on the television, and the films of P. Ramlee in particular, are readily available to purchase.

Sulong 1990: 14). Either way, Chisty and Rajhans' production company folded and Chisty returned to India. Rajhans went on to work for both the Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris (the amalgamation of Cathay Productions - distribution and exhibition, and Keris Productions - formerly Rimau Productions), and directed 25 further films (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1993: 30-33)

It is to the Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris (and from 1961 - Merdeka Film Productions) that the focus of the discussion must shift. While up until the 1950s there were other film production companies, the sheer number of films the Shaws and Cathay-Keris produced, their production practices, and their control over all three aspects of the film industry ensured their monopolisation of local film production. While both of these companies initiated production prior to the war, it is during the post-war period in which they flourished, and indeed 'saw off' their competitors.

After the Second World War, the Shaw Brothers established Malay Film Productions Ltd. (hereafter MFP) as the production wing of their cinema business. As stated, as MFP films were guaranteed exhibition, one danger facing smaller companies was not an issue. Cathay-Keris shared this advantage and both companies exploited the benefits. Both studios also employed many of the same practices developed by American production companies during Hollywood's 'studio era,' particularly the exclusive contracting of artists, technicians, and directors.

Not only that, their welfare was also taken care of by the companies. Artistes were given quarters to stay in with their families. In the case of MFP, the housing area for the artistes was specifically planned to be within walking distance of the studios so as to make sure they always reached the studio for shooting at the specific hour (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 77;

see also Baharudin Latif 1989a: 46-47).

This is not to suggest that the practices of the two studios were identical. MFP appears to have constrained their employees more than was the case at Cathay-Keris (not just in terms of living arrangements).

While MFP's films excelled in their artistic studio lighting and gigantic set pieces [the directors were actively discouraged from location shooting], Cathay-Keris spent more money bringing their productions unit outside the studio and thereby giving their pictures a different trade mark altogether (Hatta Azad Khan 1997:76-77).²⁵

The film *Seniman Bujang Lapuk* ('The Nitwit Movie Stars,' P. Ramlee 1961) was entirely filmed in and around the MFP studio and accommodation compound, providing an intriguing historical document regarding MFP's practices.

One of the most distinctive elements of the studios' praxis was their use of Indian directors. Aside from Rajhans, MFP 'imported' several directors from India, including L. Krishnan, S. Ramanathan, B. N. Rao, K. R. Sastry, K. M. Baskaran,²⁶ and V. Grimaji. Several of these directors were of uncertain cinematographic experience (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 79-81).²⁷ In addition, all but K. R. Sastry and V. Grimaji were later 'poached' by Cathay-Keris. I have already mentioned the 'new language for Indian cinema' thesis regarding these directors, but it is worth mentioning that L. Krishnan and K. M. Baskaran were both raised in Malaya.

It is interesting to speculate on why Chinese and Chinese-Malayan film producers would bring in Indian directors to make Malay language, and Malay

²⁵ In fairness to MFP, Malay at the time was engaged in a war, the Communist insurgency referred to as the Emergency, and safety would be an issue.

²⁶ *Daftar Filem Melayu* lists this director as K. M. Basker (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1992; see also Mansor Puteh 1994b: 33).

²⁷ L. Krishnan is reputed to have received all of his movie knowledge in India through being employed as a chauffeur (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 81).

oriented, films. A combination of factors probably contributed to this development. As to the audience in general, Lent states that '[b]y the 1950s, it was estimated that the per capita rate of film attendance in Malaya was probably the highest in the world' (Lent 1990: 187). Malay cinema audiences had already shown an appreciation of Tamil, Hindi, and Indonesian films. This could be read as suggesting that a combination of these elements could also be successfully produced in Malaya. Indian directors were apparently a cheap source of creative labour, and had relatively similar cultural backgrounds (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 78-83). Siaw-Hui Kueh speculates that an explanation for the early popularity of Malay language films, and therefore also an explanation of why Chinese producers would make Malay language films, is that the Malay language was the effective lingua franca amongst Malaysians (1997: 7; see also the Malay Tribune FMS 1-10-1935). This point is quite valid, and is interesting in regard to wider historical developments concerning Bahasa Malaysia and its role as the national language. Furthermore, there was also a lack of technically trained Malays. The earliest record of a Malay being employed as a cameraman was in 1953, by MFP. For the purpose of this thesis, the important issue is that Indians were, almost exclusively, the directors of Malay language films until the late-1950s. As such, the aesthetics of the films were similar, if not identical to, those of contemporary Indian films, sharing many of the conventions employed in Indian cinema.²⁸ Even when Malay directors had become the norm, the style and conventions of Indian cinema were retained (Mansor Puteh 1994a: 62; 1994b: 30-32).

MFP also brought in several Filipino directors in the mid-1950s (Jamil Sulong 1973: 235). These directors had mixed fortunes. Eddy Infante and Ramon Estella achieved some success in Malaya, whereas Rolf Bayer and Lamberto Avellana only

²⁸ Many of these conventions were readily exploited due to their presence also in *bangsawan*, particularly the ubiquitous song-and-dance routines, where many of the pre and post-war actors and actresses had come from (Amir Muhammad 1998b: 50; Baharudin Latif 1989a; Jamil Sulong 1989).

made a single film apiece. Avellana in particular had reason to regret his time in Malaya, as his film *Sergeant Hassan* (1958) was re-edited after his departure, and incongruous song routines were added. Ironically, it was Bayer and Avellana who were to acquire international recognition (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 83-85). Some Indonesian directors also plied their trade in Malaya (Mansor Puteh 1994a: 62), and there were various Malayan-Indonesian co-productions of mixed fortunes (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 69-72).

As most commentators point out however, regardless of their provenance and even their dubious morality, these films were very successful. Indeed, from a purely financial point of view, the period 1950-1955 could lay claim to the title of Malay cinema's 'Golden Era.' The cinema stars of the 1950s and 1960s became household names, '[i]dolatriy of the leading personalities reached a fever-pitch intensity. Fans modelled their sartorial and tonsorial styles after their favourites' (Baharudin Latif 1989a: 46). Further, many would have been able to see their stars in person, as actors, usually the women, from the movies playing would also appear on stage (Straits Echo 8-8-1954; Singapore Tiger Standard 12-5-1957). The films of this era also reversed the previous *status quo*, and Malayan films were exported to Indonesia, indeed so much so that the Indonesian government took steps to stem the flow (Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 84; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 89-93). Many of the film stars of this era remain famous to this day, including the cinema star, as well as one of the earliest and most successful Malay directors, P. Ramlee.²⁹

The advent of Malay directors took some time to come about. The first film directed by a Malay, at least for a major studio, was probably *Permata di*

Perlimbahan ('Jewel in the Slum') by Mahadi Mohd. Said for MFP in 1952.³⁰ 'The

²⁹ Arguably, this era not only influenced the latter (Malay) studio era, but remains the, conscious or otherwise, template by which Malay films are created and the popular standard by which they are judged.

³⁰ As we have already seen, there are numerous films where the production details are unavailable and/or questionable, and therefore there may indeed have been a film or films directed by a Malay previous to this.

film was not, however, a success at the box-office and the management [at MFP] was not pleased with the way he had handled the production' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 87). One reason suggested for the film's failure, and for MFP's displeasure, was that Mahadi had attempted to de-Indianise the film. One aspect of this was not casting P. Ramlee, the Malay epitome of an Indian film star as the lead (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 87). Be that as it may, it was another three years before another Malay was trusted with directorial duties at a major studio. As ubiquitous as the names of Chisty and Rajhans had become for the early days of the industry, the name P. Ramlee is to become for this period of the industry's history. It was in fact P. Ramlee who was to be the next Malay given directorial control by MFP. The film was *Penarik Becha* ('The Trishaw Peddler' 1955). The film itself is an emotionally powerful, though uneven, critique of the values and mores of the rich, as contrasted to the nobility-in-poverty of P. Ramlee's eponymous hero. The 'hook' was a tale of forbidden love between the trishaw driver and the rich young woman that he works for.

Penarik Becha was a box office hit. It was hailed by film reviewers as the best Malay film of 1955. Readers of *Utusan Filem dan Sport* voted the film Best Picture in preference to *Kasih Menumpang* by the established director L. Krishnan [... And] Ramlee's directorial debut was the source of great pride to the Malays (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 88).

There is some disagreement as to the originality of the screenplay for *Penarik Becha*, and though it is more likely that the movie was indeed based on an Indian film, this very point nevertheless demonstrates the iconic status P. Ramlee retains amongst Malaysians (see Mansor Puteh 1994b: *passim*). However, the film was very successful commercially and arguably became the springboard for Malay

participation in the cinema industry outwith acting and 'gophering.' Gradually, Indian and Filipino directors were replaced by Malay and Indian-Malayan directors (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1993: *passim*; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 89). However, '[a]ll the Malay directors appointed by the management of both studios worked hand-in-hand with the remaining Indian directors' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 89), and Mansor Puteh suggests that some directors were directors in name only (1994b: 32). Certainly there is some question as to how much of a change the films made during this period exhibited compared to those made by expatriate Indian directors (*cf.* Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 93). Aside from a continuation of themes, such as that of the mytho-historical drama (*purba* or period films), an interesting example relates to the point raised previously regarding the 'dubious morality' of some earlier films. The use of 'sex' to sell movies was very much continued by Malay directors (Amir Muhammad 1998b: *passim*).

While not questioning that the specifics of that exploitation may have changed, the erotic element within cinema remained. One industry informant related that dressing women in a *sarong* was one way that 'sex' could be 'slipped past' the censors.³¹ *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* ('White Onion Red Onion,' S. Roomai Nor 1959) was an adaptation of a Malay fairytale and popular *bangsawan* production. *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* tells the Cinderella-esque story of a young woman's trials and tribulations in her search for true love, hampered in various ways by her evil step-mother and step-sister (Rahmah Hj. Bujang 1989: 54-55; Siaw-Hui Kueh 1997: 31-33). The heroine (played by Latifah Omar) spends much of the early part of the film dressed in a *sarong* tied under her arms [*kemban*]. When the film was shown on television in Malaysia (1998), her shoulders were digitised/pixelated out of focus. This point may simply illustrate a more permissive censorship in the past,

³¹ A *sarong* is a long lightweight 'tube' of decorated material worn as clothing by both men and women.

and a correspondingly more restrictive censorship ethos at present. It would appear, however, that some viewers found this type of titillation objectionable then as well (Straits Echo 10-8-1954). Certainly comparing films made during the 1950s and 1960s with those made more recently would suggest that the Islamic discourse of the 1970s has shifted the moral 'goal-posts.' While this is not to suggest that 'sex' has disappeared (see Amir Muhammad 1998b), but that its depiction has become even more allusive. Conversely, this point may point us towards a discussion of the strategic use of morality as an ideological tool. This latter issue will be discussed at other junctures however. With this proviso in mind, it should be pointed out that these same films remain popular today, without attracting the controversy that some of them apparently did at the time. Likewise, more recent films that 'tread the line' (such as the 1998 film *Panas* ['Hot'], directed by Nurhalim Ismail) are more likely to draw criticism than these earlier films. In other words, it is not merely the case that there has been a rhetorical/ideological re-positioning of increased morality in contemporary society. Various factors such as nostalgia, and 'presentism' (faulting elements of the past by uncritically employing the standards of the present) will impact upon perceptions of acceptability (cf. Siaw-Hui Kueh 1997; Hatta Azad Khan 1997). One informant, when asked if the representation in *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* was how women used to dress, became slightly embarrassed and stated "maybe a long time ago." One reading of this statement is that *kemban* is not a proper way to dress, but that it was somehow acceptable or expected, at least in a film of that era. Amir Muhammad reminisces about the old films;

[t]here's an almost pagan glamour to the *purba* (period) movies. My polymorphously perverse imagination began by watching these shirtless men and *kemban* women cavorting around with nary a thought for the *khalwat* [lit. close

proximity - a man and woman being found together in suspicious circumstances] police (Amir Muhammad 1998b: 51).

Up until 1956, MFP's films, in particular, found a ready market in Indonesia, which was to be the only real overseas market wherein Malay films have found success.³² Indeed, it took the Indonesian government's restrictions to end these 'golden years.' In the 1970s, the situation was once again to reverse. The Indonesian market aside, the Malay cinema was also successful at home and in British Borneo (what was to become the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, and the nation of Brunei). While in the 1960s the international market disappeared (or in the case of most of British Borneo, was incorporated), the home market remained strong.³³ It should be noted, though, that the government took steps to ensure this:

[Loke Wan Tho, head of the Cathay Organization, stated that] with South-East Asian countries rapidly developing their own film industries, it was natural that these countries, including Malaya, would certainly try to make their films sell first. [President of the Kinematograph Renters' Society Ltd. of Malaya, Mr. V.S. Padbidri] said the Federal Government had already levied a special import tax on all imported shows. Another film company spokesman said: "With advanced campaign methods and better production techniques, locally-made films should get first billing, instead of imported films" (Singapore Tiger Standard 15-6-57).

³² Cathay-Keris had attempted to break into the Chinese-speaking markets of Hong Kong and Taiwan (with *Pontianak* [Vampire], B. N. Rao 1958) and the Middle East (*Hang Jebat*, Hussain Hanif 1961), but neither attempt was successful (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 92).

³³ As an example; 'Shaw Brothers will open a new two-storey cinema (The Rex) at Bagan Luar Road here at the end of the month. Only first-run English, American, Chinese, Malay and Indian pictures will be screened on a wide Cinemascope screen. The hall has seating capacity for 900 persons' (Singapore Tiger Standard 4-4-57; see also Straits Echo 26-9-1954).

As the following list illustrates, there was no shortage of cinemas at the time: Kluang - 1; Malacca - 3; Tampin - 1; Kuala Lumpur - 10; Klang - 1; Port Sweetenham - 2; Ipoh - 6; Taiping - 4; Telok Anson - 2; Kampar - 3; Parit Buntar - 1; Alor Star - 4; Sungei Patani - 2; Kulim - 1; Kangar - 1; Butterworth - 2; Penang - 14; Singapore - 15/16 (taken from the Singapore Tiger Standard 6-4-1957). Further, the films of this era could arguably be regarded as the first 'real' Malay films (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 92-93), though the producers remained mainly Chinese or Chinese-Malaysians. This period was also the most adventurous, until recently, in terms of the types of films tackled. As an instance, there were the Shaw Brothers' *Jefri Zain* films. These Hong Kong produced films were pseudo-James Bond thrillers, complete with suave secret agent (played by Jins Shamsuddin) and would-be world conquering villains (Jamil Sulong 1973: 238-39). Aside from all else, the series' claim to fame lay in the rumours that the film would include a kissing scene (something which is still officially not allowed), which created such controversy that the matter was raised in the Malaysian parliament (Amir Muhammad 1998b: 51).

Hatta Azad Khan opines that the Malay directed films of this era were 'coming more down to earth. Problems and characters in those films were closer to the reality of the period and could easily be identified with by the audience' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 92). Others are not quite so convinced, and suggest that these films were entertainment-oriented and/or addressed the Singaporean situation rather than that of Malaysia proper. This is not to suggest that there were no 'serious' filmmakers (see for instance Mansor Puteh 1994a and 1994b), but that any discussion of this period should be wary of hagiographic tendencies, such as those that sometimes surround P. Ramlee (Mansor Puteh 1994b: 32). For the most part the films of the 'Golden Era' were perceived, if not intended, as entertainment.³⁴

Apart from Malay directors, the early 1960s also saw the Malay film

³⁴ As for instance the discussion in Siaw-Hui Kueh on 'happy endings' in Malay cinema (1997: 7).

industry itself expanding out of its Singapore home. As we shall see, increasingly Singapore was less amenable to the big studios (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 101). The Shaws' initially shifted towards their other base, in Hong Kong. The *Jefri Zain* films for instance were produced in Hong Kong. Cathay-Keris on the other hand looked north. The union between Singapore and, at that time, the rest of Malaysia was problematic from the start, and the eventual dissolution may have been obvious to some. Whether or not political uncertainty was the case, the result was that Merdeka Film Productions (hereafter Merdeka [Independence]) was created in Kuala Lumpur (Lent 1990: 189; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 102).³⁵ Several of Cathay-Keris' top directors, including L. Krishnan and Salleh Ghani moved to Kuala Lumpur, and other directors from both Cathay-Keris and MFP were drafted in as 'guest directors' (in other words, the exclusive contract system ended). The Shaw Brothers, perhaps feeling that there was still money in Malay films, invested in Merdeka, and by 1964 had become the sole owners (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 103). By this time, MFP was in serious trouble in Singapore (see below). The Shaws' brought their 'golden boy,' P. Ramlee, to Merdeka, signaling their intentions vis-à-vis the future of MFP studios in Singapore.

The output of the Merdeka studio is in many ways quite remarkable considering the production facilities and staff available (Lent 1990: 190-91). The studio was not a film studio in the real sense of the term;

It was more like a warehouse where old equipment was kept
[...] Ramlee had to work extra hard not only as a director but
also as a composer, actor, singer, scriptwriter, cameraman,
and film editor (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 103).

What is more;

Even though the studio produced films in wide scope which

³⁵ The precise details behind the founding of Merdeka are confused, and I have heard three different interpretations, Lent and Hatta Azad Khan provide two.

they termed Merdekascope, the camera was equipped with only one 50mm anamorphic lens. There were no 75mm or 100mm lenses and there were no big close-up shots in films produced by the studio. [...] It was only after the closing of the studio in Singapore that a complete set of lenses was brought to the Merdeka studio (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 110; see also Lent 1990: 191).

Further, actors and actresses were paid very poorly, and consequently the quality of performances declined dramatically (Lent 1990: 191; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 108-09). As it was only the desperate or mediocre that took roles in Merdeka films, therefore the same actors and actresses were employed repeatedly, with a small core appearing in all of the films produced at Merdeka. These lacks are glaring clear when viewing films such as *Anak Bapak* ('Daddy's Boy,' P. Ramlee 1966). After 1967, many of MFP's directors moved to Merdeka, and for a time (1968-1971) output, at least, improved.

The 'glory days' could not and did not last. Various factors contributed to the downturn in fortunes for the Malay film industry: new entertainment media such as television; growing labour problems; loss of the Indonesian market; loss of the non-Malay market; Singapore becoming independent in 1965; government apathy, and the growth of independent film production companies (see The *Bumiputra* Era, below). Perhaps the initial sign of trouble in paradise was the Indonesian government's move to restrict the importation of Malay films. Rather than seek new markets, and by implication, adapt Malay films for a wider audience, the studios apparently chose to focus on a 'captive' market. The thematic focus of many of the films produced during the studio era bear this out, with a plethora of mytho-

historical dramas and song-and-dance love stories and comedies.³⁶

The very production practices that had made the studios successful began to work against them, particularly in the case of MFP. MFP's staff began to agitate for better wages, working and living conditions (the army barrack-style houses seen in *Seniman Bujang Lapok* were the actual staff housing), forming a union in the mid-1950s and going on strike in 1957 (Singapore Tiger Standard 4-4-57). A work-to-rule campaign was conducted between 1964 and 1965, which slowed production and hence drove up production costs (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 95-97). With its other interests in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur to fall back upon, it should come as no surprise that the Shaws would not hesitate to close MFP, which they did temporarily in 1965, and then for the final time in 1967. The temporary closure took place while Singapore was still part of Malaysia, and its closure was a source of concern to the ruling Alliance government. The Prime Minister at the time, Tunku Abdul Rahman, became personally involved with the studio in producing a full-colour costume epic - *Raja Bersiong* ('King with Fangs,' Jamil Sulong/Yamazaki 1967). The film, and more importantly the Prime Minister's involvement with the studio, was seen as ensuring the future of the MFP studio. This was a false hope (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 95-96). The film itself 'was the most expensive production undertaken by MFP and also the most extravagant production ever done during the studio era' (1997: 96). The closing of the MFP's Jalan Ampas studio in Singapore, and the final days of the studio in general, was unpleasant, with threats and arrests taking place (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 96, 98-99).

Cathay-Keris faced a somewhat different fate. As we saw, the Shaws bought Merdeka, and therefore Cathay-Keris was once again limited (in production terms) to

³⁶ I do not intend to dismiss the attempts by directors, such as Hussain Hanif and Jamil Sulong, to produce quality films, which happen to fall within these genres, nor those filmmakers who experimented within different genres. Rather, I want to suggest that, more typically, an 'easy option' was taken, one that was to limit Malay films and filmmakers in the future.

Singapore.³⁷ Although, with the studio's more flexible practices, Cathay-Keris did not face the same labour problems, the management perhaps thought the writing was on the wall (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 100). Be that as it may, the reasons for the Cathay-Keris studio's closing are generally more strictly economic in nature, than was the case with MFP. Cathay-Keris was also more directly affected by the separation of Singapore and Malaysia. With independence, the Singaporean film industry became a Singaporean (as opposed to Malaysian) government problem, i.e. to fund or legislate. However, as the Malay population in Singapore was only around 14%, the Singaporean government did not feel that it was their problem either. Further, production costs had risen, and with a downturn for rubber and tin prices (the export commodities that the Malaysian economy, and therefore Malay pocketbooks, rested upon) in the late 1960s, there was likewise a downturn in cinema attendance. Competition from imported films remained strong, and on top of all this, television broadcasting began in Malaysia in 1963 (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 100-01). In 1973, far less traumatically than MFP, Cathay-Keris also closed its doors.

Merdeka faced similar problems to those of Cathay-Keris, however the studio also encountered problems due to their production practices, as was the case with MFP.³⁸ While Merdeka may have achieved quantity (29 films between 1964 and 1967), for the most part the Kuala Lumpur studio never achieved quality. Further, a combination of poor box office returns and the Shaws' production practices resulted in the studio eventually taking a regressive step. The success of

³⁷ It is unclear as to why Ho Ah Loke and H. M. Shah would let themselves be bought out, but the death of Loke Wan Tho, the co-founder of Cathay-Keris, may have had some influence (Times of Malaya & Straits Echo 4-7-64).

³⁸ Ironically, for the most part Merdeka's management appeared to have learned a lesson from their MFP days and granted their directors artistic freedom (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 109). This was not to last, and in an article on FINAS's 'Flashback' programme (where veteran cinema artists related their experiences), Seri Bintang relates that one famous actor 'seemed to have no personal experiences to share (repeatedly answering questions with I was paid a salary to act, so I just did what I was told.)' (The Star 18-12-1998).

Indonesian and Hong Kong films (on which many of the Indonesian films were apparently based) in the 1970s, compared to the black and white output of Merdeka, persuaded the Shaws to adapt Hong Kong movies for Malay audiences (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 112-13). Production staff and technicians from Hong Kong were brought in by Merdeka's management, and in effect took control of filming. Directors such as Jamil Sulong found themselves in the position of once again acting as translators, though at least this time their names were on the films as directors.³⁹ This time however, Malay directors were not willing to go along with the new/old status quo.

What Merdeka's management (or, to an extent, Cathay-Keris' management) had apparently failed to apprehend was that the needs of the industry had changed, but the films and the attitudes had not. In this respect, it is almost symbolic that P. Ramlee left this world in 1973, and in many ways, his passing marks the end of the 'old days' for the movie industry. While most directors (such as Jamil Sulong and Othman Hafsham) made one or two of the aforementioned 'Malay-ised' Hong Kong films, they and other directors, such as Jins Shamsuddin, demanded the right to work from their own scripts (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 112-13). The Malay directors refusal to work with scripts based on Hong Kong films spelled the end for Merdeka. A couple of years after *Adik Manja* ('Spoiled Child,' Othman Hafsham 1980) was released the studio was sold to the newly created National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 114).

While both the Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris continued to distribute and exhibit films, with the closure of Merdeka Film Productions in 1980 (regular production had stopped in 1975) the studio era was over.⁴⁰

³⁹ While initially popular, the audience for these films also diminished. Considering the prevailing nationalist discourse of the time (1970s), Hatta's suggestion that the failure of this genre was due to the fact that the Malay press and literati were 'very vocal about the Chinese elements depicted in both of these films' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 113) seems pertinent.

⁴⁰ To add insult to injury, the government passed legislation to the effect that the Shaws and Cathay-Keris had to dispose of 30% of their holdings (Lent 1990: 197).

The Bumiputra Era

As we have seen above, by the 1970s, the major studios were either closed or in serious trouble. 'However, in 1972, there were signs of a revival' (Baharudin Latif 1989b: 50). This was the year that a group of cinema artists established their own film production company - Sari Artis (Baharudin Latif 1989b; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 123).⁴¹ While it was not until 1976 that the company produced their first film (*Malaysia Five*, co-produced with Javer Productions of the Philippines - directed by J. Aristorenas), they paved the way for other artist-organised production companies (such as PERFIMA, also established in 1972, by P. Ramlee, Jins Shamsuddin, H. M. Shah, and Jaafar Abdullah). Another *bumiputra* film production company beat both Sari Artis and PERFIMA out of the cinematic starting blocks though, namely Sabah Films (Baharudin Latif 1989b: 50; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 124).⁴²

Sabah Films was established by a Sabahan businessman, Deddy M. Borhan. Borhan was an 'ardent fan of Malay films' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 124), as opposed to someone already involved in the cinema industry (as had been the case with all of the companies previously, aside from Chisty). In 1975, Sabah Films produced *Keluarga Si Comat* ('Family of Comat,' Aziz Satar 1975), and while no-one suggests that the film broke any new cinematic ground, it was commercially successful, and very likely acted as the catalyst for the next period in the history of the Malaysian cinema, the *Bumiputra* Era. *Keluarga Si Comat* itself 'was rich in cliches but abundant in jokes' (Baharudin Latif 1989b: 50), 'lacking in imagination and rather incoherent in its plot and characterizations' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 124). However, the film was also widescreen and in colour (Baharudin Latif 1989b: 50). As we saw

⁴¹ This company's name is variously given as Sari Artis (Jamil Sulong *et. al.* 1993), Sari Artist (Baharudin Latif 1989b), and Sari Artiste (Hatta Azad Khan 1997).

⁴² There had been one earlier artist-led endeavour. After the closure of the MFP studio in 1967, several of the artists joined together to form GAFICO. The company produced one film *Ibulah Shorga* ('Heavenly Love of a Mother,' S. Sudarmaji 1968). The film was not successful, as well as apparently being dreadful, and the company folded (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 120). Nevertheless, *Ibulah Shorga* was the first independently produced film since the late 1950s.

previously, one of the advantages that Indonesian and Hong Kong films had was that they were in colour. Finally, a local production could compete with the imports visually. *Keluarga Si Comar* had captured the Malay cinema audience. The next Sabah Films production, *Hapulah Airmata Mu* ('Don't You Cry Anymore,' M. Amin 1976) was also a box-office winner, and;

It would seem that local films could do no wrong now.

Just as suddenly, banks had the money to give to aspiring producers. So did other sources, legitimate and untraditional ones too [...]. Everyone and anyone was into filmmaking. Companies mushroomed like a harvest season gone haywire (Baharudin Latif 1989b: 50-51).

It seems logical to suggest that Borhan paved the way for other non-industry persons to become involved in film production (Hatta Azad Khan 1989: 125), and as the Baharudin quote relates, within the next five to six years the number of Malay owned film production companies increased dramatically. Government policy also had a role to play here, namely in the shape of the New Economic Policy, through which various tax breaks, such as being granted 'pioneer status,' were introduced, and by which Malay businesses were to be 'fast-tracked' (Lent 1990: 191-93). Local film producers were one group that benefited (Mohd. Hamdah Hj. Adnan 1988: 156). Although many, if not most, of these companies managed to produce only a single film, nevertheless, it meant that a large number of locally produced films were hitting the screens every year (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 126-31).

PERFIMA (Perusahaan Filem Malaysia - Malaysian Film Industry) was established as a Malay answer to the Shaws and Cathay-Keris, with the intention that the company would build cinemas throughout Malaysia as well as make films for the local and overseas markets (Lent 1990: 191; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 122). In

other words, PERFIMA was to produce, distribute and exhibit films. For various reasons PERFIMA failed in much of its remit.⁴³ However the company had some success, most notably as importers of Indonesian films. Further, it was through the company that Jins Shamsuddin went overseas to study filmmaking (there were no filmmaking courses in Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s). Upon his return, he became the first overseas-trained Malay film director (and it should be pointed out for future reference, that he became one of the few Malaysian directors to have both 'come up through the ranks' and be trained overseas). Further, the interest and support of the government was harnessed in the creation of FINAS. Nevertheless, it was not until 1976 that PERFIMA produced its first, and basically last, feature film - *Menanti Hari Esok* ('Waiting for Tomorrow,' Jins Shamsuddin 1976).⁴⁴ PERFIMA's triple role also led to the strange situation wherein they were importing films (Indonesian) which were direct, and very successful, competitors for the same market as their own productions (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 122).

While exciting, in terms of the Malay film industry coming of age - 1975 being the last of those dates mentioned in the Prelude, the quality of the films produced during the *Bumiputra* Era was anything but. Certainly, some of the films did very well at the box-office (the PERFIMA and Sabah films in particular, with Indra Films achieving success with the rural Malay market), for the most part, however, the films tended to be derivative and uninspired. Amir Muhammad sums up the situation thus:

Where [filmmakers] could previously draw audiences from
all races and backgrounds, they now took the easy way out
by catering mainly to urban Malay youths. Even the plot

⁴³ P. Ramlee continued working for the Shaws at Merdeka, Ramlee and Shah left PERFIMA and established their own company, and Jins Shamsuddin left in 1980, also to run his own company.

⁴⁴ *Esok Masih Ada* is listed as a PERFIMA/Jins Shamsuddin co-production (Jamil Sulong, *et. al.* 1993)

lines felt routine - there were plenty of tear-jerking melodramas with musical interludes - and most products were designed for transience (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 27).

Unfortunately, this 'catering' was off the mark, for the Malay audience in the 1970s was rural (and to a lesser extent in small towns), though they did get the gender of the audience correct (Grenfell 1979: 151-71).

Many of the Malay language films released in the 1970s and 1980s copied successful overseas and 'Golden Age' Malay films, or were copies of the early *Bumiputra* films such as *Keluarga Si Comat*. As an example, compare the synopses of these contemporary screenings: '*Loang Maut*: a man who is out to take revenge on those responsible for raping and killing his wife. *Death Wish*: a man takes revenge on hoodlums in his area after his wife and daughter are ravaged by them' (Malay Mail 25-1-77). Amir Muhammad affirms this view, although he adds that;

The story-lines, freed from the restrictive studio system, could flirt with more daring subject matter. Jins Shamsuddin's *Esok* movies for example, featured illegitimacy, abortion, [... and] rape. This freedom, coupled with a desire to show how prosperous Malays have been since the NEP, meant that we got to see a lot of one-piece swim-suits and revealing cocktail dresses. Characters could now cavort in their own swimming pools rather than boring old rivers (Amir Muhammad 1998b: 52).⁴⁵

Possibly for reasons hinted at above, revealing cocktail dresses notwithstanding, audiences for Malay language films, aside from one or two exceptions, failed to return to the cinemas in droves. There was a pronounced upturn in attendance for

⁴⁵ The 'conservatism' of the studio era may be partially explained by their being owned by non-Malays. This might have been particularly true during the 1960s and 1970s.

Malay language films in general, and the market share for Malay language films (these figures, however, include Indonesian language films) went from 4% of total cinema attendance in 1970, to 12% in 1975 (Grenfell 1979: 155). That this upturn may have had more to do with the success of Indonesian films is suggested by the fact that many of the *Bumiputra* producers went out of business after a single film. A further issue for Malay filmmakers was the increasing Islamicisation of politics and society during the 1970s and 1980s. The 'one-piece swim-suits and revealing cocktail dresses' Amir Muhammad enthuses about (1998b: 52) were not to last. Grenfell concurs:

In the early 1970s an average of 850 feature films were reviewed each year by the Censorship Board and only about one film in every hundred was banned. But in 1975 an exceptionally high number of 909 films were reviewed and 80 (about 9 per cent) were banned. No significant new directions for film censorship were officially announced to account for this sharp increase in the number of films being banned. A possible explanation is that the 1975 figure reflects an increasingly wide gap between that which is now deemed permissible in cinema (and other media) in industrialized countries, which are the film's main producers, and that which is acceptable to Malaysia's more constant standards in matters of taste and propriety. An alternative possibility is that the Censorship Board is now considering more closely than in early years the deeper implications of some film themes and treatments in relation to Malaysia's national goals (Grenfell 1979: 156).

Official censorship had recently undergone some overhauls however. First among

these changes was the establishment of two bodies, the Film Censorship Board and an Assessment Committee (Lent 1990: 195-96). Members of the Board are appointed by the King, and are comprised of persons of good standing within the community (Lent 1990: 196; Kaur 1993: 89; Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 207). In some ways this is a similar situation to that of the colonial period. Be that as it may, also at this time 'youth, religious, and political groups successfully lobbied for a total ban on [sex] films' (Lent 1990: 196-97). Changing social and political attitudes enforced an increasing conservatism onto Malay films. This was a point not lost on the black market video sellers, nor to the importers of Indonesian films, both of which set about providing films containing significant doses of sex, mysticism and violence (Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 85-87).

As mentioned above, the government showed sympathy, if not outright support, for the film industry. This was, eventually, transformed into an act of parliament creating a body to deal with the cinema industry and, more importantly for those within the industry, look after the interests of the local film producers (Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: 159; Abi 1989: 84-87). Established in 1981, the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS - Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia) was to act as the main regulatory body for the cinema industry (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 130).⁴⁶ Though a large part of FINAS' remit was, and is, to 'promote, nurture and facilitate the development of the film industry in Malaysia' (Abi 1989: 84), its positioning within the Department of Information, and indeed FINAS' own web site suggest that it is first and foremost a quasi-

⁴⁶ The government had become directly involved with the affairs of the film industry prior to this. In 1973, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein Onn, had suggested that there were too many film production companies and that there should be far fewer. In 1975, the government proposed the formation of the National Film Corporation, 'to undertake certain aspects of the film trade' (Lent 1990: 192). In a move to protect themselves, local film producers established the Malaysian Chamber of Film Companies that same year. Further, in 1976, the government passed a law that all non-Malay films, advertisements, etc. were to be subtitled in *Bahasa Malaysia* (1990).

governmental regulatory body.⁴⁷ It may have been due to the aforementioned dual role that the early days of FINAS were not a success, particularly in terms of its duty as 'the film industry's champion' (Abi 1989: 84-85). However, a further limitation was that FINAS was not allowed to have 'any direct commercial role' in the film industry (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 148). Matters were not helped by the depression of 1985. Indeed, as with the 1970s, the 1980s in general were grim days for the industry. Few of the films released showed any profit whatsoever, with a considerable number making huge losses, yet, since 1981, Malay language films were guaranteed distribution by law (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 27). Technically, since 1991, local films are guaranteed a run of seven days, however if audiences are very poor, films may be withdrawn after three or four days. Further, there is no guarantee as to which cinemas the films are shown in. This latter point is of some importance as, until recently, one of the main venues for Malay-language films has been the Federal cinema, in the infamous Chow Kit area of the city.⁴⁸ After 1985, the industry declined even further.

There were some successful films during this period, both commercially and critically successful (or indeed in a couple of cases, both). As Amir Muhammad suggests (1998b: 52), many directors exploited the opportunity to experiment, some pruriently and others diegetically. As an instance, Othman Hafsham's *Mekanik* (1983) remains one of the few instances of an attempt to make a Malaysian rather than a strictly Malay film (Amir Muhammad 1989a: 27), and Rahim Razali won both critical and box-office acclaim with films such as *Tsu-Feh Sofiah* (1985) and *Puteri* ('Princess' 1987). However, the success of relatively low-budget 'youth flicks'

⁴⁷ FINAS is empowered to 'regulate all film production, distribution and exhibition in Malaysia and in relation thereto to provide the necessary licenses.' The body may impose fines and charges, as well as 'examine, investigate, probe, seize, forfeit all seized items, detain, charge and impose compound,' and monitor the importation of foreign films and production of local films (taken from the FINAS home page - <http://www3.jaring.my/finas/>).

⁴⁸ The area is officially and unofficially depicted as a centre for illegal Indonesian immigrants, drugs, and prostitution (particularly transsexual/transvestite prostitution).

such as *Azura* (Deddy Borhan 1984) and *Ali Setan* (Jins Shamsuddin 1985), resulted in an explosion of imitations in the mid to late 1980s.⁴⁹ 'Light-hearted, fast action comedies and teenage romances ruled the day. Producers were dreaming of doing good business and getting seven-figure ticket sales for their films [as had been the case for *Azura* and *Ali Setan*]' (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 136-37). This statement sums up the view, held both within and outwith the film industry, that the 1970s and 1980s were marked by cheap imitations rushed out by people more interested in profits than films with critical merit (for a particularly damning critique of the state of Malay language cinema circa 1987, see Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: 157). It should also be reiterated that Malay language films were still a small portion of the Malaysian cinema diet. As an instance, at the advertised Kuala Lumpur cinemas: 11 English language movies were being screening; 6 Mandarin films; 6 Cantonese films; 3 Hindi films; 2 Indonesian films; 2 Tamil films; and 1 Malay film (Malay Mail 5-1-1977).

It may seem strange that the government did not take a more 'hands-on' approach to the film industry, employing the media as a nation-building/propaganda tool, as was the case in the Philippines and Indonesia (Joel David 1995 and Salim Said 1991, respectively). Indeed, Grenfell expresses the opinion that 'up to 1975, cinema could be described as the "free-est" of Malaysia's free enterprise media system' (1979: 151). Generally, the censorship policy in Malaysia has been proscriptive (must not show), rather than prescriptive (must show), which is to say censoring out rather than legislating what was to go in to films. It may have been a case of prioritisation, that the government felt its support of a film industry working almost exclusively in the national language was sufficient to get its nation-building messages across without their having to expressly force the issue. On the other hand,

⁴⁹ The average budget for feature films during the mid 1980s was M\$250,000 (roughly US\$100,000 at the time - Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: 157).

the government may have felt that it had a more efficient medium by which to transmit its messages, namely that of mobile film shows. Organised by the Department of Information, mobile film shows are 'the fullest extension of governmental use of mass communication to support national goals in Malaysia' (Grenfell 1979: 172).⁵⁰ These film shows were employed as early as 1948, as part of the colonial government's anti-Communist measures during the Emergency (1979: 172). During the 1970s the shows were government produced documentaries focused on issues such as 'agricultural subjects, on national development under the Second Malaysia Plan, on current events, and on various (unspecified) government activities and policies' (Grenfell 1972: 175).⁵¹ The films were also accompanied by speeches from Ministry of Information officials. Grenfell makes clear that while the film shows were fairly well attended, they were treated as more of a social occasion, as the films themselves were often criticised. Many people also reported leaving before the speeches (Grenfell 1979: 174-175).

Although peripheral to the Malaysian film industry as such, the government's concentration upon the mobile film shows, rather than the industry as a propaganda/nation-building instrument, may have led to the industry's relative ideological 'free-ness' (Grenfell 1979: 151). Which is not to argue that the films were ideologically neutral, rather that they were not overtly employed as ideological instruments. The period of the 1950s to 1960s was marked by nationalist and religious discourses, manifesting in both official and 'private' forums, including Malay language cinemas. Films such as the *Bujang Lapok* series of the 1960s (directed by P. Ramlee), while principally comedies, frequently articulated issues of Malayness, religion, and power/economic relations. However, as mentioned above, there are other

⁵⁰ Mobile film shows were also employed by salesmen/companies as draws, to attract potential customers to sales promotions. However, these became less and less common over time, and by the 1970s apparently were used only sporadically (Grenfell 1979: 172).

⁵¹ Television has apparently taken over this role.

possibilities. The other reason I have dwelt upon the subject is that the Department of Information successfully reached the same audience that formed the basis of the Malay feature film industry, namely rural Malays (Grenfell 1979: 152-82). This is the same audience which was, more or less, abandoned by what Zaharom Nain refers to as a Kuala Lumpur-centric view (1994: 193).⁵² This issue becomes particularly acute as, because of those same NEP policies, those rural Malays became urban Malays (and the focus of this thesis), and have yet to be won back as an audience. As such, the *Bumiputra* Era was a period of stagnation, or as Amir Muhammad puts it, 'limbo' (1998a: 26). However, at the very end of the 1980s there were a couple of events which have given some commentators reason to be optimistic about the future of the Malay cinema industry.

The Current Era

There were two developments in the late 1980s significant to the recent history of the Malay cinema industry. The first was the creation of the Malaysian Film Academy (Akademi Filem Malaysia), the teaching off-shoot of FINAS, in 1987 (*Cintai Filem Malaysia* 1989: 26).⁵³ The necessity for trained cinema personnel (such as cinematographers, scriptwriters, and directors) had long been evident within the industry (Mohd. Hamdan Hj. Adnan 1988: *passim*). The creation of an institution expressly for the training of filmmakers, under the auspices of FINAS, had been mooted since the early 1980s. Indeed, since 1981, FINAS had been providing training, in the form of workshops and short term courses, concentrating on scriptwriting, directing and editing (Mohd. Sharif Ahmad 1989b: 18-19). Further, FINAS, or FINAS in concert with other government bodies, had also funded overseas training (1989b: 19). In the meantime;

⁵² Again, television appears to have taken over this role as well. Television dramas and films were often referred to by industry informants as targeting "*kampung* people," i.e. villagers.

⁵³ Teaching began in 1989 (*Cintai Filem Malaysia* 1989: 26).

Several institution of higher learning in the country had already set up centers and facilities for educational programmes related to films and filming such as The University of Science Malaysia (USM) in Penang, MARA Institute of Technology (ITM) in Shah Alam and the National University of Malaysia (UKM) in Bangi (Cintai Filem Malaysia 1989: 23).

In the main, these institutes dealt more with theoretical film studies rather than skill-based learning (1989: 23-24). As such, and in line with part of the reason FINAS had been established, the creation of an industry-led teaching institution became a priority.⁵⁴

The objective of the Film Academy of Malaysia is to provide formal training in filming with the hope that this will establish a work force skilled in the arts and techniques of films.

The second objective is to provide encouragement and an avenue for young and established talents to come together to produce films of high quality.

Thirdly it hopes to instill a more organized and disciplined work ethics [sic] among the workforce.

Lastly the academy will be a repository of information and knowledge for the film industry (Cintai Filem Malaysia 1989: 26).

The academy not only instructs in technical subjects, such as cinematography and editing, but film theory and criticism as well. In keeping with the second objective mentioned in the above quote, FINAS also hosts the *Apresiasi Filem* (Film Appreciation) series, a panel-based forum wherein industry professionals, students, critics, and the public can meet to discuss particular films, or the film industry in

⁵⁴ During the period 1997-1998, at least two private film schools were also established, including Filmnet Academy.

general. The students of the academy are slowly beginning to find positions within the industry, although primarily in the field of tele-movies at present, but the aforementioned discussion series provides a platform for critical discussion of their work.

1989 saw the directorial debut of Aziz M. Osman, with *Fenomena* ('Phenomena'). Although now dated looking (not just in terms of fashions or hairstyles); '[t]here was something charming about this pretty and well-made film, which became a critical and commercial success' (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 27). The film centres upon the story of a young woman who travels from England to Malaysia in search of a cure for a disease from which she suffers. Commentators such as Amir Muhammad see this film, and filmmaker, as marking a new period in Malay cinema (1998a; Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 87). Aziz M. Osman has certainly been the most adventurous of any contemporary director, his corpus ranging from science fiction (*XX Ray I* [1992] and *XX Ray II* [1995]), to a tribute to the old *pontianak* (vampire) films *Fantasia* (1992), to romantic comedies (*Puteri Impian* [1997] and *Puteri Impian 2* [1998]). While not all of his attempts have been commercially successful, *Senario-The Movie* (1999) has become the biggest selling Malay language film of all time.⁵⁵

The following year, 1990, saw the debut of Yusof Haslam. Although Yusof Haslam is rarely granted much in the way of critical plaudits, he is perhaps the most bankable director in Malaysia. As such, there is admiration within the industry, and not all of it is grudging. 'The four highest-grossing Malay movies of all time [until recently-see above] were released in the 1990s. They were all produced by Yusof Haslam, an actor-turned-director (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 28). Almost all of Yusof Haslam's films have reached the magic 7-figure mark, with even his 'flops' vastly

⁵⁵ Neither *XX Ray I* or *II* were huge successes. *Fantasia* was initially banned by the Censorship Board as being un-Islamic, but received a reprieve from the Prime Minister.

outselling most of his competitors. His films are formulaic and unchallenging (the one exception to the rule - *Gemilang* ['Glamorous' 1997] also being his one 'flop' so far), but they are also amongst the most well-crafted, with immaculate production values. Fast-paced, youth-oriented melodramas sprinkled with motorcycles and famous singing stars, is the trademark Yusof Haslam film. *Sembilu II* ('Love's Grief II' 1995) even out-grossed *Jurassic Park* in Malaysia (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 28).⁵⁶ Although the formula does not seem to be working as well as previously, with *Maria Mariana II* (1998) not doing as well as expected, his films remain amongst the industry's top earners. Ironically, Yusof Haslam and Aziz M. Osman, his only serious competitor commercially, are also amongst the few 'up through the ranks' directors.

As the previous sentence suggests, the 1980s saw the creation of a new type of director, one trained in a film school, rather than having 'learned the ropes' (Lent 1990: 194-195). Beginning with Jins Shamsuddin and Othman Hafsham, most of these directors were trained overseas, and the 1990s have seen them making an impact upon the Malay film world. A couple of years after the debuts of Aziz M. Osman and Yusof Haslam, two members of this 'new breed' made their debuts. Whereas Aziz M. Osman and Yusof Haslam have concentrated on well-made commercial-oriented cinema,⁵⁷ directors such as U-Wei Hj. Shaari and Shuhaimi Baba have challenged the cinematic status quo, producing films that have achieved something novel to Malay cinema - international recognition outside of Asia. U-Wei's *Kaki Bakar* ('The Arsonist' 1995) has been screened to a warm reception at Cannes (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 28), and Shuhaimi Baba was awarded Best Director for

⁵⁶ It is worth keeping in mind that Malays only make up a portion of the Malaysian cinema audience. Thus, for a Malay-language film to be the highest grossing film, as was the case for *Sembilu* in 1994, is as significant achievement.

⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that these directors are uninterested in producing quality cinema - though Yusof Haslam has been quoted as saying that he does not intend to step outside his 'genre' again (New Straits Times 26-3-1998). Aziz M. Osman, on the other hand, attends *Apresiasi Filem*, and appears more willing to experiment and challenge. In their defence, the funding situation rewards the 'sure thing'; at least for as long as it remains 'sure.'

Layar Lara ('The Melancholy Screen' 1997) at the 1997 Brussels International Film Festival.

Shuhaimi Baba's introductory film was *Selubung* ('The Veil of Life,' 1992). The film was certainly not without its flaws, containing, as it does, some technical problems. However, the film was thought-provoking and brave in its attempt to discuss religion, particularly religious extremism, and the Palestinian situation. Her second film, *Ringgit Kasorrga* (1994), dealt with corruption and sexual exploitation amongst the Malay elite. I will discuss both of these films in more detail in later chapters. Shuhaimi Baba has not been adverse to using some of the 'trademark' commercial strategies; '[a]ll her films cast models or singers in lead or supporting roles, and feature romantic subplots' (Amir Muhammad 1998a: 24). She is one of the select few directors who have managed to make challenging films which also do well at the box-office.

U-Wei's initial film was also controversial, beginning with the title - *Perempuan, Isteri dan Jalang* ('Woman, Wife and Whore' 1993), which was too much for the authorities and was retitled *Perempuan, Isteri dan...?* Title aside, the film was also controversial in that it dealt overtly with female sexuality, as such it has been variously labelled as sensationalist, ground-breaking, and anti-female. Again, I will discuss this film in more depth later in the thesis. U-Wei has had a rougher ride in terms of commercial success. His second film, *Black Widow* (1994), was a commercial failure. Combined with the notoriety of *Perempuan, Isteri dan...?*, the box-office failure of *Black Widow* has rendered U-Wei 'poison' as far as local financiers are concerned. As such, funding for *Kaki Bakar* and *Jogho* ('Champion,' 1997) has come from overseas, principally Japan. This is the situation faced by new and non-mainstream directors, such as Hishamuddin Rais, whose debut film *Dari Jemapoh ke Manchesteé* ('From Jemapoh to Manchester' 1998) was also funded from

overseas.

Nevertheless, new faces continue to appear on the Malay cinema scene, such as Kamal Ishak, director of *Penyair Malam* ('Night Poet' 1997). The tradition of actors becoming directors continues with people such as Harith Iskander, director of *Hanya Kawan* ('Just Friends' 1997) and Erma Fatimah, whose directorial debut - *Jimi Asmara* (1995), has had the honour of being 'name dropped' in another film. Different genres are being experimented with, including the psychological thriller (*Lenjan*, Ismail Yaacob 1998) and Malaysia's first full-length animated feature film (*Silat Legenda* ['Legendary Warriors'], Hassan Mutalib 1998). Some of the earlier returnees from overseas, such as Mahadi J. Murat (*Wanita Bertudung Hitam* ['The Woman Wearing Black' 1992], and *Sayang Salmah* ['Darling Salmah' 1996]), have become more involved with industry bodies such as FINAS. Further, some of the 'old guard,' such as Jamil Sulong and Jins Shamsuddin continue to direct films and otherwise remain involved with the industry. While the audiences have, by and large, remained absent, people within the industry are quietly optimistic and perhaps more adventurous now than at any time in the past. Funding, however, has become even more of a problem and even as august a personage as Jins Shamsuddin (now Dato' Jins Shamsuddin - roughly equivalent to being an OBE or MBE in Britain) has been told that there is no money for feature films, though there would be for a tele-movie.

Another recent development is the intensification of the ties between television companies and film production companies. Radio Television Malaysia (RTM1 and RTM2 - the public stations), for instance, have exclusive contracts with a set number of production companies from which they will commission tele-films. TV3 (one of the commercial stations) and Grand Brilliance Sdn. Bhd. (the leading feature film production company) are also in partnership, a palpable benefit to Grand Brilliance being the free advertising of their films on TV3.

Matters within the industry have changed even in the 2 years since my fieldwork. There is excitement over a group of new filmmakers emerging onto the scene. To a certain degree these filmmakers are bypassing the more established routes, techniques, and methods. Filmmakers such as Amir Muhammad (*Lips2Lips* 2000) and Tan Teck (*Spinning Gasing* ['Spinning Top'] 2000) are making the international festivals and 'art-house' circuits rather than trying to 'crack' the cineplexes. This move also reverses the more typical conceptualisation of globalisation, with these films going out to the world and the world market, rather than the world's films coming to Malaysia. Organisations such as Filmnet are attempting to provide a venue for non-mainstream cinema and young Malaysian filmmakers. Other young filmmakers are exploiting new technologies such as digital cameras and the internet to bypass the problems and constraints of 'traditional' cinema. As such filmmakers like Amir Muhammad and Tan Teck, as well as Osman Ali, James Lee Ismael, and others are creating new 'markets' for themselves as well as bringing a bit of new life to the industry. Further, by bypassing the commercial market, these filmmakers have also created artistic spaces for themselves and their films, and have used this space to tackle issues or experiment creatively in ways which they would not be able to in more mainstream ventures. This also means that these filmmakers are reversing the globalisation trend once again, and are playing on a world stage. While it is far too early to call these attempts successes or a new 'new wave' for Malaysian film, the positive reception films such as *Spinning Gasing* have received (winning the NETPAC [Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema] Special Mention Award at the 2000 Hawaiian International Film Festival), and the increases in potentialities for filmmakers are positive signs.

Unfortunately, this is not to say that all of the industry's problems have been solved in the past two years. The aforementioned filmmakers have had to be creative

because problems remain. The paths to the commercial markets, even for filmmakers who have made names for themselves internationally (such as Shuhaimi Baba) remain as rocky as ever. To make matters worse things are not perfect in the nascent alternative film world either. First things first. The problems of finance, distribution, and censorship remain, though there have been positive moves in the arena of distribution at least. Some of the more prestigious cineplexes, such as in the KLCC Suria (the famous twin towers of Kuala Lumpur), screen Malay language films. Non-mainstream cinema remains a niche market, and while there are organisations such as Filmnet, Filmnet has had at least three venues in recent years. In other words, this arena remains a tenuous outlet at the present time, and may be closed at the time of reading. Indeed, to a very great extent, uncertainty is a potent word with which to describe the Malay film industry, at least on the production side. Regarding censorship, for instance, there remains uncertainty as to just what is or is not allowed, and where the boundaries are. Guidelines on certain issues, such as the depiction of the female body, are quite clear (Kaur 1993: 89), but not always enforced or standardised across different media. An example comes from the film *Panas*. In the film is a scene where the heroine (Aleeza Kasim) romps in the ocean wearing a bikini. This scene was cut from the film, but a still from the same scene featured in an advertisement for an article about Aleeza Kasim in a glossy entertainment magazine. Other issues are not even this straight-forward however. A former Censorship Board member stated that as members only serve temporarily, much of the censoring took place regarding personal *bête noir*. Further, the censorship guidelines were not made clear to the board members, resulting in some debate as to what should be censored and what not. Appendix 2 provides a list of films and videos banned in 1997. The list makes interesting, if occasionally bewildering, reading. For local filmmakers the penalty for misjudging an unclear and

malleable situation (such as several did in 1997) could be very serious, ranging from cuts, to a financially ruinous ban, to prison.

Less dramatic problems also remain, such as television and video (both legitimate and black market). The percentage of homes with videocassette players in Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore is among the highest in the non-Western world (Lent 1990: 197). There is also a widespread availability of black market videos and VCDs (video compact disks, played on a computer). Indeed, the Recording Industry Association of Malaysia (RIM) chairman estimated that 90% of local video sales was going to pirates (The Star 4-8-1998). In the aftermath of a raid on a pirate VCD factory, a police spokesman stated that this single factory was producing around 40,000 VCDs daily, worth more than RM140mil annually (The Star 19-12-1997). There is the added complication of the Copyright Act, and specifically, what articles may be seized by the police. This has meant that during some raids on illegal operations, equipment has not been seized. The pirates, therefore, are free to 'plead guilty, pay a fine - a paltry sum when compared with the millions they make from their activities - and return to take up where they left off' (The Star 4-10-1998). On the legitimate side of the industry, many Malay films are shown on terrestrial television, as well as satellite stations, however, these films tend to be classics rather than contemporary films. Thus, while films may be getting to the public, it is often not through the cinemas. This has a direct influence on future funding, or the aforementioned lack thereof.

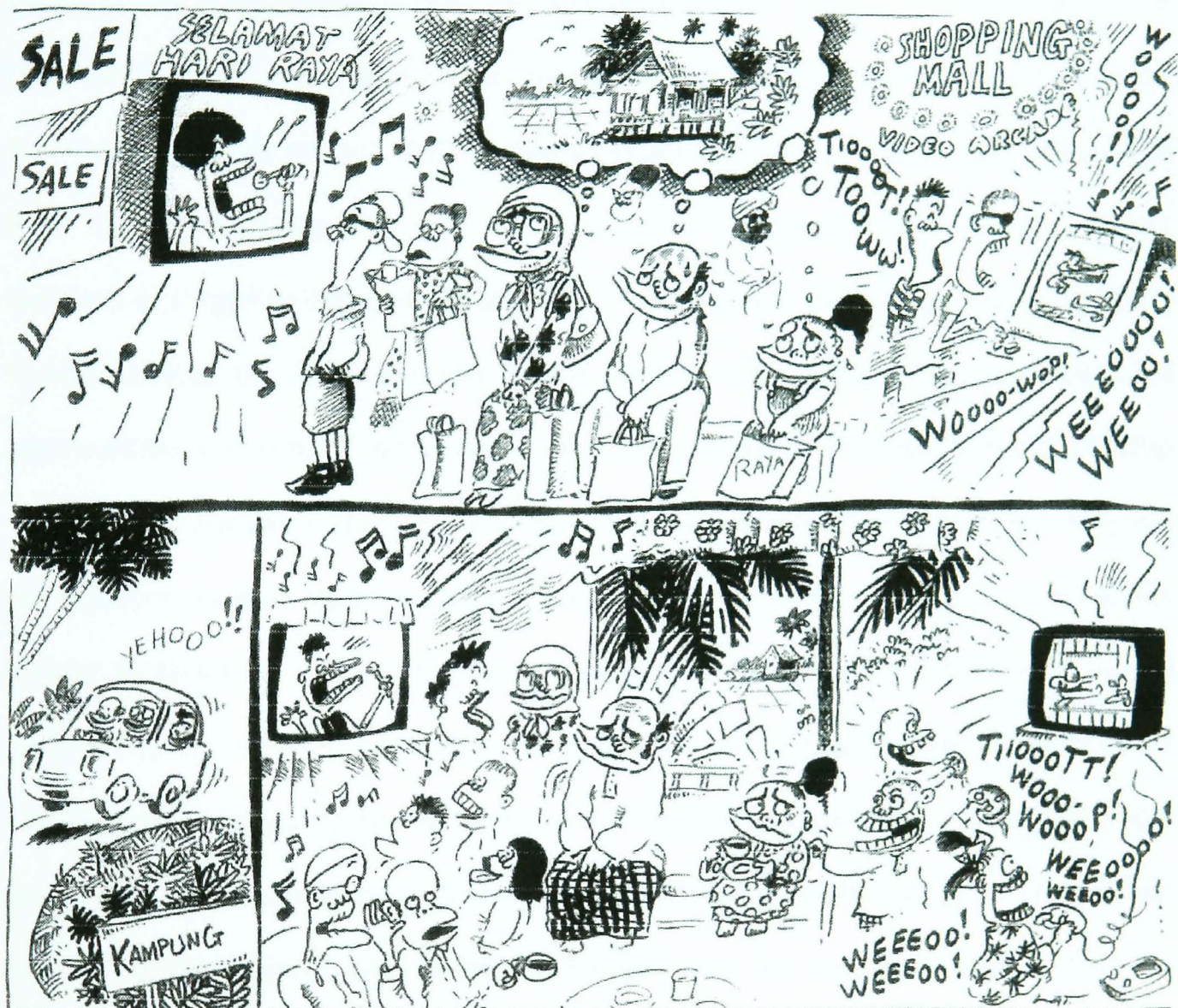
To sum up, the current era has, to date, been one of mixed fortunes. While, on the one hand, there have been positive developments such as an increase in trained personnel, a raise in standards of production values, and an expansion of thematic interests, on the other hand the most successful filmmakers of the 1990s remained those who produce 'formula' films catering to the same audience targeted for the past

30 years. This has had, and continues to have, consequences for the industry as a whole:

Turn on the TV and chances are you'd be able to spot a locally-made [tele]film without breaking a sweat. It's easy to pick out those homegrown flicks as they're mostly made up of stereotypical melodrama, predictable storylines, unimaginative camera work, dated editing ... (The Star 4-3-1998).

The continuing failure to resurrect a wider audience base has meant that funding has become harder to raise, and the economic crisis of 1997 has caused a further contraction of available local funding. Co-productions, which are often a 'life-line' for European filmmakers, have historically proved unworkable for political, social, and economic reasons (Hatta Azad Khan 1997: 167-186; Raja Ahmad Alauddin 1992: 86-87). Finally, while I was conducting research in Malaysia, the single biggest concern amongst industry informants was the proposed privatisation of FINAS. This move created a widespread feeling of unease and uncertainty amongst those industry figures with close ties to the body, either as teachers, beneficiaries, or simply in terms of its role vis-à-vis the Malay film industry. In 1999 the plan was shelved, but it remains to be seen what effect the saga has had upon the industry.

Chapter 3: Urbanism and Urbanisation



The sound of Hari Raya . . .

Introduction

With this chapter, the thesis begins to narrow its focus. The concept of a sharp divide between rural and urban is a problematic one in the Malaysian context. It is in this line that Evers argues that cities, as we would understand them, did not develop in the Malay Archipelago (1988: 146-49). Rather than 'urban' areas, the *istana* (the royal palace) formed a centre point around which various institutions (such as the royal mosque), businesses, and residences organised themselves (1988: 146). With their urban *kampung* and peri-urban sections Malaysian cities do not always conform to a rigid delineation of rural versus urban space. Be that as it may, however Kuala Lumpur may have developed, it is indeed a city, and one that has expanded (and continues to expand) dramatically in the last couple of decades (Ziauddin Sardar 2000). Urbanisation within Malaysia has taken place both rapidly and recently, and is therefore interesting for several reasons. As urbanisation has been a relatively recent experience for many Malay people, there is a significant part of the population who are first generation urban dwellers. The newly urban Malays, as we shall see, are to some degree betwixt and between the *kampung* and the city. Through the newly urban, the impact of modernity, and the assumptions and expectations bundled with it, upon rural values and ideals may be accessed. Conversely, the impact of the rural upon urban values and ideals may likewise be ascertained. Over the course of this chapter, both of these arguments will be considered. Not all Malays are newly urban however, and the long term urban Malays are an important consideration, particularly, as we saw in Chapter 2, as they are often the cultural producers (as with film). One of the key arguments that will be put forward is that the city is a contested space. The city is an ambiguous conceptual space, being the site of both aspiration/inspiration and immorality/evil. The contests and the ambiguities, the negotiations, are 'played out' both in everyday life, and in the films

under discussion. Through the course of this and the next two chapters, I will expand upon this statement, particularly in terms of the re-negotiation of social relationships, such as gender and kinship, as well as, within this chapter, focusing upon both the physical re-assembling of spatial organisations and more ephemeral concerns such urban and rural symbolic re-constructions, and their respective places within the imaginary.

Urbanisation, as a major component of capitalism, became increasingly important to politicians seeking to create a Malay middle-class in the 1970s.

The fact that in Malaya the Malays are mainly rural, and the non-Malays are urban, means that there is an inequality in the progress and development of the communities. A developing nation or community should have gradually urbanized itself (Mahathir Mohamad 1970: 79).

As such, urbanism and modernity have been intrinsically linked within official discourses in Malaysia since the 1970s. However, the non-urbanisation of Malay people was also a colonial policy (Roff 1974; Wilder 1982; Shamsul 1986). The shift from rural to urban is, therefore, more than simply a physical re-placement, but has had and continues to have impact upon a wide range of physical and meta-physical aspects of Malay societies. Films of the 1990s, are particularly interesting, as they tend to focus very heavily upon the city, particularly KL (see Zaharom Nain 1994), and are located in a second (at least) phase of modernisation, one which is involved more closely in non-primary economic development (service, investment, technology industries). The films of this era, for reasons that will be made explicit, display aspects of what have been referred to in Chapter 1 as 'bundles of assumptions.' The concept, upon which the discussion of the above will centre upon, is the negotiation of urban space.

The term 'middle-class' has already been employed, however, it is a problematic 'tag.' The term is defined and used in many diverse ways (is the basis for usage purely economic, purely sociological, or some mix of both?). Further, the term often carries a pejorative connotation. Within Malaysia, 'middle-class,' in political and to some extent academic discourses, is implicated in the modernisation process and communal advancement (Shamsul 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Gomez and Jomo 1997; Jones 1997).¹ Heuristically speaking, 'middle-class' in Malaysia appears to be discursively linked to material possessions and employment status. Income is important in terms of where it allows people to live and what possessions they can display, whereas a particular job may have more social status than remuneration (as elsewhere, the two issues tend to be linked, and there are other ways by which to make up any perceived shortcoming in income). Importantly, in this same discursive arena, middle-class is also inherently linked to city dwelling, and perhaps has been for a very long time (Reid 1989; O'Conner 1995). As such there are implications here regarding pre-capitalist constructions of class and other socio-economic relationships. For instance, the historical links between land and aristocracy, i.e. the 'landed gentry,' which is such a feature of the European imaging, does not necessarily hold true in Malaysia. Economic development of the Malays, outwith the practical demands of the capitalist economic model, and urbanism were conjoined in government policies.

Government Policy and Urbanism

The communal riots of 1969 remain a defining moment in recent Malaysian history. Whichever account of events is believed, the outcome is being felt to this day. One aspect of the aftermath was a set of policies entitled the New Economic Policy

¹ Ironically, within the Malay middle-class itself, government policies related to these agendas have become increasingly criticised.

(hereafter NEP). Either as an endeavour to address the cause of the riots, or using the riots to justify nationalist (communal) agendas, the NEP set in place mechanisms for the redistribution of 30% of the national wealth, from European and Chinese ownership to that of Malays. The more-or-less *laissez-faire* days of the Tunku Abdul Rahman administration were over and the government began taking a direct hand in the economic arena (Jones 1997). The mechanisms for this were diverse: nationalising industry; tax/loan concessions for Malay businesses; positive discrimination for *bumiputra* employment/university applicants; amongst others (Shamsul 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Gomez and Jomo 1997; Nonini 1998; Jones 1997). In the early 1980s, Mahathir (who came to power in 1981) initiated the 'Look East' policy, using Japan as an economic model. The period from 1981 through to the mid 1980s was marked, not only by 'state-led industrialisation,' but also by investment from East Asia (Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea) rather than Europe or the United States (Gomez & Jomo 1997; Jones 1997). Due to a period of severe recession, between 1984 and 1986, the government's economic policies changed. Privatisation rather than nationalisation was encouraged, and there was a general liberalisation of economic policies both internally and externally focused. As we shall see, certain of these mechanisms were more 'successful' than others, and not all of the results of these changes were expected and/or desired. However, the changes brought about in Malaysian, and particularly Malay, society have been extensive.

The late 1970s could be regarded as a period in which Malays already implicated in the capitalist economy (including the government) expanded into new arenas, such as film production, or consolidated those interests. The 1980s, particularly the late 1980s, could arguably also be regarded as the era in which the Malay involvement in the Malaysian economic sphere broadened to include those

not already involved.² This latter period was also one of rapid urbanisation. From my own experience, KL has become almost unrecognisable since 1986-1987. The growth, architectural experimentation, and demographic changes have been dramatic. Indeed, in the mid-1980s, it was an easy generalisation amongst backpackers that the cities of the west coast of mainland Malaysia were 'Chinese,' and those of the east coast were 'Malay.'³

This rapid urbanisation is itself linked to new social phenomena, such as *minah karan* (literally 'electric girls,' female factory workers) and *dakwah* (religious 'revivalism'), as newly urban Malays began the process of negotiating the physical and metaphysical demands of city life (Nagata 1982, 1984; Ong 1987, 1990; Ackerman 1991). It is this latter element, the adjustments and changes effected by the shift in residence from *kampung* to city, that this chapter will focus on. The points made in the chapter on modernity, that aspects of modernity come bundled with assumptions and expectations, and that the mechanisms of modernisation set off counter-discourses, should be reiterated here. While capitalism and urbanism are distinct phenomena, moves towards a capitalist economy necessitate urban populations for both production and consumption. Urbanism makes its own demands upon those dwelling in cities; such as restructuring social networks and patterns of social intercourse. In the Malaysian context, due to the particular extant social and spatial organisations, the resultant re-negotiations have taken on particular forms. Before delving too deeply into those negotiations it may be helpful to describe the position that was being negotiated from. In this case, the *kampung*.

² This is indeed arguable, the Malay share of the national wealth increased during this period, but to what extent this was across the spectrum of Malay society(ies) is questioned (Gomez and Jomo 1997). Largely due to FDI (foreign direct investment) from Japan and Taiwan, there was a huge growth in employment opportunities, but there was little in the way of technological transference (Jones 1997). Further, while the KL stock exchange has become one of Asia's largest, there remain questions of accountability (Gomez & Jomo 1997; Jones 1997.).

³ I spent a year travelling around South-East Asia in 1986-7, approximately a month of which was in Malaysia, over two separate stays.

The *Kampung*

While urbanisation has been extensive in Malaysia, there is still a large rural Malay population (as we will see 'rural' is somewhat problematic in the Malaysian context). Although by South-East Asian standards urbanisation in Malaysia is relatively high at around 50%, by European or North American standards it is still low.⁴ The *kampung* is frequently espoused as the 'traditional' Malay form of residence (for example by tour guides). The term *kampung* is usually translated into English as 'village' (literally it should be 'compound,' indeed the English compound - meaning an enclosure - comes from the Malay word), however, this is somewhat misleading, as 'village' conveys an exclusive rurality which is not the case. Historically, many *kampung* were situated on or near the outskirts of urban areas (Wilder 1982).⁵

Semi-urban *kampung* featured mixed economies, with agricultural practices taking place alongside more typically urban activities. Furthermore, semi-urban *kampung* acted as commuter towns for Malays working, but not living in, nearby towns and cities. Several films of the 1950s and the 1960s, for instance *Penarik Becha* and *Anak Bapak* both show this type of arrangement. There is a third category of *kampung* and that is the urban *kampung*, such as Kampung Baru, in the heart of KL. As would be expected, the main economic activities are those generally associated with urban life; rather than rural or mixed economic activities. The types of *kampung* are quite different, as for example in typical economic activities, but retain certain similarities, and many of these are to do with spatial arrangements.

As one instance of these similar spatialities, in all three types of *kampung* the compound is very spacious and with largely undemarcated boundaries, at least in the

⁴ I pointed out this difference to one of my informants during the course of investigating some computer software. Her comment was to the effect that this discrepancy was a large part of the reason that Malaysia was still not a 'developed' nation.

⁵ In Bahasa Malaysia plurals are often made by doubling the word, hence the plural of *kampung* is *kampung-kampung*, usually written as *kampung2*. In English-language usage the plural is typically rendered as the singular, *kampung*, and will be the case herein.

rural and semi-urban *kampung*, although even in the urban *kampung* there is less of the 'fenced-off'-edness, that is such a feature of some other types urban housing. Other features of note in the *kampung* include the orientation of the houses and the sheer profusion of vegetation. *Kampung* houses (at least from observation) are arranged facing the road (see also Wilder 1982: 25), and non-family guests enter and are entertained at the front of the house (Carsten 1995a). Furthermore, the front areas of the compound are more elaborate than the rear. The profuse vegetation is most striking in the rural and semi-urban *kampung*. Wilder catalogues some of the types and numbers of productive plants encountered in a *kampung* homestead:

[A] staggering variety of fruits is found [in a Malay village], including many varieties of banana (generic term *pisang*) and other fruits such as *batek*, *rambutan*, *manggo* (mango), *machang*, *rambai*, *limau* (the lime), *manggis* and many more. A typical Malay homestead, if it is well established, has coconut trees and six to a dozen types of fruit trees growing near it. Vegetables and spices are grown near the house. Sugar cane (*tebu*), tapioca (*ubi kayu*) and other root crops and, in former days, possibly tobacco and coffee might also be grown (Wilder 1982: 30).

From my experience, this list is fairly indicative.

Kampung are further marked by being quite homogeneous, in that they are predominately Malay. Ironically, this is more likely to be the case in the urban *kampung*, for reasons to do with the Malay Reserve Land Act (see for instance Wilder 1982: 23, 30, 201).⁶ Rural and semi-urban *kampung* are not necessarily Malay

⁶ During the colonial period, to protect Malay interests and/or to keep Malays on the land producing cash or sustenance crops (depending on the reader's views regarding colonial philanthropy), measures were enacted wherein Malay lands could only be sold to other Malays. Post-Independence administrations continued this policy.

Reserve land, whereas the urban *kampung* are. A couple of other points of interest are that families try to live close together, often in adjoining compounds (Wilder 1982: 34-47; Carsten 1995a), and that there is a sharp us-them divide, better expressed as a here-there divide (Wilder 1982; Raybeck 1986). The result of this latter point is that activities, or the moral implications of activities, 'here' are viewed as more important than activities 'there.' Related to this is that there is a very potent public moral censorship that can be brought to bear, particularly via gossip (Carsten 1995a).⁷

Urbanisation and Newly Urban Malays

Having already stated that the rapid urbanisation of Malays led to changes, it might seem paradoxical to then state that the extent to which things have not changed is what is interesting. To a casual observer, the crowds at the mosques, the women in headscarves, and some of the news stories would appear to show a concern with countering rather than attaining modernity. Indeed comparing the discourses surrounding the engagement with modernity in the 1950s and 1960s with those of the 1980s or 1990s would seem to affirm this idea. Modernity in the 1950s and 1960s was of a type more closely attuned to Western ideals and discourses. Films such as the *Bujang Lapok* series and *Anak Bapak* (all directed by P. Ramlee), illustrate this point quite clearly. In these films, the Western lifestyle is amply depicted (if also questioned): women in mini skirts; men drinking; night clubs; and etc. Even certain mythohistorical films, such as *Hang Jebat* (Hussain Hanif 1961), reflect some of the effects and aspirations of the modernisation process in this era. *Hang Jebat* is based on the legend of Hang Tuah (which is discussed in more detail in

Chapter 5), a hero who sacrificed his friendship to Hang Jebat for loyalty to the

⁷ This is not an exclusively Malay trait. Having grown up in and near a small town, I can verify that this is as much a feature of small town/rural life in Canada as it is in Malaysia. The difference is more in scale and level of efficacy of that censure. What is significant is the extent to which this trait has been carried over into urban life, as we shall see later.

Sultan. Hang Jebat, conversely, sacrificed his loyalty to the Sultan for his friendship with Hang Tuah. Hang Tuah has been, and arguably still is, regarded as the hero, representing as he does the ideals of honour and loyalty to authority. Hussain Hanif's film however, put forward Hang Jebat as the true hero. As such, *Hang Jebat* promotes the idea of personal ideals and relations as being of more importance than unquestioning fealty, a typically 'modern' ideal. So, which impression is the more accurate, change or non-change? A possible answer lies with in the dynamics of Malaysia's (and Malays') negotiations with, for and against, the modernisation process and the forces 'bundled' with that process. These dynamics have changed over time, as agendas and discourses have shifted, and have become embodied in one of modernisation's own avatars - Kuala Lumpur.

Kuala Lumpur (KL) is without doubt the most important city in Malaysia: hosting much of the national administration and judiciary; it is the economic and cultural production centre, contains the premiere university in the country, and it is the largest city and *de facto* capital. KL is also the site of most of the massive construction projects undertaken in recent years (KL Tower, Petronas Towers, etc.). Furthermore, KL has a singular place in the Malaysian imaginary, being the perceived locus of both desire and destruction (much like London or New York/Los Angeles serve for Britain and the United States respectively). As such, few films are set anywhere else but KL, unless it is the unmodern that is meant to be emphasised.⁸

Urbanisation necessitates housing, as well as various infrastructure projects such as roads, schools, and utilities. My experience was predominately of a lower middle class housing area, comprising small business owners, mid level administrators and/or bureaucrats, and other NQTs or 'Not Quite There's' (Kahn

⁸ All of this is not to suggest that there are no other important cities in Malaysia. Indeed Melaka (Malacca) is *the* historical city in Malaysia, Penang/Georgetown is important for historical, educational, cultural, and economic reasons. Kota Baru and Kuala Terengganu are important east coast cities, and Johor Baru is the focus for south Malaysia as well as being of historical and economic importance.

1996: 14). This area was towards the outskirts of KL, and is a relatively new scheme. It is therefore a product of that period of rapid urban growth mentioned previously. The scheme appears to be fairly typical and is organised around a commercial area. The size of these areas varies from nothing in a few cases, to quite large in others, including shopping malls. Education facilities such as kindergartens and a primary school are nearby. Most schemes are linked to public transport, but certainly not all, some are not even within walking distance of public transport. The scheme I lived in was communally mixed, and although I did not take a census, a rough estimate would be about 55-60% Malay. Other features included a weekly night-market and vibrant small-scale (quasi-legal) retail operations, such as roadside food hawkers and fruit and vegetable sellers. In the area I stayed, there was only one household comprised of single people, a group of young men, which though not common, is not exceptional. Usually this would be a student domestic situation, and would be more likely near a university/college. All other households contained families with children. Of the four households I was most familiar with, in two of them both parents worked, and housework/childcare during office hours was given over either to maids or to a near-family member (such as a daughter or sister-in-law).

The houses in the scheme were themselves quite uniform when built: two stories high; three bedrooms; and a bathroom (combined shower and toilet) upstairs; living/dining area and kitchen downstairs. A large window/sliding glass door dominates the front of the house. The front yard is composed of an asphalt car parking area, a small lawn, and various small trees or shrubs and other plants. A metal fence and gate enclose the yard. There is no backyard to speak of. It appears that as families become larger, or more prosperous, additions or other improvements were made. These changes included (on various houses in the neighbourhood): extending the ground floor; building an enclosed balcony; or elaborating the front

yard-such as with a brick wall or a more ornate gate. From observations and from informants' responses, this type of housing scheme appears to be fairly indicative of medium cost housing, and could be considered the 'norm' for the majority of first generation Malay urbanites. There are other types of housing in KL, ranging from palatial estates (and indeed palaces), exclusive condominiums, middle cost housing (usually actual houses), city centre shop-houses (or row houses) and low-cost housing apartment blocks, through to squatter settlements and, as mentioned previously, urban *kampung*. Perhaps surprisingly, the 'norm' already described seems to serve as a template for many of these other styles of housing (or vice versa), with the exception of condominiums and flats. Then again, this might not be so surprising after all. When driving past some condominiums one day, I asked an informant if she would like to live in such a place and she replied in the negative, adding that Malay people do not like to live in such type of housing because "you do not know your neighbours," and that condominiums are for people who want privacy. There was a strong implication that this desire was dubious. I then asked who did live in such places, and my informant stated that it would most likely be Westerners or rich Malaysians. Gossip regarding condominiums is rife in KL, and in particular they are reputedly populated by the second wives and mistresses of the rich and famous. Be that as it may, it is the more 'sociable form' of housing which forms the aforementioned template for Malay housing. This pattern could be sketched as: huge houses, huge yards for the elite, and huge gates; large houses, large yard, and large gates for the upper middle class; through to small house, no yard and no gate for the squatter houses.

While the differences between urban and *kampung* style housing is evident, I was struck by the similarities (quite likely this was initially due to the vibrant greenness of the housing areas). This initial perception faded, but towards the end of the

fieldwork period re-asserted itself for different reasons. One of those reasons had to do with the efficacious public scrutiny and censure already discussed, which was a feature of daily conversations. Another similarity had to do with the boundaries. Wilder remarks that there are few overt boundary markers to the territory of a *kampung*, yet nevertheless they exist (Wilder 1982: 33). In the medium cost housing schemes, there is an overt marking of boundary, yet over time it is the fluidity of those same boundaries which became prominent. As an informant pointed out, the fences in the scheme were as much meeting-points as they were separation points. It is interesting to note that one of the more visible signifiers of upper middle class status is a solid wall around the house. This point will be returned to in Chapter 5.

In terms of difference, however, one of the most overt is that the city is more ethnically mixed. I do not wish to belabour this point, as media such as television introduce diverse lifestyles, and *kampung* dwellers do interact with non-Malays. However, lifestyle patterns have had to be adapted to fit in with a new way of living. Social networks in particular have had to be realigned to deal with new situations and expectations. As one instance, kinship ties have become stretched with the distances involved in terms of both space and differences in apperception of the world. Kinship and gender relations will be discussed in later parts of this thesis. New careers and income levels lead to their own sets of negotiations: career or leisure; money or family; to live close to the natal home or not. Commensurate with the increases in possibilities has been an increase in expectations, both by and of the Malays.

When discussing rural-urban migration in the 'Third World,' it is probably more common to think of shanty towns, poverty, and exploitation. I do not intend to argue that these phenomena have not/do not take place in Malaysia, but that, to a large extent, this migration has taken place from a position of some extant capital

backing (such as land holdings or cash crops). Factors such as the aforementioned education policy and financial 'perks' have contributed to what for many of the newly urban Malays has been a relatively risk-free transition. This security is not boundless however, as some of my informants pointed out. There is little in the way of a 'safety-net' in Malaysia, no universal welfare state or unemployment insurance for instance, although the various NEP and post-NEP policies are arguably a form of welfare. While many of the newly urban Malays have a relatively secure background and at least some degree of present and future financial security, this sense of security is remarkably shallow. This insecurity manifests itself in many aspects of Malay social life, through various discourses surrounding communal boundaries, through articulated comments on the lack of a welfare state, and through some extreme activities such as food hoarding. As in the shanty town situation, the expectations, concerns and tensions of the newly urban Malays express themselves in times of crisis and, as mentioned, while I was conducting fieldwork, Malaysia was undergoing a period of financial turmoil.⁹ The various tensions and fears, the government's involvement, the 'bundles' of expectations tangled with urbanism, and the long history and somewhat fluid demarcation between urban and rural in Malaysia, mean that urban migration was not *just* a physical shift. The urbanisation of Malays entailed a shifting in the symbolism and imagery regarding the city, indeed a shift in the city's place in the Malay imaginary.

Symbolism and Imagery

While it might be posited that urban migration amongst Malays may not have been as traumatic as expected (relatively speaking, I would not wish to argue this point with someone who lives in an illegal settlement), it did involve a shift in position

⁹ There were a couple incidents of note in this regard while I was conducting fieldwork, one of which was when gossip was started (and disseminated at least partially over the internet) that Indonesian illegal immigrants were going to riot in KL. This rumour led to panic and food hoarding.

within the imaginary, a shift in identity, and a realignment of symbolism. While the role of the city in the government's discourse is pervasive, its place in the imaginary of rural people and the urban middle class is also potent. In the latter cases, the role is also more ambiguous. In all three instances, the city is strongly linked to concepts and discourses of modernisation and modernity. Further, the city is being constructed, discursively and symbolically, as an expressly Malay space (see in this regard Nonini 1998, regarding Chinese attempts to reclaim urban spaces).

For rural people, unsurprisingly, the city has the more ambiguous role in the imaginary. The city is both the site of desire (the location of the goods and lifestyles which are linked to concepts of 'being modern'), yet is also the site of immorality and temptation. However, this is not to say that urban dwellers are *necessarily* linked to that immorality (see Raybeck 1986). This highly ambiguous position, leads to the speculation that for rural people, the city is as much a *resource* as anything. A film industry informant suggested that one of the reasons that tele-dramas (television dramas) are so different from cinematic output is that they are, by and large, written for the *kampung* audience. In the tele-dramas, the city is frequently depicted as a place where 'bad' things happen. As another informant stated of a tele-drama produced by his employer - "It is the usual. Village girl goes to the city and gets in trouble..." This is not to suggest that it is only in the city that bad things happen, as it is often the case in the tele-dramas that the girl or boy is fleeing some problem in their *kampung*, though it could be argued that the 'moral' of the story is to reconcile the audience to the problems in the *kampung* as being the lesser of the evils. Either way, the link between city and modernity (jobs, money, possessions), and the ambiguous place that these institutions have in the rural imaginary are both reflected.

The place which the city has within the urban middle-class imaginary is also ambiguous, however, this ambiguity is tempered by the fact that they (the middle-

class) are located within the city and are therefore invested in it and modernity. The way in which this ambiguity is 'played out' is as a site of negotiation - between tradition and modernity. The city is thus reconstructed and repositioned from the rural conceptualisations of a neutral entity and/or corrupting force, to one whereby good and evil are co-resident and it is for the individual to make their own choices.¹⁰ This point already indicates the acceptance of one of the fundamental precepts of modernity, that of individual choice and will. The uniformity of the city in the imaginary therefore also changes and becomes more fragmented. For instance, certain aspects/areas of the city come to symbolise different elements of the modernisation process - such as up-market shopping plazas becoming exclusively located as sites of desire (as opposed to just any shopping centre), or mega-projects, such as the Petronas Towers, taking on the role of avatars of nationalistic accomplishment. What is interesting, is that the city as site of negotiation bears directly upon the depictions of urban space in Malaysian films. Conversely, the *kampung* also becomes a symbolic entity, invested with certain primordial qualities: the 'home' of Malay tradition; havens of peace; bucolic paradises. Before illustrating this, the third main player in the city/modernity discussion is the government.

The government discourse/conceptualisation of modernity, and by implication the city, has changed significantly over the course of time and with changes in the leadership of UMNO (see Rahman Rashid 1993). Not by accident, the successive agendas of the ruling elite have been inscribed upon the KL cityscape (building projects being financed and controlled either directly or indirectly by the ruling party). The 1970s saw a burst of architectural projects which melded Western and 'Islamic' (Moorish or Middle Eastern) architectural features (buildings such as

¹⁰ The city is implicated in nationalism and nationalistic discourses, as will be discussed below. While the national importance of buildings such as the Petronas Towers is acknowledged, the building itself might not get so enthusiastic a response. In other words, the goal - modernity - might be laudable *for the nation*, but modernity itself might inspire far less enthusiasm on an individual level.

the Dayabumi Complex). The 1980s saw a move to an updated 'traditional' look, with the National Library serving as an example.¹¹ The 1990s have seen the induction of 'hyper-modern' architecture-reflecting among other agendas Vision 2020 and the Multimedia Super Corridor. As may be expected, the city, as implicated in the government's discourses and agendas, is not an ambiguous symbol, but a 'concrete' example that 'Malaysia *Boleh!*' (Malaysia Can!). However, generally, Malaysia does in the city.

This necessarily brief overview of urban-oriented symbolism has so far passed over one element, and the key element for this thesis, that of the newly urban Malay middle-class. This group is in a liminal position, in that they share some of the characteristics and attitudes of rural people (in the following chapters we shall see how the social networks between *kampung* and city have been realigned and reiterated) and some of the long-term middle class as well. Furthermore, this group is a crucial component of UMNO's supporters, and arguably feels some obligation to the government and its policies (Jones 1997), which is not to say that this support is uncritical. So, what position does the city fill in the NQT imaginary? I think that a partial answer lies with the aforementioned opinion regarding the differences between tele-movies and cinema films, with the addendum that the informant went on to state that the writers of these dramas were (in the terms employed within this thesis) newly urban Malays. The *kampung*, therefore, is as ambiguous a place as the city, yet the city is also less of a neutral space than it is in the long term middle-class view. If this is indeed the case, it may explain some of the seeming paradoxes regarding the Malay movie world. One of these paradoxes is that Malays generally regard their cinema in very negative terms: 'boring'; 'bad'; 'just silly love stories' are but a few of the responses I encountered. Yet, Malay films can attract significant audiences (not necessarily at the cinema). Further, Malay films of the 'Golden Era'

¹¹ This style is satirised in Karim Raslan (1996).

remain popular to this day. Indeed, the majority of black-market Malay videos are P. Ramlee products.

There are at least two explanations for these issues, one 'pragmatic' and the other linked with the preceding argument. Pragmatically speaking, the films are 'theirs,' i.e. Malay films, however the films are also widely held to be "not very good." Therefore, a conflict exists between national/communal pride and taste (personal and that modified by social pressures). P. Ramlee was, and remains, an unqualified superstar (Baharudin Latif 1989; Mansor Putih 1994b); conversely however, Malay audiences have long been exposed to the aesthetics and codes of representation of Western cinema. The internalisation of these codes means that there is a disjuncture between an unarticulated 'taste,' informed by non-Malaysian media, and social, communal, and nationalistic expectations regarding Malay cinema. There is a conflict between the demands of Western filmic standards, which have become normalised within and outwith the film industry, versus Malay socio-cultural expectations.¹² Another way to view this, however, is that there was a shift in the type of modernity that the films of the respective eras depicted. As was mentioned previously, the type of modernity reflected in the films of the 1950s and 1960s was the more straightforward (i.e. Western) and recognisable, comprising the good life and its rewards/costs, a depiction more accessible to both Malay and non-Malay audiences. The depiction of 'modernity' in more recent films is more 'complicated,' but also more in line with modernity as experienced and/or desired by the long term urban Malays (predominately consumption-based rather than being production-led). As such, it may be time to turn to that depiction within the films themselves.

¹² As we shall see below, also versus the Malaysian modernity project.

Modernity, Urban Space and the Films

The negotiation of 'real' space within the diegetic is strongly linked to an analogous negotiation that the character is undergoing in their 'reel' life. 'Real' space herein is opposed to symbolic space, the inverted commas are to point out that this space is not physically real, but a more accurate depiction of urban space as observed and/or experienced than the various symbolic usages and representations of urban space. 'Real' space in Malay cinema tends to be reserved for characters who are undergoing some negotiation, and that negotiation is frequently a negotiation with modernity. The following chapters will illustrate this point in relation to the re-negotiations of social networks. Within this chapter the negotiation of urban space, the relation of a character with urbanism/modernity, and the negotiation those characters are undertaking in their diegetic lives, particularly with aspects of the (aforementioned) 'bundles of assumptions,' frames the focus of this chapter.

The discussion of 'real' versus symbolic space is complicated when limited to the abstract. As an example, the same or similar venues can be either real or symbolic (or even both) depending on the role they have within the diegetic. For instance, as will be discussed below in relation to the film *Gemilang* ('Glamorous,' Yusof Haslam 1996), a shopping centre can be symbolic (a site of desire) or 'real' - an area of urban space and daily life to be negotiated. Three films will provide illustrations of the points and arguments made so far. The three are all made by popular or famous directors, but are very different in their subject matters, intent, and the opinions depicted. *Gemilang* provides somewhat of a bench-mark, as it is the most unreservedly 'Hollywood' of any of the films discussed herein.¹³ However, the discussion will begin with another film - *Selubung* ('The Veil of Life,' Shuhaimi Baba 1992).

¹³ This is the director's own opinion, with the film he targeted, unsuccessfully as it turned out, a 'professional' Malay audience (New Straits Times 26-3-1998).

Selubung

Selubung stars Deanna Yusoff, M. Nasir, Ida Nerina, and others. The story itself is about a group of friends, first attending university in Australia, then returning to Malaysia. While still in Australia, one of the friends becomes involved with, and then marries, a young fundamentalist Muslim. A couple of the others become involved in an NGO (non-government organisation) called RescAid, which works with Palestinians (all of the group eventually end up doing volunteer work for RescAid). Several of the friends are killed while in the Middle East, and RescAid itself become a terrorist target of some undisclosed anti-Arab/Muslim group or individual. Between all this is a love story, and one woman's (Deanna Yusoff) attempt to balance ideals and living in today's world.

While Deanna Yusoff, and her balancing act between ideals and pragmatics, is the focus of the film, Ida Nerina likewise goes through a negotiation.¹⁴ In the case of Deanna Yusof, her negotiation between the West, Malay tradition, and Islam is 'successful.' Ida Nerina, on the other hand, also attempts to negotiate this territory, but her attempt is less successful (at least immediately). It is strongly implied that it is her retention of links to, and care and concern for, the *kampung* (traditional lifestyle, mores, etc.) that allows Deanna Yusoff to be successful. Indeed, our heroine is initially depicted as a small girl growing up in a fishing village. The depiction of the *kampung* is interesting in itself (as is the case with *Ringgit Kasorga* 1994, also directed by Shuhaimi Baba), as it is portrayed almost exclusively via an aspect of Malay 'culture' - music/drumming in the case of *Selubung*, and dance in the case of *Ringgit Kasorga*. The familial relations, and the advice/support that they provide, are another aspect of traditional Malay life-support networks and moral guardians - which are absent in the Western idea(l) of modernity. However, as important or

¹⁴ I am using the actual names of the actors to avoid any confusion with using the term 'character,' in opposition to 'type,' as discussed in the Introduction. To remind the reader, 'character' indicates a psychologically realistic portrayal rather than the structural representation of a 'type.'

crucial as 'Malay' values are, they only form one panel of the Malaysian triptych which Deanna Yusof is attempting to negotiate - hence the rendering of the *kampung* (and its inhabitants) in symbolic space. M. Nasir plays Deanna Yusoff's Westernised boyfriend and represents the second panel of the triptych, that of Western modernity. *Selubung* is itself is somewhat unbalanced around this character and the 'love story' element. One informant suggested that the 'stitching in' of this sub-story was a concession to commercial necessity. While I feel that there is more than an element of truth to this assertion, the symbolic positioning of the character (Western modernity) is also quite important. M. Nasir's part is also the least 'fleshed-out.' In other words, his part is in fact a 'type,' an aspect of a normative structure which articulates values or clusters of meanings through various representational figures. That the Westernised figure is such a type is perhaps indicative of a 'taken-for-granted'-ness of that version of modernity. Diegetically, one of the ways this 'type-ness' is represented is that M. Nasir is not typically depicted in 'real' space outwith the presence of Deanna Yusoff.

This introduces a potential problem with this formulation, that by and large it remains the main characters (character as in a personality created in a play or novel) who are depicted in 'real' space (as well as in symbolic space), which would be expected as the focus is upon them. It could thus be argued that what is occurring is that 'real' space is more to do with the subjectivity of the important characters, than with necessarily being linked to their negotiations of modernity. In other words, the main characters will be shown in more diverse spaces, as they are more important to the diegesis. Further, other actors will be portrayed in 'real' space as they are only infrequently depicted outwith the presence of the main characters. However, this does not explain why certain important characters are not shown, in and of themselves, within 'real' spaces - as is the case with M. Nasir, or as we will see later

Ning Baizura in *Gemilang*. A suggestion is, therefore, that there is something else taking place, that certain of these main characters, main in that their subjective stances are crucial to the diegesis of the various films, are not undergoing similar developments in the films. That they are not all interacting with urban space/modernity/family/gender relations in the same way, or with the same outcomes.

To return to *Selubung*, Western modernity by extension from M. Nasir's depiction, is represented as an absolute, or ideal, rather than as a realistic (i.e. successful) goal. The same is true for fundamentalist Islam. Ida Nerina is the other character depicted as going through a negotiation between different ideals of modernity. In her case, however, the 'Malay' element is of marginal importance - until the negotiation breaks down that is. As with Deanna, Ida is depicted (in and of herself) in 'real' space - dwelling in and transversing 'real' KL, rather than just symbolic aspects of KL. In Ida's case, her negotiation is depicted as being successful only eventually, after a 'fundamentalist' (there is no question herein of this type of Islam being modernising) wrong turning. Another face of Islam is depicted via the charity RescAid and its workers. This worldly, 'modern,' face does not seek to recreate a historical lifestyle, but to be Muslim in the modern world-as-is.

The analysis of 'real' versus symbolic space is perhaps the most problematic in the example of *Selubung*. Both Ida and Deanna are undergoing negotiations throughout the film, and are therefore frequently depicted in 'real' spaces. Hence, other characters are also frequently portrayed in 'real' space. Ida and Deanna are, however, the instigators of the portrayals, as opposed to M. Nasir who is also a main character, but does not instigate depictions of his own accord. Further, the element of fantasy which erupts around the heroine, seems to push her out of either 'real' or symbolic space into another type of space altogether. There is a scene where

Deanna Yusoff is lying seriously injured, and possibly dying, after a bomb attack upon the RescAid building. Out of nowhere a cloud of butterflies envelopes her, and she recovers soon after. This scene is jarring, as there has been no other fantasy element in the film. In terms of the present discussion, the butterflies possibly represent the *kampung* and/or Malay culture, and this intrusion seeks to symbolically represent the sanctity and inherent necessity of this aspect of Deanna's negotiation. While questions remain, analysing *Selubung* in this way does provide answers to some of the ambiguities within the film, such the love story 'problem,' and the 'theme park-ness' of the depiction of the *kampung*.

Femina

Femina (1993) was directed by Aziz M. Osman, and starred Erma Fatima, Eman Manan, Susan Lankaster, and others. *Femina* on the one hand falls within the Malay genre of a love story between an unlikely couple (royalty and commoner for instance), in this case between a middle-class 'hard-line' feminist (Erman Fatima) and an unreconstructed working class male (Eman Manan). Erma Fatima plays a journalist for a women's magazine operating under the guidance of Susan Lankaster. Via a set of circumstances, Erma's character is brought into contact with a chauvinist mini-bus driver (Eman Manan). Partly due to office politics within the magazine, partly due to the immoral/unethical actions of Susan Lankaster's character, and partly due to the influence of Eman Manan's character, Erma's character comes to question some of her assumptions and presumptions regarding gender relations in Malaysia. As such, the film is also about the type of negotiations, if exaggerated, that Malay women are facing (and will, therefore, also be discussed in the following chapter, which deals specifically with gender). It is a crucially urban context that the story takes place within, and hinges upon, and which I discuss here.

While somewhat 'jumping the gun,' as the actual negotiations will be discussed in the following chapter, the negotiations are depicted to a great extent through the types of spaces that the protagonists are inhabiting. *Femina* is an interesting example as it most closely aligns 'Western,' and 'Westernised' space, with immorality (or at least unMalay morals, though there is certainly a judgement as to the superiority of Malay morals). Susan Lancaster's office and home, the magazine offices, and initially the spaces linked to Erma, are depicted as 'Western' rather than contemporary Malaysian (compared with offices in reality, or even to those depicted in *Selubung* or *Gemilang*). This depiction points to a particular juxtapositioning of different symbols - on one hand of 'real' Malay-Malaysian urban life and imaginary, of the working class, and of 'traditional' Malay values retaining their efficacy, versus that of Western (or hyper-Western) Malay-Malaysian urban life and imaginary. Perhaps the best example of this is the scene where Erma confronts Susan in the latter's home. The crux of the scene is when Susan's lover wanders in. During a rather emotional exchange, Susan says to Erma "At least *I'm* not a lesbian!" (in English). This exchange forces Erma to question her own morals, actions and presumptions. As Erma begins questioning her values and re-evaluating Malay morals (particularly those involving with the family and gender roles), she is progressively depicted in 'real' space, areas of KL which are outwith the 'Western' symbolic paradigm (for example the mini-bus company's parking lot), or more particularly, spaces outwith those most implicated with the path of Malaysian modernity most bound up with uncritical Western modernity. Here, this agenda is linked to upper middle class Malays.¹⁵

Eman Manan's character also goes through a period of self-analysis, although not as dramatic as Erma Fatima's. Eman moves from an extreme MCP (male

¹⁵ I doubt that there is any coincidence that Susan Lancaster was cast in this role. She often plays European or 'mixed-race' characters. This point perhaps supports the argument that there is an alignment drawn between the West and upper class Malays within the diegesis of this particular film.

chauvinist pig) position, to a position which could be described as a 'reasonable man,' as for example in the closing scenes where he lauds the 'Malay' way and denounces Western feminism. This portrayal, the 'reasonable man,' is a cliché within Malay dramas, i.e. he is a 'type.' The 'reasonable man' is typically a figure of some authority (teacher, parent, etc.), who manages to defuse and successfully (from the point of view of the hero/heroine, and therefore to the audience) mediate a situation of great tension. He is also, almost exclusively, a he (see also in this regard Kaur 1993: 87-88; Wang Kay Lim 1994: 214). This 'reasonable man' diegetically represents authority (although not necessarily political authority) and the views/positions of authority, via his manifestation of 'common sense,' i.e. the views and opinions of 'the people' (which as many theorists have pointed out is linked to if not dominated by the authorities' discourses).

Erma and Eman's characters meet outdoors, when a photographic 'shoot' for the magazine (featuring several young and attractive female models) creates a traffic accident involving the mini-bus. An angry exchange between the two sets out their respective perspectives. The logic of the situation (he is a mini-bus driver) suggests that they would meet out of doors. However, after an initial period of 'setting the scene,' showing various recognisable KL sights (some of them, but not all, are of the type which mark KL as being the avatar of Malaysian modernity), the meeting itself takes place in a recognisably KL area - near Merdeka Square. Arguably, the locale serves to implicate modernity (as it is in KL), but not necessarily a Western modernity, but rather a Malaysian modernity. That the site of the meeting (and modernity) is also a site of argument opens the possibility that this site is, in itself, a locus of argument. As the site is also not a stereotypical image, there is reason to ponder that, at least within this diegesis, the official agenda/vision of modernity, has not as yet won the discursive battle. This was true at least for when the film was

made. Due to recent events, this area is much more closely implicated in official versus unofficial conflicts. The inclusion of a world's tallest flag pole and world's largest television screen, mean that Merdeka (Independence) Square, even beyond its name, has had a 'official' presence imposed upon it. Even more recently however, many of the *Reformasi* (political reformation movement) demonstrations were held in and around this area, counter-imposing an 'unofficial' association onto the area.

To return to our players, as the two enter into their respective negotiations with modernity, they are more frequently depicted in 'unmarked' urban spaces, entering 'marked' urban spaces when involved with those characters having 'set' positions vis-à-vis modernity. Interestingly, the climax takes place in a television studio, an exquisitely modern location. The dénouement however, takes place outwith any representational space whatsoever. The ending is a shot of a photograph of Erma and Eman surrounded by children (theirs by implication). I will be discussing this scene, and indeed the film itself, again in the next chapter, so for now we will move on to *Gemilang*.

Gemilang

Gemilang ('Glamorous' 1997) is directed by Yusof Haslam and stars Erra Fazira, Ning Baizura, Hans Isaac, and Jalaludin Hassan. *Gemilang* is based on *The Bodyguard* (Mick Jackson 1992), and also perhaps on the Hong Kong movie, itself based on *The Bodyguard*, *Zhong Nan Ha bao bai* ('The Bodyguard from Beijing,' Corey Yuen 1994). As remarked upon in Chapter 2, *Gemilang* is the most self-consciously 'Hollywood' film of any referred to in this thesis. The film also contains the most 'marked' urban spaces, with the upper middle class/ruling class spaces dominating the film. In contrast to *Femina*, these spaces do not seem to be expressly linked to a particularly Western view of modernity, rather to one unsatisfactory

agenda amongst other agendas. I stress seem, as there are various Western markers (such as the doll dressed in a white wedding dress). However, as opposed to films such as *Femina*, here this is not an unnegotiated agenda, but one that is partially Malay.

As with *Femina*, space is linked to the negotiation of modernity. Erra Fazira plays a famous singer/actress whose career and lifestyle has been supported by a 'sugar-daddy' (Jamaludin Hassan).¹⁶ However, she begins to receive threatening letters, and is being followed by a stalker. During an attack by assailants, Erra is rescued by Hans Isaac. Erra hires him as her personal manager/bodyguard and they become progressively more emotionally entangled. Erra's 'sugar-daddy' does not take this at all well, and attempts to threaten Hans off. Eventually, there is a climactic show down with Erra being forced to choose between glamour and love. In the end, between the problems that fame has caused her and the influence of the down-to-earth Hans, Erra chooses love. Critically, for this thesis, a similar 'journey' is undertaken by the lead female character in *Gemilang* as in *Femina*. Both Erra Fazira and Erma Fatima begin from a position of more-or-less uncritical acceptance of the *status quo* (elite lifestyles and Western style feminism respectively), and go through a period of personal re-evaluation (in itself a significant marker of modernity) and find happiness within the successful negotiation they undergo. While in *Gemilang* Western modernity is not expressly referred to, there are bases for arguing that the elite lifestyle and vision of modernity depicted are implicitly linked to Western visions of modernity (dress, mores, life-styles). Probably the strongest link is that of capitalism.

Ning Baizura plays a friend of Erra, who actually is a rival and ultimately a threat. Ning is variously depicted as petulant, jealous, lazy and of dubious morals.

¹⁶ Both Erra Fazira and Ning Baizura are singer/actresses in real life. This follows a long trend in Malaysian cinema, harking back to the very early days and *bangsawan* players moving into filmacting.

Through several tricks, she draws Hans into accompanying her on a shopping excursion when she is supposed to be working on a film. This set of scenes mirrors a set of scenes where Hans accompanies Erra on a very different type of shopping trip. The differences are explicitly plotted and manifested. Hans and Ning go to a variety of very up-scale shopping centres (sites of desire) and end up in a Western-style café. Hans and Erra (who is disguised) go to Petaling Street market and Chow Kit (areas of KL which are relatively marked as Chinese and dubious). Hans and Erra end their excursion by having a soft drink along a road (KL does not get anymore 'real' than that), a space which is certainly 'modern,' but not expressly 'Western.' As part of her journey/negotiation and re-evaluation, Erra considers, and thereby presents for our consideration, that 'real' urban space in Malaysia is not just Malay, but that it is also not exclusively dominated by the elites' agendas. As in *Femina*, the internal negotiation is reflected in the types of urban spaces that the characters are transversing/inhabiting.

Thinking about the City

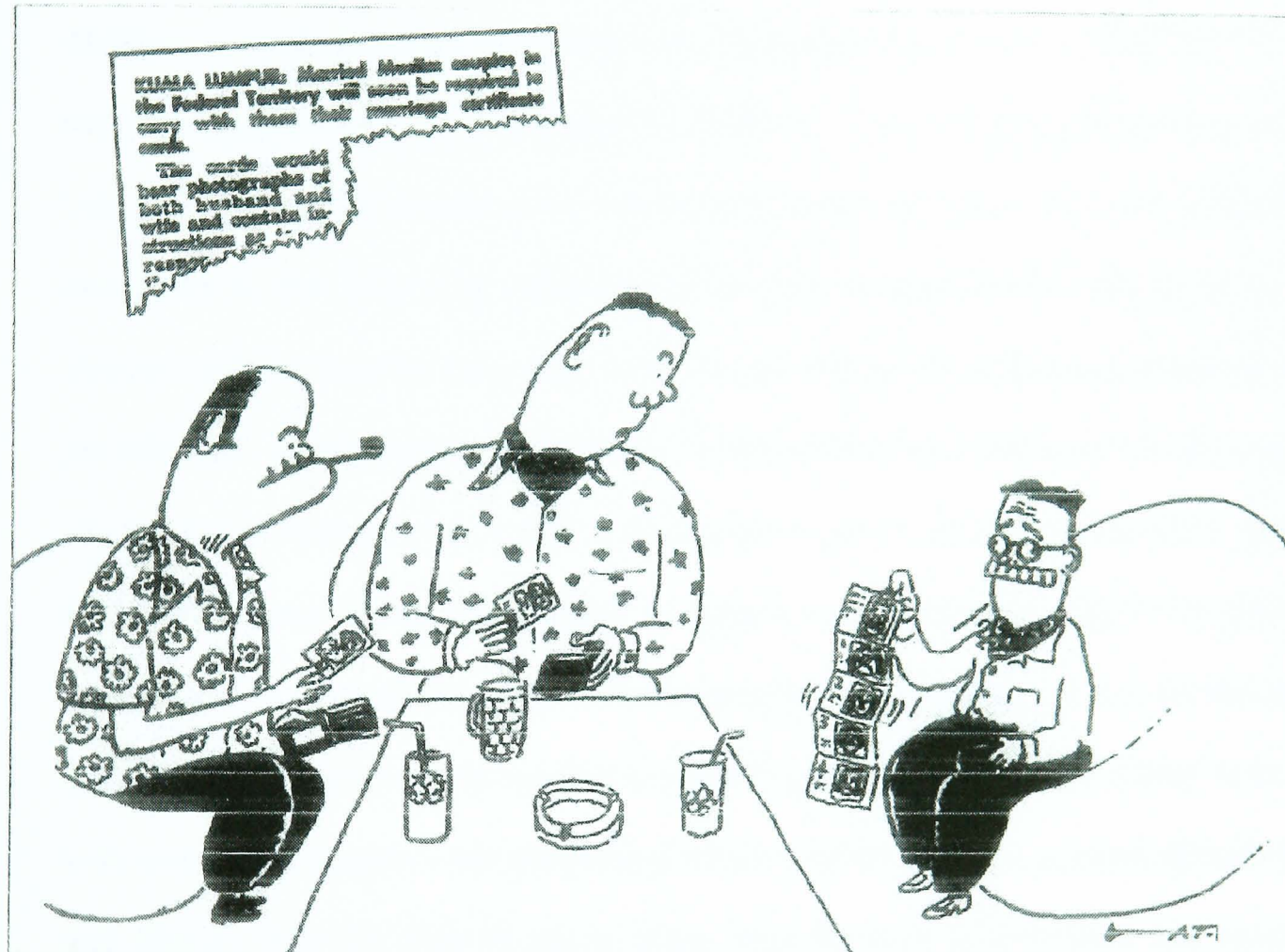
This chapter has dealt with urbanisation, a crucial component of modernity and modernisation. Urbanisation is a particularly informative institution, as it has been both a recent and rapid phenomenon for a significant proportion of the Malay community. And while the historical rurality of Malay people, and the degree to which Malay people were cognisant of urbanism, are both moot, the point remains that the practical experience of city life and its demands remain new to a large portion of Malay people. The spiritual home, if not actual natal home, for most Malays remains the *kampung*. The point made within this chapter is that urban and urbanisation take on an ambiguous conceptual space, being the locus of both aspiration and immorality. This ambiguity is 'played out' both in everyday life, and

in the films under discussion. The city is an area of life, and modernity, that is to be negotiated.

In the films discussed above, the details of the views depicted, the agenda portrayed, and even the audiences being targetted, are diverse. However, they share certain characteristics, that urban life, and by extension modernity, remains a contested area, one that inhabits different positions in divergent imaginaries. Further, as yet no one of these agendas has 'won out' and as such remain malleable. While there is a perceptible trajectory, in this case towards what could be regarded as an upper middle class vision of the city, this vision is questioned and contested. However, the upper middle class vision of, and engagement with, the city is itself ambiguous, as depictions of the city in the films suggest. The city remains an arena of negotiation even for the long term urban Malays, and a site where those negotiations may be inscribed either physically, as with KL's architecture, or symbolically, as in the films described above.

It will be interesting to see what changes (if indeed any) occur either within the cinema or in public discourses, as the newly urban middle-class, whose views are as yet only marginally represented in the cinema, become more securely established. One aspect of the trajectory mentioned above is the manner in which lower middle class homes 'evolve,' taking on the characteristics of upper middle class homes. It remains to be seen whether this physical change is a possible metaphor for a similar shift in values and ideals. As yet though this is not the case, as we shall see below in terms of the changes in social networks that urban life has helped to promote.

Chapter 4: Gender



(Text reads - KUALA LUMPUR: Married Muslim couples in the Federal Territories will soon be required to carry with them their marriage certificate cards.

The cards would bear photographs of both husband and wife and contain instructions as...)

Overview

As we saw in the preceding chapter, urbanism as a social dynamic is both the initiator and outcome of change, it is at the same time an opening of other discourses and is itself an open discourse. Gender functions similarly. Dynamics of modernisation, such as capitalism and urbanism, have been the catalysts for the creation of new discourses around the changing roles, mores, possibilities, and tensions clustered around Malay gender relations. The changing gender relations in turn have opened spaces for new discourses in other social arenas (such as kinship, discussed in the following chapter). What will be specifically discussed in this chapter are the societal fears and tensions, as well as the expressed sense of new possibilities, which the re-negotiations of this particular social network have given rise to. I will discuss how, within a Malaysian context, the interrelations of gender have 'played out.' These possibilities, negotiations, and tensions affect both females and males. This point still seems to be a necessary clarification; '[i]t is far too often assumed that when the term gender is used it specifies women, as if they were the only gendered category - the something which is other than the general' (Broch-Due and Rudie 1993: 2). This is not to argue that the new possibilities and tensions wrought by modernisation are either open to equal and universal access, or provoke equal cross gender effects. However, the issue of equal access is as pertinent within sex/gender boundaries as it is outwith those boundaries. The nexus of transformed expectations, restrictions, and possibilities created in the wake of change is not experienced in identical ways even in urban Malay society, as we shall see through the course of this chapter.

South-East Asia, inclusive of Malaysia, is often marked out as an area wherein gender relations are relatively complementary, where gender relations undergo little in the way of differentiation, stigmatisation, or over/undervaluation,

and where women 'enjoy' a higher status relative to surrounding areas (Errington 1990: 1-8; Ong 1990; Wazir Karim 1992; Carsten 1997: 24). The word *relative* is quite important in this assessment. Errington points out that this view has rarely been corroborated with ethnographic evidence (1990: 2-3). It may be worthwhile to 'unpack' these issues, and some of the assumptions underpinning them, as specific studies often focus on inequalities rather than egalitarianism (see for instance Ong 1987, 1990; Peletz 1988, 1996; Ackerman 1991).

As we saw in the chapter on urbanism, the Malaysian 'middle-class' is not a monolithic entity (Kahn 1996). This is illustrative of an argument that both explicitly and implicitly runs through this thesis, that the specification by which the group studied is delineated leads to very different analyses. For instance in the last chapter, lumping all 'middle-class' Malays into one analytical 'basket' (usually implicitly) led to methodological and analytical problems (see for instance Jomo 1996: 74-96; or Jones 1997: 150-151). In terms of gender, we will have to undergo a similar specification of *who* we are talking about. Ironically, though usefully for our purposes here, two societies that Errington expressly contrasts to South-East Asia (inclusive of Malaysia) in terms of gender relations, are India and China (1990: 4). However, Chinese-Malaysians and Indian-Malaysians make up significant proportions of the Malaysian population. Therefore, either gender relations within these groups have undergone significant changes, or that something is being omitted, namely that particular populations within South-East Asia are being foregrounded.¹ This chapter will continue to focus on lower middle-class newly urban Malays, although other socio-economic groups will be discussed.

A perennial problem for ethnographic work is the subjective/objective debate, namely, what cultural baggage is being brought into the field. Errington highlights

¹ Indeed, it would be interesting to compare gender relations/ethos between Chinese and Chinese-Malaysian and Indian and Indian-Malaysian societies (with the relevant warning as to specificity taken heed of).

certain problem areas in the field of gender relations, specifically, Western ideas/ideals regarding status and indeed of gender itself (1990: 5, 7, and *passim*). An instance given is that of status; because Javanese women have a relatively high level of financial autonomy and control, Western researchers ascribe them a 'high status' in Javanese society. However, that self-same financial control may be the opposite of the type of power valued in Javanese society and therefore may serve to diminish women's status (1990: 7). I would go on to posit that, at least in terms of Malaysia and Indonesia, that some presumptions regarding Islam are another instance of prejudging the situation (see in this context Said 1981). For various reasons, the Islamic mores and praxis of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states in particular, have served as the trope for Muslim praxis elsewhere, not least in terms of gender relations. As such, cultural markers that have particular meanings within Malay society (though not necessarily agreed upon even in this context), become conflated with/into a very different set of discourses and intentions. Female dress is one example. This issue will be discussed in more detail later, but at present I would like to suggest that the ideas of *purdah* (head to toe covering of the female body) and veiling are presumed to be the norm regarding Malay women's modes of dress (see for instance Sandborg 1993). Further, factors such as the aforementioned low status of women in surrounding areas, and the high levels of prostitution in many countries in South-East Asia, leads to certain expectations as to the role and value of women in South-East Asia and Malaysia. To what extent these presumptions have contributed to the aforementioned truncated discourse of gender is moot, but should be borne in mind. All of the above taken into consideration, two points remain: that Malay women *do* play a very large and visible role in daily life - both at home and in public; and that this point does not negate the arguments made in more specific works, that we are still talking about *relative* levels of autonomy, status, or possibilities. As we

focus the analytical lens down, gender differentiation, inequalities, and areas of tensions and apprehensions become foregrounded.

As mentioned previously, much of the anthropological writing on Malays has been in the context of village studies (Firth, Rosemary 1966; Firth, Raymond 1966; Wilder 1982; Peletz 1988, 1993; and Carsten 1987, 1989, 1997). The depictions of gender herein typically reflect the aforementioned view of relatively undifferentiated relations and female autonomy. Peletz (1996) focuses on the male aspect of gender within the village milieu, with similarly distinct findings and analyses, agreeing with other researchers as to prescribed marriage roles and mores for men and women (see for instance Wazir Karim 1992, Roziah Omar 1994, Carsten 1997). Men are ideally to act as 'elder brother' to their wives (amongst other responsibilities), and wives often refer to their husbands as *abang* (elder brother). What Peletz has found in the context of 'working-class' rural Malay men is that they can not fulfil their ideal roles, as the financial remuneration attached to the employment opportunities open to them do not allow them to provide adequately for their families (1996). This failing intersects with female fiscal autonomy and a relatively unstigmatised view of divorce (within this segment of Malay society). Discursively, the outcome of the above, is that working-class Malay men have come to be regarded as lazy, shiftless, and poor husbands and fathers; ironically echoing the colonial discourse of the 'lazy native' (Peletz 1996; see also Syed Hussein Alatas 1977; Mahathir Mohamad 1997). Peletz' analysis has been useful in that it illustrates that opportunities are not universal and unproblematic, and that this inequality is not one-way traffic.² These points have influenced the following discussion, and will be combined with a regard for the unexpected bundles of assumptions and expectations inherent to the processes of modernisation. This nexus will form the backbone of this chapter, as it did with the

² This is not to say that his analysis is unique in this regard, but that it is explicit in its focus on men as well as women.

previous chapter, beginning with the impact of capitalism and urbanism on gender relations.

The *Kampung* (reprise)

As in the previous chapter, to move forward it is sometimes useful to begin with a step back. Returning to the *kampung* as discussed in the previous chapter, this section looks at the village constructs and discourses of gender. The relative undifferentiation of gender discussed above now becomes rather expressly differentiated. Gender roles and expectations are inculcated from an early age (RoZIAH Omar 1994: 22-23; Carsten 1997: 60-62). Beginning with gender socialisation, this section will analyse gender through marriage, employment, and old age. As may be apparent already, gender and kinship are highly interwoven, and though they are heuristically separated here, a discussion of one without the other is compromised (Peletz 1996: 6-7). Further, women's identities, in particular, are often expressed as, if not conceived in, their kinship roles: daughter; wife; mother; etc. The discussion begins with the first of these roles.

Gender roles, mores, and expectations are cultural artefacts. In other words, children in Malaysia as much as in other parts of the world are socialised (explicitly or otherwise) to be 'proper' boys and girls. In Malaysia this socialisation begins at a relatively early age, and is quite explicit (RoZIAH Omar 1994: 22-23; Carsten 1997: 60-66). Further, young girls will often copy the modes of dress of their elder sisters and mothers, including wearing the *tudung* (small headscarf). Informants stated, on at least one occasion, that wearing the *tudung* was a matter of choice rather than a result of parental pressure (*cf.* RoZIAH Omar 1994: 27). Wider social pressure is another matter, however, and there may be significant pressure upon young women to wear the *tudung* (Ong 1990: 270; Ackerman 1991; RoZIAH Omar 1994). Other informants

stated that once a woman began wearing the *tudung*, if she then stopped wearing it, she would be regarded as no longer a good Muslim. The issue of dress is merely one of the choices that mark a lifetime of negotiations, gender or otherwise, that women face (Ong 1990: *passim*).

Daughters are trained from an early age to display Malay/Islamic female values and duties (Roziah Omar 1994: 22-29; Carsten 1997: 65-66). Malay girls are expected to be obedient, quiet and feminine (Ong 1990: 261). Further, by the time they are 7-8 years old, Malay daughters are expected to help with housework, and within a few years will be looking after their younger siblings.³ The Islamic ideals of reason and shame are taught at home and in religious classes. Malay society places high value upon women embodying those principles, if not acting as the very personification of those values (Ong 1990: 261--262; Roziah Omar 1994). Between these various expectations, Malay girls are relatively constrained in both their spatial movement and social interaction. This point is relative, as school provides a certain respite, though education also contains its own arena of expectation, and class plays a large factor in how 'rigid' Malay gender ideology is patrolled (Ackerman 1991: 199-200).

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there has been little written in terms of male gender roles, expectations, and/or duties (although there has been a lot written about males in other respects). This is particularly true in terms of the socialisation of boys. By implication, boys are less constrained than are girls, and from observation this seems to indeed be the case. For example, young boys, up to about 12 years of age, are a common sight playing in the streets of the housing area where I was living. Young girls (up to about 7-10) were also seen playing in the street, but pubescent girls generally were not. Adolescent boys were usually away from home, either at school, playing football, or 'hanging out' at shopping centres.

³ As we will see in the next chapter, this often continues after marriage.

Adolescent girls, as stated, will usually be helping at home or at school.⁴ This is not to say that there are no expectation for boys to act appropriately, but that, except for the eldest son (who, after a certain age is expected to help act as host to house-guests), they bear few duties at home (Ackerman 1991: 200; Roziah Omar 1994: 22). Boys however have more expectations placed upon them in terms of their religious education, attending school and religious school, whereas attendance at religious school for girls is largely more of an option. Boys, in general, appear to be under much less control in terms of either their spatial movement or social activities than are girls (Carsten 1997: 63). It is no wonder then that, as we shall see, women regard marriage as freeing them from their duties as daughters, whereas men regard marriage as imposing responsibilities upon them (Roziah Omar 1994; Carsten 1997).

Weddings are the most elaborated and important of life cycle rituals (Carsten 1997: 191; see also Rudie 1993; Peletz 1996). 'In order to be a full-fledged social adult, one must enter into a legitimate marriage (with a socially approved member if the opposite sex), and bear or father (or adopt) children' (Peletz 1996: 304). As the quote relates, the institution of marriage is of no small importance to Malays. In regard to marriage practises, Malay society is termed endogamous; i.e. marriage occurs in-group. Another way of stating this is that they marry 'close' (Carsten 1997: 16). This 'closeness' can often take the form of selecting marriage partners for physical, economic, and social similarity, even down to matching names (1997: 16). Historically, and certainly in the *kampung*, marriages were arranged, and it was not unknown for the couple in question to be unacquainted with one another before the wedding itself. As such, it is therefore hardly surprising that marriage could be a stressful period for the couple involved (1997: 69, 75, 215). This may have had some bearing on divorce statistics for the Malaysian peninsula, which, particularly up until

⁴ For about half of the period of my field work (the family in question moved), the daughter of the one of our neighbours was often seen riding around on a motorcycle. She was the subject of some negative commentary by women in the neighbourhood.

the 1970s, were 'spectacular' (Wilder 1995: 319; *cf.* Carsten 1997: 70-72). There are other possible explanations, principally that after divorce the couple were free to marry partners of their own choice, and these marriages were much more likely to last (Carsten 1997: 70-72).

As various commentators point out, marriage is about making ties between families (in-laws, or *besan*) and producing the next generation (Peletz 1988, 1996; Carsten 1991, 1992, 1997; Rudie 1993). This aspect of first or arranged marriages in particular, could contribute to the aforementioned stress upon the married couple. Further, men and women, or rather wives and husbands, have definite roles within the marriage bond. This point illustrates the issue of complementarity in Malay gender relations, for as Peletz asserts, the concepts of *man* and *woman* 'do not have all that much cultural salience,' as opposed to *husband/father* and *wife/mother* (1996: 5). As Peletz also points out, however, the roles and responsibilities that wives and husbands are expected to uphold work to compound the above mentioned stress and uncertainty (1996: *passim*), as does the high status of marriage in Malay society (Wilder 1995; Carsten 1997). Principle of the duties a Malay couple have placed upon them is to have children. In fact, failure to produce children is a common reason/justification for divorce. The discussion of expectations entails further explanation.

Normative Malay gender expectations are focused on the ideologies of shame and reason/passion (Peletz 1996). Reason (*akal*) sets human apart from animals, which are composed solely of passion (*nafsu*); therefore, proper human action is to demonstrate reason and ignore/suppress passion. In official Islamic/Malay cosmology, women are regarded as having inherently more *nafsu* than do men, and therefore must continuously demonstrate their ability to control that passion, via shame (*malu*). 'Young girls were required to be bashful and modest [...] adolescent

daughters were expected to stay close at home and to keep a circumspect distance from kinsmen. [Nor were women] supposed to sit in coffee shops or to seek male company' (Ong 1990: 261). However, in popular discourse the cosmological ordering is reversed, and men are discursively constructed as being more likely to give in to their passion than women; that they are unreliable, and they take younger wives to satisfy their lust. Either way, one result of this construction for a newly married couple is that they will express little affection in public, though this will change over the course of their marriage (Carsten 1997: 94-95).

With the birth of children, the socialisation process begins anew. Children also mark a new status for the parents, with concomitant duties and expectations. Children are highly valued in Malay society and the roles of mother and father are thus of considerable importance. Raybeck illustrates how socially stigmatised activities (namely prostitution) taking place outside the village, may and can be overlooked provided the person acts as a good parent in the village (1986: 55-74). On the one hand the visible manifestation of 'shame,' opposed to any possible 'over there' immoral behaviour (see also Wilder 1982 regarding here/there distinctions), in combination with the successful transmission of those same values to the next generation, is an important method of acquiring reputation and status. On the other hand, social censure puts a high price on visible non-conformity (Peletz 1996: 25-32). It is principally the role of women to visibly manifest 'proper' Malay attributes, and to transmit those attributes to their children. For this and other reasons, such as the near-absence of men, women have control over the day-to-day household affairs, including economic responsibility (Carsten 1997: 95).

With old age, the relations, particularly of authority, between men and women changes significantly. Men spend more time outside of the house, and take little part in the day-to-day running of the household (Carsten 1997: 76-77).

Conversely, women's authority within the household increases with age. Also in contrast to the situation with older men, older women are held in considerable respect. As we have already seen, younger women, such as daughters, or daughters-in-law, are conscripted to undertake household duties. The result of is that older women not only have more authority, but also more time to engage in their own activities (Carsten 1997: 78). While Carsten's work was in a village community, the increased authority of women over time was also a notable feature of the urban situation I was engaged with, though a likewise de-valuation of men was not apparent. The latter point may be linked to the changing socio-economic patterns of urban life, particularly Islamic discourses and a potentially increased working life. There was a marked difference in the tendency of men to spend time away from their homes, with older married men spending a large portion of their free time away from home, whereas younger married men spent, relatively, more of their non-working time at home.⁵

Malay Women and Malaysia Inc.

Aihwa Ong's works explores the impact of capitalism and urbanism, as well as religion and the nation-state, and their influences upon women's lives (1987, 1990). In this regard, her work is instructive, as the forces she tracks are diverse and interact in manifold ways. As an instance, and as will be discussed in more detail below, Islamicisation programmes have been undertaken by the government - though these have not necessarily been in the ways and to the extent that the government may have originally intended (Muhammad Ikmal Said 1996). This increase in Islamic discourses (state-sponsored and otherwise) has interacted with other social/political/economic processes and discourses to effect particular sites of tension and/or possibility (Ong 1990; Ackerman 1991; Ong & Peletz 1995).

⁵ This age difference in 'domesticity' would be an interesting subject for future study.

Ong's work falls broadly into two main categories: working-class factory women (1987); and Malay women more generally, with emphasis on the middle-class (1990). Dealing with the former first, Ong's findings demonstrate the tensions young working-class women (usually rural immigrants) working in factories undergo in their daily lives, both in terms of their employment and in wider social life as well. During the 1980s in particular, the Malaysian government opened the country to outside investment (Jomo 1995; Gomez & Jomo 1997; Jones 1997). One result of this was the burgeoning of factories owned by multinational companies. Young women in particular were recruited as workers in these factories, as they would provide (theoretically) both cheap and docile labour (Ong 1987; Ackerman 1991). Whether or not the factory owner got what they expected, this choice had implications for their young female employees. One of those implications was/is the way these young women came to be regarded by wider Malay society. Indeed, a new term was coined - *minah karan* - as was introduced in the previous chapter. As noted, *minah karan* translates as 'electric girls' with the double reference to unbridled sexuality and their places of employment (Ackerman 1991). The former of these translations illustrates the apprehension with which Malay society in general beheld these newly 'uncontrolled' young women (in the 1980s, at least, these young workers were usually housed in factory owned housing, i.e. outwith the control/influence of their families). Amy Mastura, who plays the protagonist of *Puteri Impian* ('Dream Princess,' Aziz M. Osman 1997) starts off as one of these factory workers, and is portrayed in just this type of situation. For the women themselves, this ambiguous, if not negative, perception compounds the pressures inherent to their employment. As various commentators have gone on to argue, the tensions these women face both within and outwith the factory gates is released/expressed by attacks of mass hysteria (Ackerman & Lee 1978; Lee & Ackerman 1980; Ackerman 1991), a veritable

'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1985).

Ong's work on Malay women in general similarly tracks complex interactions of ideologies and counter-ideologies, and their effects upon society. Built upon an axis of state and Islam, she demonstrates how their variously competing and coinciding discourses intersect with the forces of capitalism and urbanism (both physical and ideological). To state briefly, Ong argues that the Malaysian government, or more particularly UMNO, leaned towards a more secular capitalist agenda (1990; see also Gomez and Jomo 1997; and Jones 1997). However, the UMNO 'heartland' was, and to some extent remains, the rural *kampung*. This heartland came under threat from PAS (the Islamic opposition party). To counter PAS encroachment, UNMO undertook, arguably was forced to undertake, a more Islamic programme and discourse. *Dakwah* forces in the 1970s and 1980s compounded this 'problem' for the government. By making certain *dakwah* groups illegal and co-opting others, UMNO attempted to establish itself as the authoritative force regarding Islam in Malaysia (Ackerman 1991; Peletz 1993). At the same time the government continued with its capitalist agendas, resulting in a discourse that could be referred to as 'nationalist Islam,' or religious nationalism (Lee 1990: *passim*; Ong 1990: 270) Ong follows these two discourses through to their practical effects upon Malay women, and in particular the contradictory 'official' roles - as consumers, as producers of the next generation, and prudent household managers on one hand; and their Islamic roles on the other - as moral guardians and exemplars (1990). Further, while these two discourses have entered into 'public consciousness,' they have not entered with equal force. Capitalist rhetoric and ideologies provided women with more autonomy, whereas Islamic discourses and ideologies (government initiated or otherwise) contradicted, undermined, and eventually superseded this 'progressive' step for women. Indeed, Ong argues that Islamic discourses on gender

issues were actually a backlash against the female-valuing capitalist discourse (1990).

In short, within these discourses, counter-discourses and synthesised discourses, two points of view became promoted simultaneously. Malay women have duties and responsibilities as workers and mothers, and as repositories and transmitters of shame and deference. It is probably worth stressing that these various rhetorics did not affect all Malay women equally - a point of some significance. Ong is not the only one to have pointed out the multiplicity of forces Malay women (in particular) find themselves entangled within. Wazir Karim, for instance, demonstrates the effects upon Malay women's worlds of the twin forces of Islam and *adat* (custom or customary law/practice), and negotiations they make between the two (Wazir Karim 1992; see also Peletz 1988, 1996). We could add to this mix Islamic nationalism, internationalism/modernity, and other discourses, not to mention individual expression (Ong & Peletz 1995: 5-7). To illustrate the types of negotiations that Malay women attempt, the issue of female modes of dress might be of use.

As an example of an instance where nationalism, Islam, and the West (or perhaps better termed internationalism) are manifested (or not), female dress provides an intriguing microcosm of much wider negotiation strategies and/or possibilities. Various modes and articles of dress are discursively and ideologically linked to certain meta-narratives of Malay identity. The *mini telekung* (shoulder length headscarf) or other types of headscarf (*tudung*), and the way they are worn, are symbols of Islamic consciousness/practice. Certain dress styles: *baju kedah*; *baju kurung*; and *baju kebaya*, are marked as being 'traditional' Malay garments.⁶ Other clothes, which are marked as international or modern (such as jeans, T-shirts, and trainers), form another mode. Further, for many if not most women, it is not a matter

⁶ *Baju kedah* is a short loose blouse over a sarong, *baju kurung* is a long loose blouse over a sarong, and *baju kebaya* is a fitted jacket over a sarong. They are listed here in what might be regarded as an ascending order of elegance.

of wholly one or another of these modes, but of combining them, for instance wearing a *tudung* over a T-shirt and jeans. It should come as no real surprise that dress modes have changed over the course of time. The choice of wearing a *tudung* has increased since the 1970s (Ackerman 1991), and an article in the fashion section of one of the national newspapers as late as 1984 was actively promoting the wearing of 'traditional' Malay dress such as the *baju kurung* (Malay Mail 1984).⁷ Dress modes both manifest social pressures and ideological rhetorics and allow for individual negotiations of those pressures/rhetorics, as well as being expressions of personality.

Clothes are transformed into symbols, sometimes costumes, often disguises; the allure of the accoutrements of the city anything from Vogue to Max Factor make-up collide with notions of Malay propriety; desires for financial and personal independence spark guilt and a sense of betraying tradition (Far Eastern Economic Review 21/12/1989: 33).

This largely intra-group negotiation is in a dialectic relationship with inter-group discourses such as post-colonial capitalism, multiculturalism, and nationhood, all of which impact upon these gender/identity negotiations. This is not to argue that factors such as familial or peer pressure to adopt one or another of these modes are of no influence upon any one woman's decisions. As an instance, peer pressure upon young female university students to don the *tudung* is very strong (Ong 1990: 269-270), and once worn, to discontinue wearing the *tudung* is to as much admit to no longer being a conscientious Muslim. Conversely, women who choose not to adopt Islamic markers are not *necessarily* seen as 'bad' girls, rather, this latter point introduces a further distinction in this discussion, that of class. *Minah karan*, as we

⁷ The implication being that at this point in time most urban Malay women in their 20s and 30s were not wearing such dress.

saw earlier, are ascribed a loose morality, even if they dress and act demurely. On the other hand, upper middle-class women are far less likely to adopt dress modes marked as expressly Islamic, yet do not necessarily suffer such ascriptions.

Interestingly, Ong states that '[e]mphasizing sexual charms, married women's clothing was in sharp contrast to unmarried girls' (1990: 262), whereas from my observations the opposite is at least as arguable. Part of the problem here is in regard to whom we are referring. Lower middle class (married) women are currently more likely in general to express markers of Islamic nationalism (combining *tudung* with *baju kurung*) than are upper middle class women. It could be argued that there are modalities within modalities, and that dress-as-class-marker is 'read' differently from, though concomitantly with, dress-as-morality-marker. Conversely, the matter could be interpreted as generational, with the unmarried women potentially being one generation more 'urban' than their married counterparts. Indeed, this may be a case of the urban milieu opening a 'space' for women to express their identity.

The one, almost universal, constant to these dress modes is their adherence to the Islamic dictate to cover the *aurat* ('nakedness' - shoulders, breasts, and hair/head), with the partial exception of the head. The Islamic prescription to cover the *aurat* fits in well with general South-East Asian body modesty (this is another area where the high regional incidence of prostitution has adversely affected Western perceptions of South-East Asian women). In general, again excepting the head/hair, this prohibition is followed no matter which dress mode is adopted. An interesting cinematic example of this comes from the film *Panas* ('Hot,' Nurhalim Ismail 1998), where one of the (many) scenes cut from the film featured the female lead in a bikini.⁸

While the above may suggest a 'frumpiness' to Malay dress, this is not the case. Aside from outright *purdah* (head-to-toe covering of the female body), which is

⁸ However, as was discussed in Chapter 2, this same scene was used to advertise one of the glossy entertainment magazines. Modes within modes, in this case of censorship.

rarely practised and was looked upon ambiguously by most of my female informants, these modes can be made more, or less, sexual/sensual depending upon personal preferences. This was a point that women spoke quite candidly about. A further aspect to the issue of dress, is the pleasure, and care and effort that women take over their choices of material, colours, and styles. On one occasion, I had the opportunity to accompany my foster-mother on a trip to her dress-maker. After the style was determined, a *baju kurung*, each potential piece of fabric was checked and evaluated for colour, pattern, and quality. This process lasted well over an hour, and neither my foster-mother nor the dress-maker hurried the matter. Interestingly, my opinions were sought and considered. This would appear to confirm suggestions that Malay women do not consider their dress to be merely utilitarian, but an important aspect of their femininity and attractiveness (Ong 1990: 262; Roziah Omar 1994: 30-33). This care did not just extend to clothing for the body. *Tudung* were as carefully examined and evaluated. *Tudung* to be worn with more stylish garments, such as a *baju kebaya*, are carefully chosen to match the clothes they will be worn with, and certain *tudung* will be worn with particular clothes. There are also general purpose *tudung*, which can be worn with what ever the person has on, for going to the local shops or market. Whereas the head-scarf is often constructed as a synecdoche for the suppression of women under Islam, for female informants the *tudung* was expressed in terms of being another aspect of their wardrobe, and another arena for personal expression. At the same time, women are very clear about the meaning of the head-scarf and its importance to their visibility as Muslims. However, that does not mean a woman has to look bad, a point female informants were also quick to assert. The issue of female dress is complex and multifaceted, and can only be touched upon here. Factors such as regional variation, urban/rural modes, bourgeoisification, different versions of modernity as portrayed in the media and by other communal

groups, the continuing normalisation of *dakwah* discourses, not to mention the whole field of men's dress modes, have not really been discussed. Clearly, this is an area where a great deal of research remains to be done.

Dress is but one of many forums where nationalism, capitalism, Islam and individuality (amongst other forces), are negotiated and displayed. This chapter will continue to focus upon these sorts of negotiations, centred upon a particular development in Malay society - the increase in incidences of second marriage.

Bermadu⁹

Peletz's work in Negeri Sembilan illustrates how the failure to live up to expectations as husbands has led to the construction of men as untrustworthy (Roziyah Omar 1994; Peletz 1996). This argument has great cogency for the issue of second wives, specifically, how a male strategy to deal with the tensions and fears engendered by transformations in society have resulted in increased fears and tensions for women.

As we have seen, Malay men, from boyhood, have relatively few constraints placed upon them, relative to Malay women. Their duties and roles as younger sons and younger brothers are fairly minimal. Eldest sons and elder brothers have more expected of them in relation to younger sisters. Elder brothers in particular are presumed to care for and protect, morally and physically, their younger sisters and their sisters' honour (Peletz 1988). However, with marriage, the situation changes and a new world of duty and responsibility is entered into. Ideologically, husbands are expected to act as 'elder brother' (*abang*) to their wives, and will even be addressed as such.¹⁰ In their *abang* capacity husbands are expected to act as their wives' protectors and supporters, however they are also expected to act as 'husbands.' Husbands are expected to financially support the family, to provide

⁹ *Madu* translates as honey or second wife, *bermadu* is having honey, to have a fellow wife, or to marry a second wife. The symbolism is eloquently apparent.

¹⁰ Wives are not necessarily referred to by the corresponding term (*adik* - younger sibling) however.

children, to teach the children to be good Muslims, and to sexually satisfy their wives (Roziyah Omar 1994). As was mentioned previously, men often find marriage restricts their freedom. This point hints at imminent problems. To begin, an important aspect of Malay domestic life needs to be introduced. Display is very important, whether that display be proper dress, proper actions, or of material accomplishment. Men and women, and husbands and wives for that matter, have various ways to display their success in the material sense (house, car, or living in a good neighbourhood), as parents (successful children), or as Muslims (dressing and acting in the appropriate manner). This is at least as true in the *kampung* as it is in the city, however, capitalism and urbanisation have both added new elements, new class formations, new modes of display. Further, the 'bundled' assumptions and expectations also lead to new pressures; to strive to 'keep up with the Jones.' It is arguable that this less attractive feature of society has long been a feature of most societies, but for various reasons, such as the breakdown of the royalty/non-royalty paradigm, increases in the pressure to consume (i.e. display), and the tensions inherent to the position of new urbanisation have exacerbated these features. In other words, a matrix of aspirations and expectations (relating to modernisation) and controls (via elite discourses) has been created. The resulting rhetorics, have filtered through, and been enacted via, social coercion such as gossip and peer pressure. This has in turn led to a 'double bind' wherein material and social expectations are frequently (and paradoxically) in conflict with other expectations. Paradoxically, as the differing expectations are often espoused simultaneously by the same sectors of society in relation to the same individuals (as was the case with *minah karan*, where women should work and be productive and are also 'bad girls' for working). The particular expectations are moderated by class and other factors, but break down roughly as upper middle class and long-term urban versus lower middle class and

newly urban.

To focus on middle class men, they, as with women, are 'caught' between at least three major rhetorics and ideologies, which strive to win their adherence: Malay nationalism; capitalism; and Islam. While, as was argued earlier, the Malaysian government has in effect attempted to combine all three of these discourses into one programme, nationalist Islam (Muhammad Kamal Hassan 1987; Jomo & Ahmad Shabery cheek 1992), they effectively remain three distinct arenas.¹¹ In terms of role models and/or proponents, nationalism has the government and the *kampung*, capitalism has the elite and the West, and Islam has the various influences of Qur'anic authority, government policies, *dakwah*, and PAS. There are in other words extreme pressures on NQTs to act variously, and/or simultaneously, as 'modern' urban dwellers, as Muslims, and to continue rural mores and practices (Muhammad Kamal Hassan 1987; Jomo & Ahmad Shabery Cheek 1992; Kahn 1992, 1996; Jomo 1996). As is often that case with this type of rhetorical position, these mores and practices are as much idealised as they are 'real.' One of the few constants that overlaps all three discourses is that of polygamy.

Evidence would point to polygamy being rare in either the past or in the *kampung* (Djamour 1965; Firth, Rosemary 1966; Roziah Omar 1994: 15-16; Carsten 1997: 71, 194). As an instance, the comedy films *Seniman Bujang Lapok* ('The Nitwit Movie Stars,' P. Ramlee 1961) and *Madu Tiga* ('Three Wives,' P. Ramlee 1964) respectively employ polygamy to humorous effect and have a plot centred upon polygamy. The inference is that polygamy was uncommon enough to be a 'laughing matter,' to not raise anxiety. However, classic Malay tales such as the *Sejarah Melayu* (1970) abound with tales of the Malay royalty (the role model *par excellence*) indulging in polygamy. In more recent times the Malay elite are widely

¹¹ These discourses do overlap, and may be employed in combinations, but are typically employed with different levels of emphasis in different contexts.

perceived and depicted as being involved in polygamy within the media, such as advertisements, and in popular discourse. Stories and wedding photos in celebrity magazines often support the notion that polygamy is endemic within elite circles. In other words, polygamy is, and/or is being, strongly linked with material and social success. Ironically, the very fact that one of the Qur'anic conditions for second marriage, that a man must be able to support and treat both wives equally, may have aided the interpretation that only a rich or successful man can have more than one wife. Further, contrary to ostentatious displays of wealth, Islam does not frown upon this particular form of display. However, for lower middle class men the situation is different from that of the elite men who are their aspiration, namely that there is less economic or social constraint upon their wives to accept the situation. Divorce is statistically less frequent amongst the middle class (Ong 1990: 271). Further, as there is no alimony and social pressure upon middle class women not to work, divorce is, potentially at least, financially disadvantageous. As Wilder (1995) points out, the high rate of divorce amongst Malays is mirrored by an equally high rate of re-marriage, this option may not be as readily available to urban middle class women.¹²

The fears and tensions that this social phenomenon engenders in women is palpable, and a common feature in discussions with female informants (see also Roziah Omar 1994: 15-16). Frequently, the subject of polygamy came up in unrelated conversations, and was discussed in a very negative manner. While films such as *Madu Tiga* are still found funny, this situation in 'real' life is far from amusing. During one meal time, the young son of the family I was living with asked his father if he (the father) would get a second wife. There was a deathly silence, with shocked expressions around the table. Shortly after, very angry remarks were

¹² Anecdotal evidence from my informants suggests that urban women are more likely to 'see out' an unhappy marriage.

directed at the son by both the mother and the eldest daughter. This was one of the very few times I saw the boy rebuked in this way. The rest of the meal was quite strained, with the father looking very unhappy, and the women of the household upset and angry.

Along with verbal expression of disapproval, women's fears regarding polygamy also manifest themselves in sexual jealousy. Sexual jealousy is also a frequent feature and plot device in Malay cinema, to which we now turn.

The Films

In the previous chapter, the films may have depicted a different 'world' than the one which the lower middle class can/does relate to, but one that nevertheless was at least depicted. Conversely, in this chapter the discussion is of silence and of non-representation of the social phenomenon at issue. Polygamy is not a typical diegetic device in contemporary Malay films, though in the cases of *Madu Tiga*, *Bermadu*, or *Tiga Kekasih* it is apparent that it has featured in other times. *Selubung* is the only recent film, that I am aware of, where a polygamous marriage is featured, however, this marriage involved an Islamic 'fundamentalist,' and was portrayed neither sympathetically nor as typical. Jealousy however, does play a large role in the Malay cinematic narrative repertoire, and features in two of the three films discussed below. *Hanya Kawan* ('Just Friends,' Harith Iskander 1997), and *Gemilang* (Yusof Haslam 1997) both feature sexual jealousy as an important plot device. Through the discussions of these films in the context of jealousy, as well as other gender re-negotiations, some hypotheses on the current absence of depictions of polygamy will be put forward. Polygamy is not the only important aspect of gender relations, or of the re-formulations and renegotiations of gender relations, in contemporary Malay life. Issues such as family versus career are important, as are the negotiations

between the forces and rhetorics of Malay-ness and Islam, and between individual goals and desires alongside familial and social expectations and demands. *Femina* should serve as an example of these issues.

Femina

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, *Femina* combines two classic elements, the protagonists who initially loathe each other only to fall in love, and a love affair which is almost illicit, being between two who should not fall in love due to their social (or other) positions. *Femina* is also, very vocally, about what is the 'proper' relationship between men and women, and what the priorities of women should be. The issues are discussed throughout the film, but most emphatically in the television 'showdown' between Susan Lankester, Erma Fatima, and Eman Manan. The closing credits scene, a photo of Eman Manan and Erma Fatima surrounded by children with a sound track of classic Malay music, leaves us in no doubt as to what constitutes a 'proper' relationship. That the traditional music is mirrored by the couple wearing traditional dress merely emphasises this point. In this respect it would be easy to dismiss the film as a bit of nationalist Islam propaganda, and the film certainly lends itself to a reading of it in terms of film-as-nation-building-tool. However, a more thorough 'unpacking' of the film might pay dividends.

Historically, marriage amongst the Malays was ideally arranged and 'close.' Ong, for one, points out that one of the 'spin-offs' of modernisation is that Malay girls gained more say in their marriage partners (1990).¹³ Ong was speaking mainly in terms of *minah karan*, but this has been an issue for middle class women as well. University (another aspect of modernisation) has become the most common place for the middle class to meet their prospective spouses. In this respect, marriage still retains some of its 'close-ness,' with the couple being from relatively similar socio-

¹³ This is also the case for remarriages after a divorce, this may help to explain the aforementioned divorce figures for Malaysia.

economic backgrounds, and with a common level of education. Female informants point out that these criteria remain crucial in determining a potential marriage partner, and that if a woman marries a man from a lower class or with less education the marriage will be difficult; women can marry 'up,' but not 'down.'¹⁴ Pressures both from within the marriage, as well as outwith (potential social castigation for a woman marrying 'beneath herself'), will create difficulties for and between the couple. For all the potential problems, marriage does remain the norm, and to not be married, or to wish to postpone being married is only socially acceptable up to a point (for example, in order to finish schooling), but even then will be a source of gossip, concern, and pressures to marry (subtle or otherwise). Marriage remains a crucially important event in Malay life.

On the surface, *Femina* seems to negate (or ignore), many of these ideals; Erma Fatima and Eman Manan are not 'close' after all, nor do they, in common with many inhabiting the Malay diegetic world, appear to face any social pressures either to marry, or more specifically, to marry appropriately (this is a point that will be returned to in the following chapter). Not only are Erma and Eman from different socio-economic backgrounds, they are polar opposites in terms of their views of gender relations. As stated in the previous chapter, however, both undergo a personal journey and realise the correctness of 'proper' gender ideology, and therefore it could be argued that love develops between them as they *become* 'close' (i.e. both attain a proper, Malay, perspective on gender). This ideological closeness supersedes their 'non-close' biographies. For this reason the two can marry, the dramatic tension of the illicit love affair may be realised, and closure can occur (they marry and produce a family). Perhaps though, society has the last word, and the very fairy-tale quality of the ending, the implication that they live happily ever after, reflects that social taboos remain taboos. To explain that last statement, I wish to return to the subject

¹⁴ This may be another reason that women in general have ambiguous views regarding *minah karan*.

of gender negotiations.

The nationalist Islam rhetoric on gender relations appears to have found most fertile ground amongst the NQT/newly urban lower middle class. Amongst the elite and upper middle class (long-term urbanite) Malays, gender relations are enacted differently. As opposed to the situation with the NQTs, upper middle class women are less likely to work in paid employment, and divorce is statistically less common (and therefore, perhaps, also more socially stigmatised).¹⁵ In other words, material autonomy is balanced by less space to react to marital problems. As was also noted, some aspects of upper middle class gender relations are 'trickling down,' but for the moment (1997-1998), there are distinct differences amongst Malay social groups in terms of gender relations. Susan Lankester in certain ways represents the Malay elite, although in what would seem to be a hyperbolic manner, with her (Western-style) sexual and material 'freedom.' Nevertheless, the film leaves us in no doubt that hers is not appropriate behaviour. The intra-office jealousies, Susan's conflation of sex and freedom, her taunting a chaste Erma with being a lesbian, and Erma's confusion regarding her womanhood, all reflect badly on the Western/elite model of gender relations. This is not to say that Eman is an exemplar, as he too must move from an extreme gender position, and although the male chauvinist position comes in for less criticism, neither is it a valid model for Malay gender relations. This is exemplified in a scene, which is also the catalyst for Eman's soul-searching, where Eman protects a female passenger on his bus from an aggressive male. It is, therefore, something close to a nationalist Islam version of gender relations which is depicted as being the proper model. However, as stated, certain 'traditional' ideals still hold firm in Malay society (such as marrying 'close'). In this situation, the dramatic tension (lower class male in love with an upper class female), the ideological positioning of

¹⁵ Reasons for this might include an ideological construction of moral superiority vis-à-vis other social groups, combined with other features such as the lack of alimony.

the film, and 'traditional' values force a silent space, the fairy-tale ending. The practicalities of Erma and Eman's marriage are elided, for example attempting to cope with their diverse backgrounds and expectations. The fairy-tale can only carry us so far and no more.

Hanya Kawan

Hanya Kawan ('Just Friends,' Harith Iskander 1997), stars Ella, Hans Isaac, and Jojie. The film is a reasonably innovative approach to a time-worn concept; boy meets girl, they fall in love, break up, and get back together again. The introduction of the film takes place via a nifty bit of reality/diegetic confusion. Hans Isaac, the male lead, is being interviewed on the set of the movie in question, and gives a synopsis of the plot. There are other places in the movie where reel and real are conflated; one of the main characters is a singer, Ella, who plays a singer in the movie - named 'Ell,' the other main character is an actor, who plays an actor. In the movie the two are involved in a love affair, there has also been gossip that the two are romantically involved off-screen as well as on, a subject coyly answered in the introduction by the male actor; "I can neither confirm or deny..."

Much of the dramatic tension in *Hanya Kawan* comes via sexual jealousy.¹⁶ Hans comes to suspect Ella is having an affair, which leads to their breaking up (to avoid causing the reader any anxiety, they do get together again). Ella later sees Hans with other women and this keeps them apart. While on one hand the 'boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back again' formula is far from unique, there are a couple of particularities that render the analysis of this film worthwhile. One of the interesting aspects of the film is that *both* main characters display jealousy. That it is male jealousy that breaks up the relationship sets the film apart from others such as

¹⁶ Sexual jealousy is also a prominent plot device in *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, *Puteri Impian 2* ('Dream Princess 2,' Aziz M. Osman 1998), *Permpuan Melayu Terakhir* ('The Last Malay Woman,' Erma Fatima 1999), and no doubt others.

Gemilang and *Suami, Isteri dan...?* ('Husband, Wife and ...?', Pansha 1996), where it is female jealousy that moves the plot along.

At the beginning of *Hanya Kawan*, Hans and Ella are both struggling entertainment professionals, and as such are quite 'close,' they have similar socio-economic backgrounds and expectations. Hans and Ella make the perfect couple, if a bit hectic, both having their separate careers. It is in the context of careers that problems begin to arise. Initially, they are both struggling, but Ella's career begins to 'take off,' whereas Hans' acting career continues to stagnate. Hans begins to resent the amount of time Ella spends touring, recording, and particularly the amount of time she spends with her producer. In this sense two things are going on, first is Hans' resentment of Ella's success and economic autonomy. Ella no longer needs Hans in economic terms (although arguably she never did), and his masculine role, and therefore his very masculinity, is under threat (in this regard see Ong 1990). Hans' jealousy in this regard reminds us of Peletz's points concerning working class men and their economic failures (1996). While Hans at this point was not a 'failure,' his and Ella's relative equality became unbalanced. His masculinity threatened, relationship unbalanced, and career problems combine, Hans begins to project his fears and anger onto Ella, and constructs a reality where she is being unfaithful to him, confirming his inadequacies. The crunch comes when Hans begins to spy on Ella, causing a scene in a café, and then sees her truck parked outside her producer's house overnight. Ironically, after the two break up, Hans' acting career begins flourish, and he starts to reflect on his actions. The self-confidence Hans gains from a successful career no doubt is very important in the successful consummation of the narrative, although a question remains in the viewer's mind as to whether Ella was constraining Hans' career.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Hans now has the confidence in himself to

¹⁷ As was discussed in the Introduction, and as I hope will be made clear over the course of this thesis, this does not have to be an either - or situation, and both readings are possible.

see that Ella was not being unfaithful, and that her career was in fact not a threat to his masculinity. Unfortunately, as we shall see in more detail below, Ella has in the interim seen Hans with other women. Therefore, even though the two are not together, Ella now has built up some of her own grievances beyond being the subject of suspicion. Ultimately, these grievances keep the two of them apart, and continue the dramatic tension. The two eventually do get back together, largely through the intervention of Ella's sister (played by her real life manager - Jojie).

Before dealing with Ella's point of view, a couple of issues bear scrutiny, which will involve the elucidation of tangled sets of relations. One aspect of Hans' jealousy, and the most overt, is his own feeling of inadequacy. There are, however, other modes of interpretation available. One such mode is related to the idea of 'closeness.' Ella's success creates a disjunction between herself and Hans, and it is only when events result in a return to relative parity, that the two can rejoin. We could, therefore, interpret events such that Hans' success re-masculated him, that the closeness of their relationship could only be reclaimed once Hans was again on a par with Ella. Conversely, it could also be argued that it was the recovery of closeness that allowed the diegetic relationship to be salvaged. In other words, the social pressures and tensions inherent to the marriage ideal would not/could not allow the couple to continue, until Hans became successful, or Ella stopped being a success. In the case of *Hanya Kawan*, one of the marriage ideals is that a woman should not marry 'down,' or perhaps more importantly, that a man may not marry 'up.' Further, there are expectations as regarding male marriage/gender roles, as the provider for, and protector of, his family. These rules and expectations had to be met before the fulfilment of the narrative. Jealousy was the manifestation of other social phenomena altogether.

The other point to be made is in regard to the idea of women 'marrying up.'

One aspect of the particularity of this situation is that Hans suspects Ella of having an affair with her producer, that is with someone who is in an superior position (relative to either of their positions at that time). There is an anxiety, related to Hans' lack, that Ella would choose to marry up rather than continue with Hans. The masculine/materially successful conjuncture posits the producer, rather than Hans (in Hans' own mind), as the object of Ella's desire. Hans' anxiety reflects the situation Peletz refers to, that working class men are 'caught' in a situation where they aspire to the lifestyle of the elite without the necessary financial ability to realise their desires (1996). I will return to this point in the discussion of *Gemilang*.

As the aphorism states, 'it takes two to tango.' Ella is not a passive observer/victim, and her point of view forms an important element of the narrative. The first point relating to Ella is her friendship with the producer. As was related earlier, most discourses on women would disapprove of Ella spending time with this man. In a sense Hans' jealousy is a manifestation of social disapproval, even though it is often assumed that these discourses are of little relevance to/for urban middle class Malays. Ella herself reflects this latter point, she enacts her autonomy of space and place and does not sense Hans' unease. On the other hand, her sister asks Hans, in relation to his suspicion that Ella has spent the night with her producer, if he really thinks that she would let her little sister do such a thing (Ella still lives with her sister and brother). Ella's actions however, are represented positively, and it is Hans' actions that come between them, not Ella's fame *per se*. For instance in the scene where Hans 'stakes out' the film producer's house, we take on his subjectivity and believe (are led to believe) that Ella has indeed stayed the night. But, this scene takes place after Hans has already once accused Ella of betraying him. Blame could be attributed either way, and our own complicity forces home the point that we, along with Hans, believe what we wish to believe. This compounds our empathy

with Hans, but also forces us to think about the (mis)placing of that empathy and reconsidering our assumptions of the validity of Hans' actions.

Ella displays her own jealousy, which we are ultimately given much more cause to believe justified. That Ella's jealousy comes after the couple have broken up could be seen as emphasising her own innocence. Ella apparently still loves Hans (and he her) and finds his new relationships painful. In terms of the initial display of Ella's jealousy, she (and therefore we) had no more basis for her jealousy than Hans did for his. Indeed, the situations were vaguely similar, as each saw the other with a member of the opposite sex. The differences were that Ella was with a colleague and as stated, someone of superior social/financial position, whereas Hans is seen walking with a woman we have no information about. The implication here is that there are more general grounds for perceptions as to men being untrustworthy, as opposed to men's more specific anxieties regarding women and superior status men. As stated, jealousy is a recurring theme in Malay movies and is a recurring theme in 'real' life as well. Malay women do frequently manifest jealousy in discussions and actions, and have no little justification for their suspicions. Ella expresses that anxiety. Malay men also have anxieties, and *Hanya Kawan* depicts those as well.

Gemilang

Gemilang provides another example of female jealousy. As commented on in the previous chapter, Ning Baizura persuades Hans Isaac to take her shopping. When the two do not show up until very late, Erra Fazira is extremely jealous and angry. This jealousy creates a period of tension between the two of them, and in the narrative this is another factor in the postponement of any consummation of their love. Erra's jealousy concerning Hans and Ning is in some ways similar to that of Ella in *Hanya Kawan*. Erra and Hans are not, at the time where Erra's jealousy manifests itself, romantically involved, indeed Erra is Hans' employer. Once again we have the

situation of a rich woman and poor man. In this case there are some major differences, first is that the 'other' woman in question is Erra's best friend and second, that Erra is herself the protégé of Jalaludin Hassan. In terms of the second of these issues, while in the diegetic the two (Erra and Jalaludin) are not lovers, real life experience and/or cynicism would dictate otherwise. At a later point in the film, Jalaludin makes clear to Hans that he (Jalaludin) is responsible for Erra's success and that this situation could change. Hans accepts this and breaks off his employment, and nascent relationship, with Erra. It is only when Jalaludin's patronage is demonstrated to be flawed (he fails to protect Erra, and his pursuit of her becomes aggressive) that Hans and Erra get together.

In both *Gemilang* and *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, it is the woman's best friend who is the 'other' woman (although nothing actually happens in either case), and in both cases it is this woman who is the aggressor. Also in both cases it is the man who shoulders the blame. In *Gemilang*, Hans' protestations of innocence are (grudgingly) believed, which is not the case in *Suami, Isteri dan...?*. The proportioning of blame is intriguing. Casting the women as aggressors and the men as 'victims' could be interpreted as merely the filmmakers trying to 'shift the blame' wholesale onto women and creating mistrust amongst women. There is likely some truth to this, however, it could also be suggested that this phenomenon occurs out in the 'real' world discourses on infidelity. While female informants are not loathe to point out that men could not have mistresses or second wives unless other women complied, the bulk of the anger is laid squarely on the males.¹⁸ Hence, we have a set of ideas and assumptions that appear in both 'reel' and 'real' life. Arguably, this could suggest that jealousy in both of these milieux reflect and enforce one another. It may also suggest that men are not only aware of this jealousy (the filmmakers referred to in this

¹⁸ *Minah karan* and women from certain parts of Malaysia, such as Kelantan, are often attributed with 'aggressive' tendencies, and are accordingly held in some suspicion.

chapter are mainly male), and that they also have some concerns themselves in this area.

The other aspect of gender relations that is highlighted in *Gemilang* is that of female autonomy, or rather the limits to female autonomy. Erra would appear to have it all, a beautiful huge house, servants, bodyguards, two successful careers (singer and actress), friends, in short a glamorous life. However, for all the glamour and material success, Erra is not an autonomous individual. Her achievements are backed/created by her 'sugar-daddy,' to whom she owes it all (and this is a bill sugar-daddy will eventually try and collect). This lack of material and financial autonomy does not seem too important to Erra, until events demonstrate her lack of autonomy in other arenas of her life.

A stalker begins to harass Erra, sending threatening letters, culminating in attacks upon her. Jalaludin, the 'sugar-daddy,' attempts to stem these attacks by providing Erra with a chauffeur and a bodyguard. During one of these attacks however, both the driver and bodyguard are knocked unconscious, leaving Erra to face two masked men. As Erra is fleeing from her attacker, she meets with, and is protected by Hans. Erra, through Jalaludin, hires Hans to be her bodyguard, or 'personal manager' as she refers to him in a conversation with Ning. While this proves to be an astute move, it also points out the boundaries of female autonomy, at least for a 'good' girl. Ning, for instance, has much more personal autonomy, but she is not, as we find out, a 'good' girl. Erra's restricted autonomy is highlighted at several points, such as when Jalaludin threatens her career, or when Hans begins organising her schedule. Thus, the nationalist Islam rhetoric appears to 'win out,' even if in subliminal form, as even a hyper-successful woman must ultimately depend on male protection (economic and/or physical). Male protection also features in *Suami, Isteri dan...?* and *Ghazal untuk Rabiah* ('a *ghazal* song for Rabiah,' Jeyakumar 1997).¹⁹

¹⁹ *Ghazal* is a type of music popular in the southern state of Johor.

There are other films in which female characters do not turn to male protection (*Selubung*, and *Ringgit Kasorga* spring to mind - both by a female director - Shuhaimi Baba), and in *Lenjan* (Ismail Yaacob 1998) the tables are unintentionally turned and the man is saved by his wife. Actually, she was intending to kill him and save her lover, and this in itself could be interpreted as a comment on female autonomy. In cases of films where women do not turn to men *per se*, they seek help from their families or other women. This is in contrast to *Gemilang*, where the one instance of family we see, an old, drunkard, gambling-addicted 'uncle,' is the one turning to Erra for help. Further, Hans literally 'comes out of nowhere' to rescue Erra. He appears as if by magic twice in the film to come to Erra's aid. We are never shown any aspect of Hans' life (house, friends, family) to whom he could turn to for support, he is the veritable 'lone wolf.'

A look at *character delineation* showed [...] the principal *male* characters to be strong, egoistic, confident, independent, calm, ordinary-looking. And, all the dramas showed the principal *female* characters to dependent, pretty, loyal, patient/long-suffering, and submissive. The *goals and motives* depicted of the principal characters of the two sexes were as follows:

Males: a need to calm people down, to solve problems,
ambitious, being responsible, eliminate competition

Females: to be protected, to seek help, to get a life
partner.

The implicit values depicted regarding men's and women's behaviour as 'fitting or 'inappropriate' include:

Males: must be brave, confident, hard working, be able

to face all challenges, take charge of problems and be calm

Females: should give priority to family matters and not question husband's decisions (Kaur 1993: 87-88).

So, we see that this is not just the feature of one or two films, and that men are much more likely to be depicted as independent and/or in public spaces/capacities (Kaur 1993: 87-88). These points seem to back up the argument made earlier that women's roles and duties are more tightly constrained than are those of their male counterparts. In the end Erra must choose between her 'sugar-daddy' and her *abang*. As a female, Erra's negotiation has been truncated and she is faced with an either/or situation.

End Notes

As was argued in Chapter 1, the processes of modernity and modernisation can and do lead to disjunctures. Gender is one such site of disjuncture, and a particularly potent one. Issues of control and autonomy are intimately conjoined to the roles, values and valuations, and social discourses and constructions of gender and gender relations. Bundled with modernity are various assumptions and expectations, as we have seen in this chapter these may include unforeseen changes regarding female autonomy and control. One example is the alterations to female expectations and arenas of possibility, which came bundled with the integration of women into the industrial workforce (Ong 1990; Ackerman 1991). Within the film world, a further disjuncture becomes evident, as Malay language films do not always coincide with the wider social discourses on gender.

Malay social discourses on gender have undergone a period of change, for instance my own perceptions regarding female academic success and the desirability

of a career either in the armed forces or the police, do not bear out Ackerman's findings (1991). In terms of the former, male and female informants both expressed a wish for *all* of their children to go university, and an expectation that they would do so. If anything, there was more expectation of the girls to go to university than the boys. In terms of the latter point, a career in either the military or the police appeared to be regarded as a 'last ditch' measure for boys who did not do well at school. The military was generally discussed more favourably than the police, but neither was mentioned as a first choice career.

However, the depiction of women and gender relations in the films under discussion tend to represent yet another conception, one that does not wholly reflect a Western modernity, but which is nonetheless closer to that vision. The positionality of the majority of Malay filmmakers is not that of the people I worked and lived with. Theirs is not the same set of assumptions and expectations and engagement with modernity, and in this case this is reflected in the portrayals of a principle site of contestation regarding modernity - gender. This disjuncture is possibly most acute in terms of what is not being represented, or represented only obliquely through jealousy, namely second marriages. Why this social phenomenon is not represented in Malay language films is intriguing, for it is one instance of the 'gap' between the expectations, assumptions, and perceptions of the filmmakers and those of their audience.

Film, much less Malay film, does not speak with a single voice, and there are differing ideals of gender articulated. Of the films considered here, *Femina* is notable as articulating a position closest to that of nationalist Islam. It is interesting, in this regard, that the filmmaker in question, Aziz M. Osman was not trained in the West, and is also one of the more 'bankable' of current directors. However, even here this representation is problematic, and remains fragmentary, as represented by the non-

consummation of the ending. Gender remains an area of negotiation, the ideologies remain in transition and negotiated, as exemplified by *Femina*, albeit unintentionally.

One of the reasons that gender, and gender relations, is such an important area of negotiation is the intense links between the individual, and modernity. Gender represents an arena wherein this link, and the conflict this linkage will/may create with other social forces, may be played out. Chapter 5 investigates this arena of negotiation and conflict more specifically in terms of the family and the individual.

Chapter 5: The Family and the Individual

"Kak Tipah, I really don't mind Shahnaz marrying before me. Azman's such a good man - how can I mind?" There was a note of resignation in Sara's voice as if she were tired of answering the same question again and again. Kak Tipah, her elder and similarly unmarried cousin, shook her head in disbelief. She had an instinctual grasp of her cousin Sara's weakness and she replied in an insinuating manner, prodding Sara with her forefinger as she spoke.

"Are you sure? I would hate it. Absolutely hate it. I'd insist on a Louis Vuitton cabin-bag in recompense. Not a fake one - mind you. A real one, with LV, LV, LV everywhere, " she said, lingering on the letters of the logo.

(Karim Raslan, 'Sara and the Wedding,' in *Heroes and other stories* 1986).

Bringing Up the Family

Within this chapter, three sets of relationships will be discussed. As the title suggests the relationship between the family and an/the individual is one such relationship. However, neither families nor individuals exist in a vacuum. Therefore, the relations between family and society, and individual and society, will also be analysed, both in terms of the Malaysian context and in their filmic manifestations. Familial institutions, such as marriage, have already been introduced to the reader. Further, we have also analysed the affect these social institutions have had upon modernising forces. Within the present chapter, these and other aspects of the family, the inter-relation of family and individual, and the individual *per se*, will be analysed in their own right.

The structure of the present chapter will be somewhat different from those preceding for two reasons. First, the chapter is organised into two parts, the first investigates issues of the family, the second issues of the individual. Within public discourse, to separate individual identity from the context of family would be unwarranted. As was related in the previous chapters, and in the preceding sections, marriage, children, and familial/filial duties are integral aspects of an individual's being in the world. Indeed, Peletz points out that this is to the extent that gender identities are subsumed by familial identities (Peletz 1996: 5). For this reason, I have not separated the following discussion out into a distinct chapter. The second of the differences is that rather than analysing the films discretely at the end of the chapter, as has been the practice so far, the films will be analysed within the relevant sections throughout the chapter.

As was the case with gender, Malay family life has also been implicated in the processes of modernisation. Those dynamic forces for modernisation which have been outlined previously, capitalism, urbanism, etc. have also impacted upon kinship

ideas, ideals, and praxis. Kinship is, furthermore, tightly integrated into the other social arenas previously discussed. Therefore, it may be more useful to posit a dialogic relationship, one in which these forces inform one another.

Kinship is not a lifeless and pre-given force which in some mysterious way determines the form of people's relations with each other. On the contrary, it consists of the many small actions, exchanges, friendships and enmities that people themselves create in their everyday lives. For most people it is perhaps the heart of their creativity. But the contact of these relations is not only continuously created anew, it is also shaped by long-term political processes [...]

The kinship I describe here cannot be separated off from politics or economics or history but is embedded in them
(Carsten 1997: 23; emphasis added).

Kinship is also an area which has been of central importance to writings upon Malaysia (de Josselin de Jong 1960; Djamour 1965; Firth, Raymond 1966; Firth, Rosemary 1966; McKinley 1975, 1981; Banks 1983; Carsten 1987, 1991, 1995b, 1997; Peletz 1988, 1996; Wazir Karim 1992). Peletz gives a historical account of the priorities of those kinship-oriented writings upon Malaysia, from the colonial period through to the 1980s, as well as the foci amongst those writing more specifically on kinship (Peletz 1988: 1-11, 13-42, and *passim*).¹ Amongst contemporary studies, a recent focus has been upon the constructedness of relations, that kin bonds must be affirmed and reaffirmed, as well as being strategic. This focus has a strong link to wider South-East Asian studies. Freeman's study in Borneo is an instance of a precursor to the contemporary focus (1958). In his study, Freeman explicitly

¹ While Peletz's work is in regards to Negeri Sembilan (which is distinct from other Peninsular Malay societies), much of the commentary holds true for studies done in other states.

demonstrates that the boundaries of kinship are as much cognitive as biological. To develop the genealogy further, the 'alliance'-oriented theories of Lévi-Strauss (1969) and de Josselin de Jong (1951), though themselves still influenced by descent-oriented theories (i.e. alliances are constituted between descent groups rather than families as such), also brought into play concepts of strategy and the creations of ties. These ideas have been extended, not only by kinship specialists *per se*, but by those interested in issues such as gender and identity.

We have already seen some instances of Malay kinship in practice, such as marriage (previous chapter), and have hinted at others. The study of kinship has its own jargon and short-hands, and in those terms, Malay kinship is cognatic (or bilateral), endogamous, and ego-centric (or sibling-centric, or house-centric, depending on the focus). Kinship terminology is part of the reason that the subject, as a (sub) discipline, is so often regarded as 'lifeless' (Carsten 1997: 23). The unpacking of those terms should achieve two goals; first to aid in an explanation Malay kinship (as has been, primarily, written of in the village situation), and to help comprehend the 'processual' kinship focus, which is such a feature of South-East Asian kinship studies.

The *Kampung* Family

Perhaps the most crucial point to be taken from this section is that 'the family' is of extreme importance to the lives of Malay people, and certainly amongst the family I lived with. This is a point that is reasserted throughout the kinship literature referred to above. Kahn, in discussing the NQTs, lists many of the characteristics of lower-middle class Malays, one principal characteristic is that of strong family ties (Kahn 1996: 14). Indeed, one of the suggestions put forward for the problems that the Malay cinema faces in terms of audience is regarding the family bond, that once

married with children Malay people do not go to the cinema because of the expense this would entail.

To return to kinship terminology, a cognatic kinship system is one in which matters of inheritance and/or descent pass either through the male or female lines, or indeed both lines (bilateral). In other words, children are members of both their mother's and father's families, and may inherit from either or both.² Certain problems with this definition arise however. Our theoretical inclusion does not necessarily mean that any particular person is in fact included, or indeed that we (as members of a family) *necessarily* include any other particular family member. In the most extreme example, popular culture abounds with stories of siblings or a parent (or parents) and child who do not speak/see each other for years. This level of choice, is indeed one of the issues that the processualist/constructivist kinship specialists foreground.

Cognatic kinship has effects upon other social structures. For instance, if lineages, clans, or phatries are not the organisational entity, then what does Malay kinship organise itself upon? In terms of the Malays, that organisational element is either ego, siblings, or the house, depending on the context. In terms of kin terminology, the Malay system is ego-centred, that is kin terms are formulated based upon a particular, but fluid, place within the system.

Malay kinship is also sibling-based. Arguably, the relationship between sisters and brothers/sisters are the most important in the entire system (McKinley 1981; Errington 1987). As such this relationship will be discussed separately below. Malay kinship is also house-based if we are looking at the system on an organisational or procreative level. On one level, the sibling relationship may be the most important, but it can only be taken so far, i.e. not to the procreative level. In this regard, the 'house' (the nuclear, or extended nuclear, family) is the primary

² Theoretically, at least, this is the case under Islam.

functioning element of the system. Structurally, at least, Malay kinship does not appear to be alien to what a Western European or North American may experience.

Within the family, we begin to see signs of hierarchical relations, particularly of generational cleavages. A child would call his or her parents either by the informal *emak/mak* (mom) or *bapa/pak* (dad), or by the formal *ibu* (mother) or *ayah* (father). The child would refer to older siblings as either *abang* (older brother), or *kakak/kak* (older sister).³ Conversely, all younger siblings are *adik* (younger sibling). *Abang*, as was pointed out in the previous chapter is also the term of endearment that a woman will use with her boyfriend/husband, and reflects Malay marriage ideals. Kin terms other than *abang* are also frequently used outwith the family bond. As commentators have pointed out, Malay society reflects a social cosmology which emphasises inclusivity (Errington 1987: 418; Peletz 1988: 193), rather than the exclusivity which might have been assumed from the us/them dichotomy discussed in Chapter 3. As Errington states;

alliances of people (Us) tend to be incorporative, even imperialistic, in this part of the world. Each person tries to increase the numbers of people who can be counted on for support and to decrease the numbers of people who might form a hostile opposition (Errington 1987: 418).

There are various ways in which to do this; one of which is using kin terms for most people, regardless of actual relationship. In this case the particular referent depends upon the level of respect which must be shown. For instance, a colleague, friend, or even an unknown person of roughly similar age might be referred to as *saudara* or *saudari* ('brother' or sister' respectively, also 'relative'). One of the crucial aspects of Malay kinship relations highlighted above, is the generational hierarchy. The

³ As older daughters typically take on many of the domestic responsibilities, the term of respect is often more than just nominal (Carsten 1997: 88-90).

generational aspect of Malay kinship again comes also into play when we return our attention to the arena of marriage.⁴

Malay kinship is referred to as endogamous, that is marrying 'in-group.' However, when there is no clear division of group, as opposed to the case with clans or lineage systems, group boundaries become problematic. One strategy is to make the 'group' as inclusive as possible, such as by calling non-kin by kin terms, as we saw above. In terms of marriage, marrying 'close' is another (linked) strategy. Even here there are restrictions and proscriptions to possible marriage partners. In this case, these proscriptions are generationally-based. A marriage partner should not be sought from the generation either below or above one's own, nor should they be seeking from siblings or first cousins. Historically, and particularly in the kampung context, a marriage partner would have been arranged by female kinfolk. As we saw in the previous chapter, and as will also be discussed below, things have changed. Further, marriage also brings new relationships into play, namely children and in-laws.

The hierarchical aspect of Malay family relations (parent-child, elder sibling-younger sibling), and the hierarchies inherent to the kinship terminology, could mask the very close emotional bonds within those families, and the importance of children in Malay society. One of those bonds which is particularly close is that between siblings, the brother-brother relation aside (Errington 1987: 404-06; Peletz 1988: 215-17; Carsten 1991: 427, 1997 87-92). Indeed, as was mentioned above, the sibling bond is so significant that some analysts refer to the Malay kinship system as sibling-centred (Errington 1987). Carsten points out that siblings often form economic corporate units, and share the natal home until a marriage takes place

⁴ Non-kin terms of reference would include *Encik* or simply *Cik* (roughly similar to Mr. or Ms.). Terms of respect then extend up through *Tuan/Puan* (lit. 'master' or 'mistress'), through various honorary titles such as *Datuk/Datin* and *Tan Sri* (vaguely similar to a CBE or OBE), up to the royalty.

(1997: 68).⁵ The sibling bond ensures a support network, with siblings contributing aid (in various forms) to younger siblings. At quite an early stage children are encouraged to take care of their younger siblings (this is particularly true for daughters), and this 'care' may extend up to and beyond an interposing marriage. This is not to suggest that the parent-child relation is distant or non-supportive, but that in the Malay family the support network is both vertical (parent - child) and horizontal (sibling - sibling). The social institution referred to as 'fostering' is one arena where the sibling tie is made manifest.

Fostering is a form of semi-formal adoption, typically in-family. A common scenario where fostering takes place is 'when a couple have a large number of children or when they are so close together in age that their mother is overburdened with work' (Carsten 1997: 247). As has been mentioned previously, children are extremely important, and for a couple to remain childless may lead to tensions and divorce. In the example given, fostering is a way for the fostering family to circumvent that outcome, and will also assist the 'fostered.' There are other circumstances wherein fostering may take place, such as when grandparents raise a grandchild. In this case it is so that the grandparents' house will not be empty (Carsten 1997: 80). A further possible fostering situation is if a couple have only boys or only girls.

The other relationship formed by marriage is that between the two sets of in-laws (*besan* or *bisan*).⁶ This relationship, cemented with the birth of children, moves from their being parents of one spouse, and parents-in-law to the other, to being co-grandparents. This shift is not only conceptual but actual. Whereas the parent-in-law relationship may be quite strained, particularly if the married couple live with one set of parents, *besan* are expected to 'combine forces' in regards to the welfare of their

⁵ It is quite often expected, if not explicitly stated, that one child will remain in the natal house (usually the youngest daughter) even after marriage, to look after the parents in their old age (Carsten 1997: 75-76). From observation, this remains true even in the urban context.

⁶ Carsten employs the Langkawi spelling *bisan*, whereas the generally accepted spelling is *besan*, which is the form employed in this thesis.

(joint) grandchildren (Carsten 1992, 1997). The *besan* relationship is important for two further reasons; one is that it forms one more support network, the other is that it (potentially) defuses a disruptive situation.⁷

The City Family

As with gender relations, Malay kinship relations are not emerging from their brush with modernity unscathed. New ideas/ideals regarding marriage were introduced in the previous chapter, and other dimensions of the family have likewise moved in new directions. As an instance, returning again to the previous chapter, the 'nationalist Islam' discourse inscribed a dual responsibility upon women, as producers and producers of consumers, and as the moral instructors and guardians of their children (Ong 1990). In short, women were to (ideally) have both successful careers and successful families. Ong has suggested that this was a regressive step (from the early modernisation period, where women were achieving financial and social autonomy via their wage labour), in terms of women's rights and valuation in society (1990: 270-72). In this sense, the nationalist Islam rhetoric and policies (or indeed capitalism or urbanism *per se*) would be expected to have massive impacts upon family life. However, this dual role of women is not new (although the 'stakes' are now higher for a woman with career ambitions), and the double bind is indeed one that Malay women have been involved in historically and/or in the village context. What this suggests, therefore, is that a teleological analysis of social change, in this case involving kinship relationships, is at best only partial. Any of the various elements to modernisation which Malaysia has engaged with do not in themselves provide the full story. In terms of the family, one of the most significant aspects of modernisation has been the physical distancing of family members. This is not

⁷ I would not go so far as to suggest that this phenomenon is unique to Malaysia. Indeed, something quite similar happened after my elder brother (actual, not Malaysian) married and subsequently became a father. However, in the Malaysian context, this relationship has been institutionalised and overt. *De jure* rather than *de facto*.

solely the result of the government's moves to incorporate Malays more closely into the capitalist economy, but a combination of this agenda with other aspects of the modernisation process, and the discourses and social movements regarding group and individual rights. This is not to suggest Ong is 'wrong' to suggest, or pinpoint, a certain nexus of relations, but that other factors and processes are/were taking place and that these too need to be incorporated into the analysis.

Educational opportunities, urbanisation (or at least the opportunity to move from the natal home or area), and financial independence amongst other factors, have all made space for changes to the ways in which marriage comes about, takes place, or is conceptualised (Ong 1990; Rudie 1993; Carsten 1997). As Ong argues, factory work allowed young women the opportunity to choose their own husbands, as their financial autonomy meant they were no longer dependent upon their parents for the payments from the groom's family to the bride's (1990: 265). On the face of it this seems a straight-forward and reasonable assertion. However, I would suggest that, as we saw earlier, the point that these women were not at/near home is also quite important (Far Eastern Economic Review 21/12/89).

Other young women also took the opportunity to choose their own partners, university being most common among the middle-class (either established or newly middle-class). Again, these women were also away from their natal *kampung*. To an extent this means that there have been significant shifts in Malay marriage praxis (Rudie 1993). The prospective families are not so much arranging the match as either confirming or denouncing it (as is/was such a feature of 'kitchen sink' dramas and 1950s American melodramas). The 'close-ness' of the marriage partners is also somewhat affected. The 'distance' between the families of the prospective couple in turn has also opened space for innovations regarding the marriage ceremonies. If one family is from, for example, Johor (the southern-most state of the peninsula) and the

other is from Perlis or Kelantan (the northern-most states), then the practice of holding *kenduri* (feasts) at the homes of both the bride and groom's parents alternatively (often on consecutive days), becomes problematic. One compromise is for the ceremonies to be held in one or the other family's *kampung*, and for a hall or other public building to be rented wherein to conduct the other family's share of the ceremonies. Rudie suggests that there has been a shift from a 'business-like' communal marriage ceremony to a more 'friend and family' semi-private ceremony (Rudie 1993). Residence patterns also have become affected, with neo-local (new residence) becoming increasingly common. On the other hand, the nuclear nature of Malay families has remained, and at any given time the majority of households will be composed of mother, father, and children. Arguably, the ambiguous, or even antagonistic relationship between male siblings has also been defused, but conversely, from observation, it still appears rare for male siblings to form economic units.

Carsten states that 'when the parents of a groom select a spouse for him, their choice is to a large extent governed not by the qualities of his bride-to-be but by those of her parents, their prospective *bisan*' (Carsten 1997: 235). Further, Carsten argues that there are strong social and economic ties between *besan*, even before the birth of the grandchildren (1997: 235-242). However, it would appear that for many urban-based families, the force of the *besan* relationship has been somewhat dissipated. Certainly, the economic ties between *besan* have become more focused upon the married couple. This is not to suggest that the tie has been severed, but that amongst the newly urban, lower middle class social group, the *besan* relationship did not appear to have the level of significance that Carsten found in Langkawi. One factor involved in this change might be the affects of distancing; that the *besan* no longer need to 'get along' as they are no longer, necessarily, from the same or nearby

villages.

To remain with marriage, as we saw earlier, there is/was an important difference in the longevity of arranged first marriages versus the personal choice second marriages. Arranged marriages quite often were short-lived and in some cases even forgotten about after their break-down. In choosing their own spouses, Malays are still marrying 'close,' sharing similar socio-economic backgrounds, expectations, and aspirations, but no longer necessarily from the same area or even state. This may indeed have influenced the fall in the divorce statistics (Peletz 1988: 258-59; see also Roziah Omar 1994: 47-48). However, there is the added consideration, that this person was their choice.

The above would seem to suggest that Malay kin ties have changed dramatically in the course of modernisation. This is only partially the case. Ties of kinship remain very strong, and while distancing has led to some change, other institutions have also developed (in both senses of the word). Among these is what is referred to as *balik kampung* ('return to the *kampung*'), the wholesale migration of Malays to their natal *kampung* at holidays, such as school breaks and *Hari Raya* (the end of Ramadan - the Muslim fasting month). To provide some indication of this exodus, KL becomes a veritable ghost town during this latter period.⁸ What is more the '*kampung* people' frequently visit their urban relatives as well. While I was staying with them, my family were visited by, and visited, their urban relatives weekly. They were in turn visited by rural relatives at least once a month, and the whole family *balik kampung*, to the mother's *kampung*, four times. Part of the family (mother and children or just the children) visited the mother's *kampung* a further three times. The father's family lives in KL and were visited more often.

The sibling relationship (sister-sister and brother-sister) has remained strong.

⁸ During the period of my field work *Hari Raya* and Chinese New Year coincided, and KL became a more than *veritable* ghost town.

As illustrated above, visiting, even over considerable distances occurs frequently. As a side note, this provides some basis for the speculations regarding the *besan* relationship, namely that other relationships are being 'kept up,' even though over distances. To return to the main point however, siblings remain an important source of support, be it financial or emotional. As was mentioned in regards to kin terminology, this support network can also be extended outside the biological family. For instance, female Malay university students, both in Malaysia and abroad, enter into a *kakak-adik* (older sister-younger sibling) relationship, explicitly utilising those referents, wherein the elder 'sisters' give advice and support to their younger colleagues.⁹ However, as Ong states, university peer relations may also be employed as a source of social pressure and control (1990: 270). To sum up individual relations, even if hierarchically structured, in such a general manner may be presumptuous, but the relationship can be very demanding for the *kakak* as well as constraining for the *adik*.

Two other areas where the sibling bond has surfaced in the urban setting is in a new form of 'fostering,' and in co-opting siblings as domestic help. In both cases, the sibling bond combines with the retention of *kampung* ties. Mention was made in the urbanism chapter regarding *kampung* dwellers conceiving of, or at least employing, the city as a form of resource (and vice versa, as we shall see below). More specifically, rural-urban (and/or urban-rural) kin networks are often deployed for various agendas. This deployment may or may not be exploitative. In terms of fostering, links to the city via urbanite kinfolk provide a known introduction to the urban milieu. Younger siblings, or the children of other *kampung*-based siblings (or indeed siblings based in cities other than the one to which access is desired), may be sent to live with relatives in the city. Typical situations would include in order for a

⁹ Female-male relations of this sort may also occur (still *kakak-adik*), but are less commonplace. As most of my informants are female, I'm not certain if there is an equivalent male-male relationship.

child to attend a 'good' school, to attend university, or for employment. This 'fostering' is usually unremunerated and may be for significant periods of time. In the case of the family I was living with, over the course of the marriage to date, they have had living with them: one of the wife's younger siblings (employment); three of the wife's sibling's children (at different periods for schooling); and one foreign researcher. This may be an extreme case, but one or more of these elements may be experienced by urban Malay families with strong *kampung* ties. As mentioned earlier, this relationship could be regarded as exploitative, but obversely, it can also strengthen kin (or extra-kin) ties. While this relationship does not lessen other relationships, it was expressed several times, both verbally and non-verbally, that there was a special closeness between the 'fostering' family and their various fosterees. This phenomenon may also extend outwith kin networks. University students may be adopted by a family while conducting research away from 'home.' In this case, the relationship is often that of rural adopter and urban adoptee. The level of incorporation into the adopting household, and expectations of compensation, vary considerably.

Although in some ways co-opting is the inversion of neo-fostering, in Malay terms, the two would be referred to similarly. This is quite important, as this effects how the two manifest themselves. Mention was made in Chapter 3 regarding the duties of daughters, and especially how marriage freed them from many of these duties. A question springs to mind, who does this work in the new household, particularly as was also noted, the wife is also expected to be in paid employment. There are different answers, different strategies adopted, to this question. The long-term answer is that eventually daughters will grow up and take on their responsibilities. Short-term measures are a different matter. One strategy is to employ a maid (or as likely, a string of maids). Typically, these maids are from either

Indonesia or the Philippines. While there are certain advantages to having a maid, there are also several potential drawbacks. On the one hand maids are generally cheap labour, their wages were around RM300 a month (approximately £50 at the time of fieldwork), and there were/are few legal constraints as to terms of employment.¹⁰ On the other hand, cultural, social, and economic differences lead to conflicts. There are also factors, such as sexual jealousy, which can lead to suspicions, if not outright conflict. Before the daughters of the family I was living with were old enough to take on their responsibilities, the family had over the course of time hired and dismissed (for various reasons) thirteen maids.

The other short-term strategy is to co-opt a female kin member. Indeed, if the family in question is fostering a female kin member, that member could be, to some extent, co-opted in this manner. While co-opting retains the classic patterns of fostering, I would make a distinction between the two institutions. One principle distinction is that the co-opted member may already be married and have a family of their own. This hints towards another difference between fostering and co-opting. Instead of the implicit reciprocity of the fostering relationship, there is explicit reason for the co-option, namely for domestic help. The co-option of a female kin member can be mutually beneficial, providing domestic help and support to the co-opter, and for the co-optee, gaining access to urban life and its benefits. One of those benefits could itself be leaving the *kampung*. While *balik kampung* was never expressed as being an unpleasant or onerous duty, it was also often expressed, both explicitly and implicitly, that when staying in the *kampung*, people could not act as they wished. It was made clear, that for several of my informants, the *kampung* is a nice place to visit but they would not like to live there. Other benefits that those being co-opted could possibly accrue would include: access to employment for spouses; better schools for their children; and consumer goods. While the more usual

¹⁰ This is even before considering black-market labour.

circumstance, and likely less strained situation, is for an unmarried female kin member to be co-opted, it was not unknown for married female kin to also be co-opted (hence the discussion of spouses above). Indeed, one of the cases of co-option that I was most familiar with was of this pattern. In a sense, this situation breaks one of the 'rules' of Malay kinship, that married siblings do not co-reside, though as Carsten states, the rule is that married siblings do not share the natal home (Carsten 1997: 68). Perhaps a better way of stating this is that the processes of modernisation, in conjunction with extant Malay kinship ideals, have lent themselves to the formation of new residence strategies, one of which is temporary (though not necessarily short-term) co-residence of siblings. As mentioned previously, surveys or other quantitative devices were not employed, therefore I do not have statistical evidence as to how prevalent the co-opting strategy is. However, from observations, interviews, and discussions both within the housing area and with colleagues, co-opting is by no means a rare phenomena.

Familial relationships are seldom uniformly idyllic. Neo-fostering and co-option (particularly of married female kin) both provide scope for tensions and conflicts, and in accounts of family life past tensions and traumas were discussed. A lot of the commentary on Malays, professional or otherwise, states that strong emotions and (particularly) confrontations are avoided (see for instance Wazir Karim 1990: 12-15). While from experience this is true, it was also found that in defused situations many of the people I was in contact with would and did discuss these same or similar issues and situations. An instance would be the situation mentioned previously, of the young son asking his father if he would get a second wife. The family most emphatically did not want to discuss the matter at the time (the evening meal), but the father, mother, and eldest daughter did talk about the incident later. The point being that it did not appear that tensions and problems were being 'written

out' of these narratives, or at least any more than nostalgia and the desire for harmonious relations would require.

So, while Malays do not fulfil a utopian fantasy of family life (at least no more than the West fulfils a dystopian fantasy), the family is of considerable importance. As we have seen through the course of this chapter, the ideals and praxis of the kinship system informs many aspects of social life in Malaysia. The processes of modernisation have changed aspects of Malay family life, but in conjunction with - rather than strictly in opposition to - that same family life. For newly urban lower middle class Malays, the manoeuvring between visions of modernity, the rhetorics of nationalist Islam and *dakwah*, the ideals of the *kampung* and global identities, has meant the creation of a revised family situation. It could also be argued that kinship has had as much effect on urbanisation and capitalism as the reverse. Though this may be taking a point to an extreme, that kinship and modernisation have informed one another, leading to new forms of both, is a defensible argument. This situation, as we also saw in terms of gender relations, is not without its pitfalls and problems, however, neither is it without its benefits.

The portrayal of family life in Malaysian cinema is somewhat disparate. Typically, what is being represented is 'an urban-biased - largely middle-class - depiction of Malaysia' (Zaharom Nain 1994: 193).¹¹ Through analysing some of these films I will seek to determine how accurate this description of Malaysian cinema is, particularly in respect to representations of the family.

The Family at the Movies

[TV scriptwriters] fill the script with what you think the

Malays will like. Producers don't think that Malay scripts

¹¹ Without attempting to force my own interpretation onto this quote, I am taking middle class here (although not in the entirety of the article) to mean upper middle class.

will sell as movies. Glamour, sure-fire story, etc. is sure box-office winner. TV also made for *kampung* people whereas cinemas are always in town (notes from an interview with an industry informant).

At the end of the previous section, it was hinted that the portrayal of family life in Malaysian cinema may be at odds with what has been discussed above. This indeed does seem to be the case. As opposed to Malay-language tele-dramas and films, where family-based melodramas are the backbone of the genre, in the cinema it is the love story which reigns supreme (White & Winn 1995: n. pag.). In other words, while the aim of 'love' might be to create a family, in the cinema the family is of secondary importance, and as we saw in the context of *Femina*, happens off-stage. If various industry commentators are correct, and the Malay cinema is indeed targeting a youth market, this would make sense. Before closing the book on this issue however, we should enquire further. For instance, if indeed the industry is pandering to a youth market, the question remains, why then is the family not, at least, employed in a 'Romeo and Juliet' fashion, as a plot device to prolong the separation of the young loves? Certainly, to postulate that this particular scenario would be meaningful and/or acceptable cross-culturally would be naïve, but Malay narratives do often employ the 'forbidden love' scenario. Further, as symbols of authority and other targets for youthful rebellion, the family is a potent metaphor. The portrayal or non-portrayal of family and familial relationships may provide the grounding upon which to suggest some answers to this question.

Rather than analysing three films, in this section four modes of representation of the family will be discussed, using films as examples. There are certainly more modes possible, but these should provide a basis from which to initiate discussions. The four modes to be discussed are: films that more-or-less elide the family; films

that represent the family; films where the importance of the family is acknowledged, but is 'worked around'; and films where some aspect of the family relationship provides a structuring device for the narrative.

'Writing-Out' the Family

It is rare to find a film, Malaysian or otherwise, with no portrayal of the family whatsoever. That portrayal might be minimal, as we shall see with *Gemilang*, but it is indeed present. However, if we start to 'pick apart' these same films, then the elision of family becomes more apparent and also more intriguing. The mechanics and the strategies for 'writing out' the family provide some scope for commentary upon the rationales for the elision of such a key feature of Malay life. To begin with a film that has almost no family involvement whatsoever, we turn to *Gemilang*.

In *Gemilang*, the only family portrayed is an uncle of Erra's character. As we recall, Erra plays a very successful singer/actress at the peak of her career. Several events lead her to question whether all the 'glitter' has been/is actually that 'glamorous' after all. One of these events is the appearance of her uncle. This uncle is addicted to gambling, and is being fleeced by a group of other gamblers. When the uncle can no longer pay his debts, this group start to threaten him, and he in turn pressures Erra to give him some money. The uncle eventually murders one of the group that is cheating him, and he is imprisoned.

In itself this subplot is merely one of the aforementioned events which leads Erra into questioning her life. However, this scenario also highlights certain features of the 'writing out' of the family in other films and in itself is an ambiguous portrayal of family relationships, which is, arguably, another way of 'writing out.' To deal with the latter of these issues first, the uncle shows up when he needs money. It is left unclear if he (or any others in her family) had helped Erra in her career. By

implication, that Erra has/needs a 'sugar-daddy,' suggests that he/they probably have not. The uncle coerces money from Erra via the (as he suggests - unfulfilled) obligations of the family relationship. Ong, however, argues, that for a man to be supported or to augment his income with that of a daughter, would be shameful (1990: 265). And while it is hazardous to make extrapolations, it would seem likely to also be the case for an uncle of his niece.¹² In this case, it would be doubly shameful, as gambling is morally dubious in Malay/Islamic ideology.

All in all, the scenario as depicted does not correspond to expectations raised by the earlier sections of this chapter. On one hand, the uncle is acting shamefully by asking his niece for money, and this is highlighted in the film by his snatching the cheque from her hand. On the other hand, while this action demonstrates the depths to which he has sunk, it also remains an unusual occurrence. That his asking his niece for money is unusual is reflected in Erra's hesitation to give him the money. Indeed, Erra has to be cajoled into giving him the money, and this is the other unexpected occurrence. That a niece would not help a member of her family, or would at least hesitate to help a member of her family is not what we would expect from the previous discussions. Erra does give him the money, however reluctantly, demonstrating the power that the duties and obligations of kinship continue to have.

That Erra is the only character depicted as having any family whatsoever is also significant. Even in films where family relations are foregrounded and/or depicted more positively than in *Gemilang*, it is typically the female characters who are shown as involved in family relations.¹³ For example, in *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, the wife in question (Lydiawati) is shown with her natal family, whereas the husband (Rosyam Nor) appears to be *sui generis*. This is also the case in *Hanya Kawan* and

¹² This was not a subject I broached with any of my informants.

¹³ *Lenjan* (Ismail Yaacob 1998) provides a counter example, wherein it is the husband who is depicted, via photos and the appearance of an 'uncle' (in this case not a 'real' uncle, but a former employee of Eman's family).

Selubung. In *Gemilang*, Erra's support network consists of her friends and her 'sugar-daddy' rather than her family. While most of this support network collapses (her 'best friend,' played by Ning Baizura, tries to kill her and her sponsor tries to seduce her), significantly it is her only support network until Hans Isaac comes along. Friends also supply Amy Mastura's support network in *Puteri Impian*, as well as Hans Isaac's support in *Hanya Kawan*. Interestingly, Amy's friends disappear in *Puteri Impian 2* (Aziz M. Osman 1999), and her family (particularly her sister), as well as her 'kakak,' provides emotional support. This brings us to another mode of representation of family.

Representing the Family

As opposed to 'writing out' the family, herein the family is an important part of the narrative (if not necessarily of the main characters' diegetic lives). For the films being discussed, this mode provides a second 'pole' of modes of representing the family. In various ways *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II* (Yusof Haslam, 1996 and 1998 respectively), *Selubung*, *Ringgit Kasorrga*, and *Puteri Impian 2* depict family relations. Indeed, the plots of *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II* are centred upon the sibling relationship of the two main characters. As such, the wider family relationships (father, mother, etc.) are important to both the narrative and diegetic lives of the characters. However, these two elements can be quite distinct, the case of Erra's uncle in *Gemilang* being an example. Although the uncle's appearance in *Gemilang* is important for the narrative, he has little part to play in the diegetic life of Erra's character. However, in the examples given above, the reverse is as likely. The importance to the narrative of these representations of family may be marginal, but they are important to the diegetic life of the characters involved.

In *Selubung*, *Ringgit Kasorrga*, and *Puteri Impian 2*, the characters facing

crises turn to their families for support/guidance. In *Puteri Impian 2*, after Amy discovers her boyfriend is two-timing her and she loses her job (as well as losing her boss, and *kakak*, her job as well), she goes back to her *kampung* to be with her family. Significantly, it is to her sister that Amy predominantly turns to for support. This is highlighted by Amy and her sister talking to each other in a 'secret' language (which most of the female characters actually appear to understand), leaving their parents bewildered.¹⁴ Neither in terms of Amy's need for emotional support, nor for her need to emotional escape, is the *kampung* hiatus strictly necessary for the narrative. As mentioned, in the first *Puteri Impian*, Amy's family was non-existent, and in terms of support and a refuge, her friends supplied this in *Puteri Impian*, as does her boss in *Puteri Impian 2*. Indeed, Amy and her boss enter into a *kakak/adik* relationship, and Amy gets a significant amount of support from this relationship. The *kampung* hiatus is therefore important for other reasons, namely that the *kampung* and family are important to Amy's diegetic life in *Puteri Impian 2* (though not in *Puteri Impian*).

Similarly, in *Selubung* and *Ringgit Kasorrga*, as was argued in the urbanism chapter, the family and the *kampung* are condensed into a symbol of calm, love, and support, in opposition to the city. The closing scenes of *Ringgit Kasorrga* graphically emphasise this opposition, with a caterpillar tractor grinding the *kampung* signpost into the ground. To an extent this is also true in *Suami, Isteri dan...?* where Lydiawati's family also lives in a *kampung* (we are left to assume that Rosyam's family does as well). In the case of *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, after Lydiawati's marriage to Rosyam breaks down, she returns to her natal home, and so far we have a similar scenario to those mentioned above. However, when it transpires that

¹⁴ As an aside, Amy, who dresses 'Western' in KL, wears a *baju kurung* in the *kampung*, though she does not wear a head-scarf. Amy's sister does wear a head-scarf, but not 'properly,' i.e. fastened tightly around the face so that no hair is visible. This latter feature also shows up in *Perempuan Melayu Terakhir* ('The Last Malay Woman,' Erma Fatima 1999), and was commented on negatively by female informants.

Lydiawati is in fact pregnant, her father throws her out of the house. On the one hand, this demonstrates the boundaries to the family bond, and the power of the shame ideology within the family bond. On the other hand, this is also a 'useful' plot device (which is not random, a point which will be returned to later), as Lydiawati is forced to get a house of her own, which is 'coincidentally' right across the street from that of her former husband. It should be pointed out that the house in question is, realistically speaking, outside her income (keeping in mind that there is no alimony). Arguably, all of the examples given above demonstrate some boundary to the family relationship, and especially that (sibling or sibling-like relationships aside) families are to be found only in the *kampung*, and only to be turned to in extremity. In *Suami, Isteri, dan...?* however, Lydiawati's family is a crucial part of her character's diegetic life, and this is suddenly withdrawn. Shame, herein, is not an abstract point, but a crucial aspect of the family bond. Even a child, as important as children are in Malay society, can not bridge this gap. It is only when Lydiawati and Rosyam are reunited that the shame may be expunged and the rift healed.

Working Around the Family

If in the previous two sections we dealt with the 'poles' of representation of the family, the following two sections fall within those poles. In this section films that 'work around' the family are the focus. Rather than avoiding the issue of the family altogether (such as in *Gemilang* where the family is absent except as a negative intrusion), or foregrounding aspects of the family relationship (for example, *Puteri Impian 2* where the family is a last refuge for a grief-stricken Amy Mastura), herein the family and its importance, obligations, duties, etc. are implicitly acknowledged. In films such as *Femina*, *Perempuan, Isteri, dan...?*, *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II*, and *Selubung* the family is present but 'open.' By 'open.' what is meant

is that the presence of the family is, to an extent, unarticulated, that meaning/s can be read into the family as represented. The family is there because it should be there. Requirements of verisimilitude require that it is 'realistic' for a family to be present at that given time or place. 'Open' is not the same as empty. An empty representation of the family would have no meaning or intent, and its presence would be like the presence of wallpaper or a rug. Rather, a particular representation, being unarticulated, remains in the arena of 'common-sense.' 'Common sense,' however, contains within it the implication of elite rhetorics/agendas and social constructions of meaning, being accepted as 'matter-of-fact.'

In *Ringgit Kasorrga*, Deanna Yusoff turns to her family for support and advice, as does Ida Nerina in *Selubung*, however, this is about the extent of any similarity between the two instances. Deanna Yusoff's *kampung* is firmly placed geographically and visually; we know where it is, what it looks like, and what her family is like. Deanna is depicted with her family, talking laughing, and getting advice. Further, Deanna is shown to become visibly strengthened by her visit to her family. In the case of Ida Nerina in *Selubung*, almost the opposite is true. We are given no real idea where Ida's mother's house is located. The house appears to be an urban dwelling, and by implication (there is no time lag to suggest a long journey somewhere) it is probably in KL. There is no interaction depicted between Ida and her mother, and Ida is definitely not becoming stronger when we see her. Indeed, Ida's mother is represented as being very ineffectual, and it is the appearance of a friend (Deanna) that catalyses an improvement. While making comparisons between films, even if by the same director, is a rather precarious undertaking, it can also be enlightening. As was discussed in the Chapter 3, there are similarities in the representations of the *kampung*, particularly in opposition to the city, in both of these films. Likewise, Deanna Yusoff, the lead in both films, is depicted as having

good relationships with her family. Two situations, alike yet different.

In *Ringgit Kasorrga*, the family is an important part of the diegetic life of Deanna Yusoff. This does not appear to be as much the case in *Selubung*, particularly for Ida Nerina. Although Ida's family is ineffectual in helping her, it is to her family that she initially turns. By becoming involved with, and later marrying a *dakwah* leader, Ida has become alienated from her university friends, and thus may have been hesitant to turn to them, yet that in itself does not explain why Ida turns to her family. Ida's family has not previously been depicted as being of importance, nor is her retreat to her mother's house necessary to the plot. This is where 'common-sense' enters into the equation. As we have seen from the ethnographies (see Chapter 4 above) and from the films, the family is where (women in particular) *should* turn, rather than to friends, colleagues, professionals, etc. As this depiction is 'open,' it may also serve to reinforce the argument made earlier, that the critical difference between Deanna and Ida is that Deanna has kept in touch with her *kampung* roots, and that she has incorporated 'traditional' Malay values into her negotiations with modernity. If this reading is correct, then it is important that it be Deanna's character who aids her stricken friend, even though it is to her family that Ida should get this help from. A compromise needs to be made, and thus the family is 'worked around,' it is there and yet not there.

Perempuan, Isteri, dan...? is another case wherein the family must be 'worked around.' The film opens during a wedding ceremony. Both the bride (Sophia Jane) and groom (Rosyam Nor) are depicted surrounded by their friends and families. The bride however, runs away and the wedding ceremony is torn asunder. The jilted husband tracks his errant bride to Thailand. Through a series of events they end up back in the husband's *kampung*. So far so good, the couple are now married and living together, but those families who were so prominent at the beginning of the film have

now disappeared. As was demonstrated in *Suami, Isteri, dan...?*, shame and the family make for a potentially volatile mixture. Sophia Jane brought shame upon both her family and her husband and his family. On the other hand Rosyam Nor's character has also acted shamefully, by chasing down the runaway and marrying her.¹⁵ So, on the one hand, that the families have little to do with Sophia and Rosyam is understandable, but not their total absence, or at least that of Rosyam's family. Comparing the situation with *Suami, Isteri dan...?* (admittedly a comedy), Lydiawati's father does turn up again, even if it just to spurn her and demonstrate how desolate her position is. As opposed to *Gemilang*, or other films where characters appear to have no families, in *Perempuan, Isteri, dan...?* the families exist and are shown to exist, but have disappeared. In terms of the plot, the absence of family is crucial, as in *Perempuan, Isteri, dan...?* Sophia Jane's actions in the *kampung* become increasingly outrageous, which would be difficult if her or her husband's family were present.¹⁶ The family can, and arguably must, be sacrificed to the enunciative (commentary) needs of the narrative. Therefore, this is again a situation where the family must be worked around, if in a very different manner from that of *Selubung*. Though the family is absent, this is a case where 'silence is louder than words,' and the family is acknowledged by virtue of its absence.

Structuring the Family

This fourth mode also fits within the poles of the first two modes. In various films, the family, or at least particular familial relationships, provide a structuring device for the film's narrative. This sounds like a family-oriented melodrama, but in this instance, the structuring element does not necessarily coincide with the film's *raison*

¹⁵ Unbeknownst to both families, Rosyam has actually murdered the man Sophia married in Thailand and then forced her into prostitution. It was only by a trick that Sophia got him to marry her and free herself from life as his prostitute. Needless to say, this provides a further incentive for them both to keep a low profile.

¹⁶ An alternative interpretation is that prostitution is unrecoverable in the family system, however, Raybeck's work casts some doubt on this point (1986). Furthermore, the families are supposedly not aware of the events in Thailand.

d'être. Whereas in *Home From The Hill* (Minnelli 1960), for instance, the focus is upon a relationship between a father and his son, the film is 'about' power and control within the family, about expectations and failures of expectation, and about abuses of prestige. Without trying to argue that this type of delving into the undercurrents of the family is not part of the mode of representation under discussion, it is not the most important aspect of the film. While this argument depends on issues of interpretation and intent, through the use of some examples hopefully a difference may be ascertained.¹⁷

Maria Mariana (Yusof Haslam 1996) and *Maria Mariana II* (Yusof Haslam 1998) demonstrate to some degree, what has been argued above. The stories are centred upon two sisters. The elder of the two (Erra Fazira) is the solid dependable one and works as a policewoman.¹⁸ The younger of the sisters (Ziana Zain - another famous singer-actor) is the rebellious one who gets into trouble, typically by getting involved with the 'wrong' guy. The relationship between the sisters is stormy, as might be expected, but fits in with the ideals of sibling relations. Erra does her best to look after her *adik*, to give her support, even if this is not always appreciated, indeed at the end of the first film Erra is 'killed' (actually, it was a mistake, she was merely in a coma. Erra's character returns for *Maria Mariana II*). The siblings are not the only family depicted in the films, the two sisters have parents, though these parents are largely ineffectual in terms of 'controlling' Ziana's character. In regards to the parents, *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II* 'work around' them. The sibling relationship forms a key structuring element to the story, and therefore can not be 'worked around' nor 'written-out.'

¹⁷ The whole issue of *genre* (such as melodrama) is another matter raised by this discussion (see for instance Gledhill 1987). Particularly in dealing with films outside the corpus from/for which genres were developed, they are at best employed as heuristics, for organisation and to provide a starting point for analysis, rather than as formalist pigeon-holes. As an example, I would personally term *Suami, Isteri dan...?* a melodrama (with touches of comedy) rather than as a comedy, but the latter is how it is billed - *Komedi Sensasi* '96 (The Comedy Sensation of '96) is emblazoned upon the video cover.

¹⁸ Who also happens to be a singing star.

To attempt to 'place' *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II*, they are action-romances, in this case centred upon a particular family relationship as a plot device. As such, the sibling relationship is not what the film is 'about.' Indeed, most people familiar with the films would be surprised that they are being discussed in this manner at all. This is not to argue that this 'common sense' response is the only valid reading of the film, however it does suggest that the sister element is not a major focus in the film. This should not be surprising, as different audiences, including academics or industry professionals, will have different priorities and make different readings. Those being put forward here are amongst many.

Suami, Isteri dan...? also provides an example of this fourth mode of representation. When last discussed, Lydiawati had been thrown out of her natal home because of her pregnancy. She subsequently moves into a new home, coincidentally across the street from where her former husband is to live. By the time Rosyam does move in, their son is about 4 years old. However, while this close proximity is useful, it is the presence of the son upon which much of the following humour (and melodrama) depends. We, along with Rosyam, are left in no doubt that this is indeed his son. When first Rosyam meets his son, they share the same gestures and attitudes, they even wear the same glasses. This very funny scene also plays upon Islamic ideology that fathers are more important than are mothers (Ong 1990), albeit in this case to humorous effect. The strong bond between father and son also provides less humorous moments, such as when Lydiawati becomes angry with her son for spending time with his estranged father, and slaps him. This scene provoked the response amongst two Malay female informants that when marriage breaks down it is always the children that suffer.¹⁹ The point intended here, as with *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II*, is that in none of these films did a family

¹⁹ Conversely, an American couple who also watched the film remarked upon an earlier scene where Rosyam slapped Lydiawati.

relationship have to form a structuring device, but that it was *particularly* chosen to. Further, that while the family relationships involved are important (siblings in *Maria Mariana* and *Maria Mariana II*, parent-child in *Suami, Isteri dan...?*), they are not the central/critical relationships these films. This is aptly illustrated in *Suami, Isteri dan...?* When Lydiawati learns that her husband had not been unfaithful (the cause for their divorce), and that he still cares for her, the husband-wife relationship becomes foregrounded (i.e. the 'love story' takes precedence over the 'family melodrama').

Focusing on the Individual

There is an issue that links many of these scenarios together beyond that of family (although it is closely linked to the family), that of the individual. In Malaysian discursive constructions of identity, the individual is intrinsically linked to other institutions. These various components to identity become foregrounded depending upon context. In some instances, Malay-ness, and all this comprises, is brought to the fore, at other times other components will be of principal interest. Of significance here is the extent to which the extrinsic elements of individual identity are promoted, as opposed to the internally generated and internally consistent model discussed in Chapter 1. We have already seen, in Chapter 4, how women's identities have been constructed in public and official discourses. This is also the case for individual identity more generally.

While in discursive constructions of identity, the individual is integrated with/into other factors, this integration is also a site of disjuncture, as the individual is one of the modernity project's 'bundles of assumptions.' The preceding section and chapters have highlighted the conflict between social and familial demands and expectations, and individual needs and desires. Thus, the individual will also be

analysed discretely from the family, even though the two are intertwined in Malaysian discourse. This connection/disconnection arguably parallels the changing public discourse on the individual, currently taking place in Malaysia.

Throughout the previous chapters, as well as within many of the films mentioned above, a distinct layer of analysis has centred upon an individual's attempts for, or struggles with, personal autonomy. The importance of individual expression and realisation, for instance, was of considerable importance within the discussion of gender. The remainder of this chapter will focus more specifically upon the consequences and implications of the expression, or control, of the needs and desires of individuals. In the first part of this chapter the family/society was investigated, with the family/individual relationship touched upon, in this section family/individual will be looked into more closely, as will the individual/society relationship.

The term *individual*, as with many throughout this thesis, is a problematic one. Firstly, in the South-East Asian context it is 'loaded,' being employed to excess by both sides of the infamous Asian Values debate (Chapter 1). Secondly, two distinct ideas are collapsed within the term, subjectivity and autonomy. Unfortunately, here we have the introduction of a problematic term, in the attempt to explain a previous problematic term. *Autonomy* is almost as loaded a term as *individual*, and is in itself bound up in issues of *agency*. Indeed, the third set of italics in the previous sentence signify that we have yet another problematic term. The remainder of this chapter could be given over to a discussion of the various merits of the differing interpretations of the terminology involved, however; in order to achieve any analysis at all, the working definitions for these terms are as follows. Agency signifies the will and ability to take/make actions of and/or for oneself, that is to manifest one's subjectivity. Much of the debate regarding agency centres upon

whether agency is indeed agency unless the manifestation of agency is efficacious, whether or not a being's actions in/on the world change the world, or merely replicate or reinforce the world. In the sense in which agency is employed within this thesis, autonomy would be the extent to which a person is 'allowed' (physically, ideologically, or otherwise) to express or enact their agency. If, at least for the moment, we take *individual* to incorporate subjectivity and agency, acknowledging that autonomy is involved, but remains a site of negotiation and confrontation, there is a starting point for our discussion. While this has been a lengthy digression, the issues involved are central to this chapter and thesis.

The above has been, in effect, an encapsulation of the 'European' views upon the individual. As has been pointed out, perhaps most famously during the Asian Values debate, this definition and conceptualisation may have little to do with how others conceive of the individual. To attempt to determine whether or not this is the case, Malaysian ideologies of power, shame, and conceptions of public and private space will be analysed.

Malaysia and the Individual

Historically, and arguably still today, power in South-East Asia (inclusive of Malaysia) is based upon the accumulation of persons rather than, necessarily, land or wealth *per se* (Errington 1989, 1990; Anderson 1990). The ability to form a 'net' of patronage and protection constitutes personal esteem and authority. Certainly, a relatively wealthy person will be able to do this on a greater scale than others, but those others will be attempting to do likewise. Anderson provides a cosmological underpinning for discussions of power in Javanese society, which can be extended to other Indic-influenced societies (again, such as Malaysia). Three key elements of this discussion are that power is finite, concrete, and is neither inherently good or bad

(Anderson 1990: 22-23). That 'power' is finite has the implication that the more one person has, the less there is available for others. This places a theoretical limit on the level of autonomy that various members of society may demonstrate. If for instance a ruler is absolute, his subjects have a limited scope for independent action. The legend of Hang Tuah is indicative of historical attitudes towards power, authority, and autonomy in Malaysia. These attitudes, and the ideologies which are intertwined with them, are of relevance to present day Malaysia, and warrant a brief recounting.

The mytho-historical legend of Hang Tuah takes place during the reign of Sultan Mansor (c. Fifteenth century A.D.) in Malacca. It is the story of a group of young friends who through acts of bravery and martial prowess are rewarded with the posts of royal guardians. Hang Tuah in particular flourishes, and is given more and increasingly important commissions to fulfil (such as stealing the daughter of one of the neighbouring rulers for the Sultan). So far so good, but political machinations lead to accusations of treachery being imputed onto Hang Tuah. The Sultan believes these accusations, even though Hang Tuah has personally saved the kingdom several times by this point, and sentences him to death. The *Bendahara* (the state treasurer, a very high-ranking court official and the Sultan's second in command) however hides Hang Tuah away from Malacca. At this point in the legend, Hang Jebat, Hang Tuah's best friend, begins to run rampant. There are two diverse readings of Hang Jebat's actions. One is that because of the 'killing' of his friend, he has lost faith in a morally dissolute ruler. Another rationale is that Hang Jebat's actions are a result of his status as Hang Tuah's replacement going to his head (*cf.* the accounts of Rehman Rashid 1993: 216-20; Sharifah Maznah Syed Omar 1993: *passim*; and Ziauddin Sardar 2000: 203-07). The *Bendahara* tells the frightened Sultan that Hang Tuah is indeed still alive, whereupon Hang Tuah is immediately forgiven and summoned to the court. Incidentally, this isn't the first time Hang Tuah has been sentenced to death. Hang

Tuah defeats Hang Jebat in combat and thereby saves the kingdom.

The Hang Tuah legend highlights certain issues. Both Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat demonstrate agency, autonomy is however a different matter. Like the heroes of Greek myth, Hang Tuah devotes his autonomy to fulfilling his 'role,' he acts as a 'type' rather than as a 'character' (whose subjectivity and agency are manifest). Hang Jebat on the other hand (re)claims his personal autonomy. The Sultan is the epitome of autonomous action (if rather unwise in his usage), Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat demonstrate autonomy to lesser extents. Other 'characters' are merely addenda. This latter point highlights one of Anderson's statements regarding power cosmology - that it is a limited resource. While autonomy and power are not necessarily the same thing, they do appear linked. The other issue brought to light is the ambiguous position in which 'individuality' was regarded. While Hang Tuah's actions were, in the main, reprehensible, he is still the notional hero of the legend, while Hang Jebat in acting against the Sultan is the villain. As Rehman Rashid (1993), Sharifah Maznah Syed Omar (1993), and Ziauddin Sardar (2000) point out, this reading of the legend still has ideological weight. Incidentally, two filmic treatments of the legend give two differing interpretations of the legend. *Hang Tuah* (Phani Majumdar 1956) represents the 'official' version, whereas *Hang Jebat* (Hussain Hanif 1961) positions the eponymous Hang Jebat as the true hero of the legend.²⁰ In other words, autonomy (as manifested by Hang Jebat's actions) was not, and arguably is not, seen as universally 'good.'

Sultan Mansor's reign was after the introduction of Islam, as is indeed signalled by the title 'Sultan.' The advent of Islam has also had an impact upon Malay constructions of autonomy. While Islam is 'about' submission of oneself to Allah and Allah's will, Islam is also 'about' personal striving for closeness to God's

²⁰ For a critical reading of the legend and its employment in contemporary times, see Sharifah Maznah Syed Omar (1993).

message. To be a Muslim means literally 'to submit,' to live one's life according to the word and law of Allah. Perhaps the most stereotypical Western images of Islam focus upon this aspect; *jihad* warriors throwing themselves suicidally into battle or hundreds if not thousands of men prostrating themselves in prayer. This is, however, also the aspect of Islam most Muslims focus on as well; the brotherhood of Islam, Islam's egalitarianism, etc. In this respect, to be a Muslim does entail the submission of a certain degree of autonomy. Reading the Qu'ran is a case in point. 'Reading' is an inappropriate word to represent the action in question; 'reciting' is actually more accurate. For most Muslims, the goal in reciting the Qu'ran is not to 'understand' it, indeed, the question of literacy aside, the Qu'ran is written in Arabic, which is not the first language of many Muslims. The goal in reciting the Qu'ran is to repeat Allah's words perfectly, and thereby become closer to him. However, as the word 'most' in the sentence above signals, this is not the case for every Muslim.

There is within Islam a hierarchy. For most Muslims, the above holds true, that they are 'reciters,' who repeat the words of Allah's message without any explicit attempts to understand (Gilsenan 1982). There are however, other Muslims who do attempt to understand Allah's words, who do 'read' the Qu'ran. These readers' job is to provide exegesis on Allah's word, and to attempt to apply this understanding (Gilsenan 1982). This exegesis is then relayed to other Muslims via the mosque and religious teachers. As with the historic ideologies of power, the more authority persons have, the more autonomy they also have.²¹ The inherent ambiguity of the status of autonomy within Islam meshes well with a similar ambiguous attitude towards autonomy in Malay ideology. However, the above discussions do illustrate that conceptualisations of power and authority are ego-centred, i.e. that there is indeed a history to the individual (however ambiguously the concept may be

²¹ The above discussion is that of ideals, Islam is far more heterogeneous than this discussion allows, even within Malaysia, much less at the level of individual faith and praxis.

regarded) in South-East Asia.

One further arena where questions of autonomy are foregrounded is in the family. As we have already seen, there is conflict regarding issues of personal autonomy vis-à-vis social/familial roles and expectations, but these roles and expectations have not as yet been made explicit. As we saw earlier, there is also a hierarchy within the family. One interesting aspect of the authority/power situation within the family is that with age there is a significant shift from male to female (as noted in the Chapter 4). Outside of the family, men's status (as with that of women) also increases with the raising of a successful family. As Anderson suggests, this status (power) has been accumulated and is a concrete entity (a number of successful and wealthy children). However, if age represents one way of accumulating power, then youth would be marked (particularly for women) as a period of restricted autonomy. As we saw in the Chapter 4, this does indeed appear to be the case.

Returning the discussion to the family also brings up another issue, one that has been circumvented until now. When describing Malay kinship, brief mention was made of Malay society sometimes being referred to as a 'house society,' due to the significance of *the house* as both a metaphor and structuring motif for many South-East Asian peoples (Carsten 1987; Errington 1989). The house brings with it the public/private relationship, another *bête noir* of anthropology and anthropologists. The house in Malay culture is largely a public space, with only the sleeping areas and kitchen (*dapur*) being 'off-limits' to non-family. From the earlier description of urban housing it should be evident that the public spaces of the house can be rendered truly public, as most of the frontage of the houses is glass. The point of shame is largely what others 'know' you have done wrong (as opposed to guilt), and this visible public area demonstrates that either that nothing is 'going on,' or that 'proper' activities are in fact being carried out. As a case in point, if I was at home

alone (that is if there was no male 'relative' at home) with a female 'relative,' the front door would be left open-i.e. there was nothing to hide. To return to another point made earlier (Chapter 3), there is a strong element of public surveillance and censure within Malay society, and the very visible public spaces of urban housing is quite possibly one manifestation of this feature. One aspect of living in Malaysia that I found personally irritating was that people would not come up to the door and knock to gain admittance. Instead, visitors would shout from the gate and either wait to be acknowledged, or only then approach the door (if they were close friends or kin). On reflection, this makes sense when the front of the house is 'open' (I still found it annoying however). In effect this means that there is very little 'private' space, either within or outwith the family home. Indeed, even what 'private' space there is within the home (bedrooms) will most likely be shared. This is even more so in the case of *kampung* houses, where the living areas typically double as sleeping areas as well. The visibility factor may also explain the aforementioned aversion to condominium living, that they are enclosed and therefore people assume that you are necessarily 'up to something.' In this regard it is interesting that one of the first improvements to a house is to solidify the wall around the house. The solid wall is also a significant middle-class marker, which may also signal a removal of one's self and family from public scrutiny, and a suggestion that those within are no longer bound by the same moralities.

While privacy is not the same as autonomy, when combined with issues of shame, power and authority, and efficacious public censure, its importance regarding autonomy is crucial. The 'individual' then is a space for negotiation, between public accountability and private autonomy. This negotiation, of the 'individual,' is a site of confrontation between different institutions (family, capitalism, religion, etc.) and their demands and expectations. It should be unnecessary to stress the point that this

is as true in the 'West,' but relative differences sometimes are made into absolutes, as was the case in the 'Asian Values' debate. Relative differences are not inconsequential however, and the public/private dimension in regard to issues of autonomy is a case in point. This matrix of confrontation also has significance in terms of Malay cinema, to which we turn in the next section.

The Individual and Film

Questions of censorship may not, on the face of it, appear to have much to do with issues of public and private space, but as we shall see these two apparently disparate issues are indeed mutually affective. Censorship is largely to do with what is 'acceptable,' which may take into account issues of artistic merit, or verisimilitude, or social/cultural mores and norms. In order to explicate what is meant here, a digression is necessary. An underlying assumption in terms of Western cinema is that a diegetic representation of 'private' space will be a 'realistic' depiction of private activities (within the bounds of what is 'acceptable' nonetheless). For instance, a scene enacted in what would be a private space in the 'real' world, would involve the actors acting as if they were truly in private (not in front of an audience, whether that audience is the film crew or the perceived viewers). Part of this cinematic *habitus* has to do with the Realist mode, which is generally speaking the dominant mode in Western cinema. In other words, the diegetic world is *presumed* to be comprised of both public and private spaces, and represented accordingly. The limits to how, and how much of, the 'private' sphere is acceptable for depiction has changed over time. As an instance, the theatrical hyper-emotionality evinced in many silent films is no longer deemed 'realistic.' The point being that social constructions and/or understandings of public and private relative to the cinema, have shifted. So too have the corresponding censorship codes, and therefore what cinema goes, filmmakers, or

actors accept as a 'real' enactment of space and action has likewise shifted.

In the Malaysian context, the above assumption is not similarly valid. The majority of Malaysian censorship codes are based upon what is publicly acceptable, therefore no nudity or kissing. In effect, censorship laws impart a public morality onto 'private' spaces and representations within the diegetic. As the previous section argued, much of Malay life is indeed conducted in public or semi-public (or as if in public). Malaysian cinema has therefore little in the way of a diegetic 'private' space available. This has two important consequences: one being how a 'private' scene is represented (or not as the case may be); and the other being for the enunciation (commentary) of the scene. These two points are entangled, but can be 'unpacked.'

Depiction is arguably the more straightforward of the two consequences. The 'Fourth Wall' of the cinematic space (i.e. that space comprised of the imaginary audience and/or the film crew) is in effect a public arena. This may be due to censorship codes or culturally this space would be equivalent to the glass frontage of houses. Either way (or indeed in combination), limitations are placed upon actors' portrayals. The most overt example of this is the lack of physical intimacy shown/portrayed between lovers or spouses (as is generally the case in real-life public spaces). Intimacy is often signalled either in dialogue or symbolically. In terms of the latter, sharing a meal is one of the more common ways of sign-posting an intimate relationship or courtship.²² This symbolic representation also led to the following anecdote. An acquaintance in Singapore stated that when she was younger she had watched Malay films. One stuck in her mind as it led to some early biological confusion. In a particular film, a couple were eating satay, a little later in the film they were eating satay again, but this time the woman was pregnant. As a child, my

²² Sharing a meal is very important in Malay culture, as kin bonds can be formed through communal dining (Errington 1989; Carsten 1995a, 1997). A central part of a Malay marriage ceremony is for the couple to feed each other. Indeed, it could be argued, as opposed to above, that the depiction of eating together is a portrayal of a Malay relationship at its *most* intimate

acquaintance made the logical conclusion, that if you ate satay with a man you became pregnant (she did say she had since learned otherwise). As this anecdote illustrates, whereas in Hollywood cinema of the 1950s or 1960s the initiation of physical intimacy typically led to a *pan* to a crackling fire (or some such), the 'eating-together' scene stands for the depiction of intimacy. Certain films have pushed the boundaries regarding the depictions of intimacy, *Lenjan* and *Panas* in particular, however, the restrictions are generally upheld. While there are a range of potential penalties for errant filmmakers, from editing by the censors to legal action, there is also the point that this aversion conforms to social (public) mores.

Another area where the public 'Fourth Wall' imposes itself is in individual portrayals of the 'private,' such as emotions. One of the frequent complaints encountered regarding Malay films is that the acting is 'bad,' or more specifically- 'wooden.' This is a comment related by sources as diverse as a taxi driver and a film director. An example of 'unrealistic' acting comes from *Perempuan Melayu Terakhir* ('The Last Malay Woman,' Erma Fatimah 1999). The actor portraying the 'last' Malay woman (Vanida Imran) at one stage has to act as if she is having erotic thoughts about a man (Eizan Yusof). As the 'blurb' on the back of the video cover attests, this scene was not convincing, as Vanida Imran was too embarrassed to make a realistic portrayal. In order to make it appear as if she was indeed in the throws of passion her feet were tickled with a feather. While this is the most humorous example, overly restrained or 'unrealistic' portrayals of emotions (particularly strong emotions) or emotional situations do frequently appear. As was noted previously, the avoidance of strong emotions is an oft mentioned feature of Malay culture, and therefore might be regarded as publicly 'real' (however unreal in the context of the diegetic). This is more often a complaint made regarding male actors than female actors, although the above anecdote illustrates this is not an exclusive feature. An

interesting point is that while this 'unrealism' is, arguably, grounded in Malay culture and social mores, it is nevertheless acknowledged by Malay spectators, hence the complaints. It would appear that it is easier for Malay audiences to distinguish the inappropriateness of 'public' portrayals of the 'private,' than it is for the actors and filmmakers to comply with audience expectations in that regard.

The other arena, that of enunciation/articulation, is less clear-cut. Herein we must discuss the treacherous ground of 'the message,' as numerous 'audience studies' have pointed out, transmission and reception are very different animals (Morley 1980, 1996a; Ang 1985; Miller 1995b). A film scene does not happen 'by accident,' though certainly fortune may play a role. A good example, if possibly apocryphal, involves *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Spielberg 1981). In possibly the most memorable scene of the film, after several fights the crowd around Harrison Ford parts to show a huge Egyptian brandishing a likewise huge scimitar. With a look of annoyance Ford pulls out his pistol and shoots his gigantic foe. Allegedly this scene was an *ad lib* by Ford, who was suffering from stomach problems and couldn't face another prolonged fight. As stated, this scene is also one of the most memorable of the film. Be that as it may, generally speaking a scene is tightly scripted, with care for details which make up the *mise-en-scene*. This involves the conscious choice of X over Y, however this choice may have less articulable underpinnings. There is then a further layer of meaning than that of the articulated. Regarding these further layers of meaning, incorporating such factors as lighting, sound track, incidental music, set details, etc., provide more scope for varied readings of 'the message.' What is being suggested here is that, at least some of, these layers are 'picked up' by the audience in the intersubjective process of watching the film, and fit (or not) these meanings into their experiences and expectations (Rajadhyaksha n.d.). If we return our attention to some of the earlier chapters, examples abound. In the case of *Gemilang*, the scene between

Erra and her uncle illustrates the above point. In the context of Erra's diegetic life-crisis, the confrontation is further impetus to Erra's realisation that glamour and wealth are not utopian after all. However, as the catalyst for this realisation is a family member, and one who is implicated in gambling, there is another reading available than that given earlier. A different interpretation of this scene is that it is a (negative) commentary on the commodification of familial relations in Malaysian capitalist/urban society. This criticism is not articulated as such, but is layered into the scene.

What does this have to do with individuation/autonomy? Diegetic struggles for and with autonomy are often the sites of disjuncture in the enunciation. This might be expected given the aforementioned ambiguity regarding individual autonomy. One of the key codes of modern narrative is character verisimilitude. Two reasons for this are as follows. Firstly, as McKeon points out (1987), with the shift to 'modern' literary forms, the author (or in the present case, the filmmaker) had a new task to accomplish. Contrary to the epics, where the narrator was pre-established as truthful and virtuous, being in effect 'voices of god,' 'modern' authors had to establish themselves as purveyors of truth and virtue. One of the ways of establishing themselves as arbitrators of truth and virtue was for authors to incorporate the subjective perspectives of their characters. As the characters became autonomous agents, readers could come to empathise with the characters. Secondly, as Rajadhyaksha states, the intersubjective experience (between character and viewer) is a necessary one in regard to the cinema (n.d.). One way in which both of these issues can be addressed is via the portrayal of a 'coherent' (i.e. one that adheres to an internal logic) subject. This provides the reader/viewer with a basis upon which to interact with the narrative, and by which the author/filmmaker may establish their *bona fides*. In other words, the basis for the suspension of disbelief (particularly

important in regard to the cinema) is characters in whom we can 'believe.' Character verisimilitude is therefore a crucial factor. Probably we have all experienced a film (or novel for that matter), which left us unsatisfied. For the moment disregarding other possibilities, an inability to engage with a character or characters, and hence to engage with the diegetic, at the very least contributes to this dissatisfaction.

As we have already seen, 'private' space constitutes one area of slippage regarding character verisimilitude in Malay films. This could be regarded as a form of resistance against Western-imposed narrative conventions (as with cinema vérité), specifically Realism. However, for the most part filmmakers adhere to these conventions, and it is in specific instances that the portrayal slips from 'real' to 'fantasy.' One such area, where the elements of 'fantasy' intrude upon 'reality, is in terms of character temporal verisimilitude (autonomous body time). While the most overt example of this comes from a tele-movie, it frequently appears in feature films as well.²³ In the film a young woman has sex with her boyfriend. As he drops her off at home, she vomits outside of her house (a public space), signalling that she is pregnant. Herein a realistic portrayal of the body time has been sacrificed for enunciative force, and the public expression of that commentary (that sex outwith marriage is wrong). Other examples come from films such as *Perempuan, Isteri, dan...?* and *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, where the characters do not show any sign of ageing, even though a significant period time passes in the narrative. While this could be dismissed as examples of 'bad' editing or continuity, this dismissal does not explain why it is this particular instance. The point remains that character's autonomous body time does not appear to be as crucial a feature as it tends to be in European and American cinemas (though there are whole genres where this is also the case - such as erotic films). The ambiguous nature of 'the individual' perhaps holds

²³ The tele-movie in question was either *Naemah* by Aman Shah or *An-Nur* by Ahmed Siregar. My apologies to the director of the other film, and for not having complete notes concerning these two films.

more of an explanation in this case.

There are other arenas wherein 'fantasy' intrudes upon 'reality.' Lifestyle circumstances (residences, affluence, etc.) is another such area. To return to *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, mention was made that after her divorce and consequently being abandoned by her family, Lydiawati is portrayed as living in a house that is realistically outwith her means. A reading of this situation, with new information in mind, is that this 'reality' comes up against the enunciation of aspirations. *Suami, Isteri dan...?* depicts aspirations to 'the good life,' principally that of an upper middle-class lifestyle, as well as an aspiration towards female autonomy. In this case, 'fantasy' wins out, at least initially, and overthrows the 'reality' of a divorced single mother. The film, contra the earlier reading, reconciles this somewhat in the end, and the 'happy ending' (Lydiawati and Rosyam Nor are remarried, their child has two parents again, etc.) entails the 'drawing back' from the more radical aspirations, particularly those of female autonomy.

With this further layer of meaning (the individual), the previous readings of *Perempuan, Isteri, dan...?* can also be reinterpreted. Earlier it was posited that the force of familial roles, bonds, and obligations were being 'acknowledged by their absence.' In regards to the issue of individual autonomy, particularly female autonomy, the film presents a strong moral message, that (unchecked?) female autonomy can/will destroy both the woman and the family. This is not to say that the earlier readings were 'wrong,' but that the various levels of meaning which make up the film all contribute to differing interpretations. Some of these may have more 'weight' than others, depending upon the positionality of the viewer.

The individual then, whether in terms of their relations to/with the family or society is a negotiated space. Female autonomy in particular is a site of conflicting ideas, ideals, and ideologies, as indeed it remains in the West. While filmic

representations of this negotiated arena tend to 'draw back' from the more radical possibilities (as for example in *Femina*, *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, or even *Gemilang*), if not present an outright warning (*Perempuan, Isteri, dan...?*), arguably these representations remain more progressive (at least in terms of Western liberal configurations) than the general discourse in Malay society.

Compromising The Family and The Individual

As will have struck the reader, the aforementioned modes (regarding the representations of the family) are only partially satisfying. Certain of the films contain more than one mode (such as *Suami, Isteri dan...?*) and some of the examples could arguably fit into other modes. Furthermore, I may have appeared to 'play a nasty trick' upon the reader, providing one reading, only to give another interpretation later. This is partially an artefact of the process of categorisation (the former points), and partially the effect of working in/with a symbolic medium (the latter). However, these heuristic deconstructions have raised some pertinent issues. Keeping in mind that the (potential) audience and the filmmakers come largely from different socio-economic backgrounds, combining several of the points raised previously may address, if not answer, some of the issues raised above.

One of the points *not* already raised is that, for various reasons, Western lifestyle (including that of the family) is depicted and regarded very unfavourably in Malaysia. Government and religious leaders and rhetorics stress the prevalence of homosexuality, single parenthood, juvenile delinquency, and poor social and moral values in the West. The 'Asian Values' debate in the 1980s propelled these arguments into both the academic and global arenas. Further, Western media available in Malaysia, such as American films and television programmes, have done nothing to change people's perceptions of Western (family) life. Indeed, it is taken as fact by

many Malaysians that Westerners simply do not have close families full stop.

A further issue is that the upper middle class in general is also perceived as being less family oriented, at least relative to other Malays. Without having personally experienced family life amongst upper middle class Malays (not to mention the elite), it would be specious to comment on the validity of this perception. Further, the majority of my contacts amongst the filmmakers were male, in contrast to my informants, and therefore more likely to be met outside of their homes. This may give an unbalanced view of the importance of the family to the filmmakers themselves. On the other hand, wives and children were scarcely mentioned in conversations, something which is not the case generally in Malaysia.

Combining these issues with others raised in the chapter, a couple of themes present themselves as, at least partial, explanations of the lack or under-representation of the family and the ambiguity of representations of individual autonomy in Malay cinema. In terms of the family, the first of these is based upon the values and aspirations of the urbanised middle class. Rightly or wrongly, these values and aspirations are perceived and depicted as being similar to those found in the West, if not out-and-out 'Westernised.' The derision of Western values during the 1980s by various groups, including elite forces as well as those further down the socio-economic ladder, will have had some effect upon those sharing these values, or perhaps more crucially those perceived as sharing those values. As we have seen from the films both in this chapter and in those previous, depictions of the 'Westernised' are ambiguous, if not outright critical. Significantly, this ambiguity/criticism has often come from those of a similar background and status. To push the analysis, this ambiguity has led to compromises, and as we have seen, the depictions of the family is one area where compromises have been made.

Remaining with the issue of ambiguous relationships, perhaps 'the individual,'

that is issues of autonomy, also play a role in the under-representation of the family. 'The individual' forms one of the most important foundations of modernity, whether in terms of philosophical debate, or as criteria for aspects of modernity such as capitalism. It should not be surprising to find that those more closely integrated into modernity should concentrate energies onto this key aspect of their world. The status of individual vis-à-vis the family has long been a focus of melodramatic film treatment, and films such as *All That Heaven Will Allow* (Minnelli 1964) impart the message that sometimes the needs of individual are more important than those of the family. If indeed the Malay upper middle class is more closely aligned with a Western-style modernity, then a similar shift of focus/message (i.e. struggles for and with personal autonomy) might also help to explain the under-representation or 'lack' of family in many Malay films.

In terms of the individual, a nexus of social and cultural forces together with codes of censorship have imparted a 'public' morality and 'public' mode of depiction/representation. Historically, this 'public' face may have roots as far back as the *bangsawan* theatre and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre), wherein the aesthetics were of restrained portrayals, and intense formality (Jamil Sulong 1989; Osnes 1992). Portrayals of the individual (along with those of the family), as was stated earlier, are a point of negotiation between various forces, those mentioned above as well as the desires and expectations inherent to the processes of modernity, and by extension modernity's avatars. Furthermore, as we have seen immediately above, there may be some impetus for filmmakers to distance themselves from what is perceived as the epitome of Western modernity and lifestyle, i.e. the individual. The ambiguity of representation regarding the individual is therefore intelligible, even if, as when 'fantasy' intrudes upon 'reality,' at times jarring.

Conclusion

When a kencil (mouse-deer) walks among elephants,
it must walk carefully.

——— Malay proverb.

Crescendo

I remember that when my film *The Third Man* had its little hour of success a rather learned reviewer expounded its symbolism with even less excuse in a monthly paper. The surname of Harry Lime he connected with a passage about the lime tree in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The Christian name of the principal character-Holly-was obviously, he wrote, closely connected with Christmas-paganism and Christianity were thus joined in a symbolic dance. The truth of the matter is, I wanted for my villain a name natural yet disagreeable [...] An association of ideas, not, as the reviewer claimed a symbol. As for Holly, it was because my first choice of name, Rollo, had not met with the approval of Joseph Cotton. So much for symbols (Graham Greene *Ways of Escape* 181-82).

In attempting to draw a curtain upon this thesis, four aspects of the preceding work will be focussed upon: the projects; the theme; the platform; and the thesis.¹ While these stages will be articulated more fully below, at this point a brief summary might be in order. There were two main projects attempted within this thesis, namely to introduce a cinematic corpus (Malaysian cinema) little-known to a Western audience, and to demonstrate the usefulness of integrating anthropological perspectives and film studies. The major theme which has been developed is that of Malaysian culture as a series of negotiations with modernity. The platform for the projects and theme was that of Malaysia and Malaysian cinema. The thesis argued that the society within which these films are produced is an important consideration

¹ I have chosen the word 'platform' to convey the point that Malaysia and Malaysian cinema are not just physical locations, but that they serve as conceptual analogues of, and for, one another.

in the analysis of these same films. Through the course of this dissertation, many other issues were also raised, some of which were put aside for future analysis (as mentioned in the text), others will be discussed below. Finally, we will return to the film scene, and the question mark surrounding it, which was broached in the Introduction.

The Project I

There were, within this thesis, two main projects: that of introducing Malaysian cinema to a broader (if academic) audience; and to demonstrate the potentials of integrating anthropology and film studies as a methodology for cultural analysis. The former will be discussed in this section and the latter in the following.

By and large, Malay/Malaysian cinema will be a new territory for most non-Malaysians. As has been pointed out in the Introduction, there has been some academic writing on the corpus, but relative to work done on other non-Western cinemas (such as India and Japan), this work has been a drop in the bucket. To this effect, the second chapter of the thesis outlined a history of Malaysian cinema, from its beginnings in the 1930s to the (more-or-less) present day (the year 2000). As was shown in the chapter detailing the industry's history, events in Malaysian society played a crucial role, in both negative and positive ways, in the development of the industry and in the films themselves. Many of these events continue to have influences in the present day. As an instance, the long period in which Malays had no creative input/control over the film industry continues to have ramifications within the industry. The economic policies of the 1970s created a space for Malay entrepreneurs to take financial control (hence creative control) of the industry. Thirty years on, however, it is the pre-1970s that continues to cast a shadow over perceptions within the industry. When the privatisation of FINAS was being mooted in the late 1990s, fears that control of the industry would fall into Chinese hands

were apparent and widespread within the industry. During a heated discussion following an Apresiasi Filem panel, one informant made the comment that "I feel like a black in my own country."

In terms of the output of the industry, chapters 3-5 articulate certain recurring themes and motifs in contemporary Malaysian cinema. As was illustrated in these chapters, these themes and motifs coincide with those in the wider society, particularly those centred upon issues relating to the Malaysian encounters with modernity. Chapter 3 dealt with urbanisation, an important component of modernity, particularly when it has been both a recent and rapid phenomenon for a significant proportion of the Malay community. This is not to argue that Malays had no conception of urban life, indeed the various media are saturated with images of urban life (both home and abroad). However, seeing and doing are not the same at all. The spiritual home, if not actual natal home, for most Malays remains the *kampung*. As such, the urban and urbanisation take on an ambiguous conceptual space, being the site of both aspiration/inspiration and immorality/evils. This ambiguity is manifested in many of the films discussed in the thesis.

Chapter 4 dealt with issues of gender. The point was made that this includes both men and women. However, as most of my non-filmic informants were women (and as most of the literature being employed within the chapter focuses upon women) this chapter also remains female-oriented. Be that as it may, the point made within the chapter is that gender issues are in flux, and that this particular negotiatory space also inhabits filmic narratives. Perhaps the most important of these fluxes involves the negotiations that Malay women make between their social/familial duties and their aspirations as 'modern' individual beings. This point introduces a topic which returns to prominence in the following section.

Chapter 5 is distinct as it focuses on two topics which are, as the preceding

section mentions, the family and the individual. The family is one of the most important foci in Malaysian society, yet it too comes into conflict with the demands of modernity and individuals. Indeed, as we saw in the chapter, it often becomes easier to work around the family than to depict it. While the family remains a force to be reckoned with, the needs, desires, and expectations of individuals is one of the bases of consumerism. The relatively recent shift from a production-based (primary and secondary industries such as agriculture and heavy manufacturing) to a consumption-based economy (tertiary and beyond industries such as services, financial and IT) has highlighted the conflicts of interests between society, family, and individual. The rhetorical device of combining these issues in one chapter is intended to emphasise both the aforementioned conflicts as well as the interconnection of these issues.

The choice of a small cinema industry as an object of research involved no little strategic consideration on my part; an annual output of 10-12 feature films meant that it was possible to get an overview of a large portion of the filmography, both for a single year and over a longer period of time. Recurring trends, themes, and problems thus became more apparent in a restricted arena. However, Malaysian cinema remains an instructive and fascinating subject in its own right. As has been shown throughout the course of this thesis, this small, troubled industry provides a canvas for the discussion of broader issues, both from the field of film/critical studies and anthropology. Indeed, to demonstrate the potentials of combining film studies and anthropology was the second major project carried out in this thesis.

The Project II

[W]hat I am attempting is a theory of film as a transcription between media, between cultures, and between disciplines - a transcription that

should, I think, force us to rethink not only currently predominant notions of ethnography and translation on one hand but also film on the other (Chow 1995: x-xi).

The second of the projects tackled here is not quite as grand as the one attempted by Chow, but is in a similar vein. The other project was to demonstrate the benefits of combining anthropology and film studies. I had hoped to demonstrate that this benefit is/would be reciprocal, but this may have been optimistic. From the standpoint of film study, the close attention to socio-cultural background adds a new and significant layer (or indeed layers) of meaning to the readings available for films produced within any cinematic corpus. In this respect, the importance of the cultural embeddedness of film becomes overt. As Latour argues, cultural and representational phenomena do not merely reflect society, they are part of society (Latour 1993). The habitus, the quotidian, what is taken for granted by one society, group, etc. becomes the unexpected, the unusual, the strange when viewed by another. Cultural embeddedness is also crucial when it comes to aspects of theory (film or anthropology) which seek to provide universal answers/opinions. While anthropology has not been innocent in this regard, there has, in general, been an epistemological dialogue between relativism and generalising theories. Film theory has tended more towards interpretations and re-interpretations of universalist or generalising theories such as Marxism or psychoanalysis-derived theories. In filmic terms, while Hollywood may have developed much of the conventions and codes of narrative film, to base readings of all films uncritically upon those conventions renders our analytical understanding of these suspect. While this is not to say that the above mentioned theories/theorists are wholly and unreservedly wrong, they nevertheless can not be unequivocally assumed to be correct. Indeed, the body of the work under consideration centres upon issues which are global (if not universal).

such as family, gender, and urbanisation.

One of the main benefits that anthropological backgrounding has to offer film theory is alluded to in the quote that opened this chapter, taken from Graham Greene's autobiography. In his discussion of the filmed version of *The Third Man* (Carol Reed 1949), he mentions a film review wherein the reviewer undertakes an overly elaborate semiotic dissection of the names of the main characters (see above). This quote is not intended as a humorous attack on film criticism or semiotics, but to highlight the dangers inherent to interpretation (filmic or anthropological). Some of the film directors discussed within this thesis may find the basis for future anecdotes, "...you'll never guess what this Westerner wrote about my film..." The point I wish to make is that the sort of detailed socio-cultural understanding that ethnography makes possible can also ameliorate the kind of excesses illustrated in the quote (see also Chow 1995), and makes explicit what much film theory takes for granted (especially on writings on Western or Hollywood films), namely that films are produced in a specific social context (Rothman 1988; Traube 1994).

The introduction of film theory into anthropology has been somewhat less straightforward. Partially this has to do with the aforementioned epistemological differences, on the other hand it is also the result of a certain over-optimism on my part (as I have discussed in the Introduction). The benefits have been significant. As a rhetorical device, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 were structured in such a way that the filmic elements gained increasing prominence, culminating in the re-readings presented in Chapter 5. There were two reasons behind this strategy, first to demonstrate how a more catholic approach would/could enrich the analysis, and second to make manifest the symbolic qualities of film as visual media, that is 'open' and therefore available to differing readings, yet retaining some common ground of understanding. I would suggest that both these points are worth consideration by both

anthropologists and film theorists. I hope to have shown that cinema is a valid subject of anthropological study, opening, culminating, advancing, and challenging the society/social discourses in which the cinema (and cinema makers) are integrated.

The Theme

The core theme of this work is the social and cultural transformations, including filmic representations, that members of a particular society draw upon in the midst of their ongoing negotiations with modernity. Modernity is a concept which overlaps both anthropology and film studies. I wished in this thesis to work with some ideas which I had been examining prior to beginning the Ph.D. One of those ideas being the processual aspect to the Enlightenment/Enlightenment thought, as is discussed in Chapter 1. Modernity served as a useful arena in which to argue this point, as it is a concept ideologically bound up with the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, modernity is also of great importance to Malaysians, as (amongst other things), the government rhetoric is laced with references to modernity.

In the first chapter the philosophical arguments surrounding modernity were highlighted. The argument was made that modernity is indeed a process. Furthermore it is a process which not only moves forward but also back, that the past is employed as well as the future. In several places in the thesis, examples of this movement in action are provided, such as *dakwah* discourses and activities. A further point brought out in the first chapter is that modernity is also a discursive arena, where the various forces, interpretations, and counter-interpretations are brought to bear. As events in Malaysia in the late 1990s demonstrated, even within a single (political) party, the vision of modernity is in fact plural. Different structural positions within society (such as class and residence) also give rise to differing interpretations of what it means/will mean to be modern. Throughout this thesis, some of these positions are illustrated, principally though the newly urban lower

middle class (the NQTs - not quite there) serve as the bench-mark for this thesis. It is the positionality of the NQTs (though they are themselves a far from monolithic entity) vis-à-vis the elite, government, or upper middle class positionalities which provides an illustration of modernity's discursive nature. In short, modernity is being negotiated.

The argument made above raises another issue, that there is a point from which these negotiations are based. As much as I would argue that modernity is not a fixed entity (spatial or temporal - the USA for instance), nevertheless it is a Western modernity which provides the foundational reference point for the aforementioned arguments. That this referent is not necessary a positive one is clear from the public and private discourses and discussions in Malaysia surrounding 'the West' and/or Westerners. The highly ambiguous perception of 'the West,' the simultaneous envy and fear, is emblematic of the West's own iconic status as modernity. Throughout the course of the thesis examples of this ambivalence, such as *kampung* people's attitude to the city, have been discussed. This ambivalence is another point of negotiation.

One of the reasons for this ambivalence is to be found in another point made in the first chapter, namely that with modernity comes various bundles of linked concepts, assumptions, and expectations. An example given in the chapter is that of capitalism, which is itself dependent upon other processes and institutions, such as urbanisation and individuality. In other words, once integrated into this particular aspect of modernity, those other bundles begin to make themselves felt. Further, with the emergence of these, often unexpected, bundles, disjunctures also emerge. Examples of this are given throughout the thesis. One such example is in Chapter 4, where women's expectations (and men's for that matter) have changed/been changed, or to reiterate a previous point, a space has been created for the possibility of change, through women's increased integration into the capitalist system. More

particular disjunctures are discussed in the Chapter 5, an example of which is the representation of the private in many of the films discussed. Aside from the more pragmatic explanations, such as censorship laws, discussed in chapter two, the playing out of these disjunctures in the films demonstrates the embeddedness of culture discussed above. Further, the process outlined is not a one-way street. In this regard, cultural/social factors are doubly important as they render these processes more dialogic. While there is a directionality (in this case towards a Western modernity), it remains to be seen at this time what the result of these negotiations will be.

While the first chapter deals with the philosophy of modernity, the practical aspects of these issues are also discussed within that chapter, as well as throughout the thesis. This is a crucial point. We are not merely discussing abstract matters, but issues which are important to the daily life, the lived life, of people in Malaysia, and indeed elsewhere. These negotiations are in effect negotiations of life as much as negotiations of modernity. When a Malay informant suggests that the reason for X is that we aren't a modern country yet, this is not only a rhetorical device/stance to exculpate acknowledged/perceived national shortcomings, but is also an expression of the force these issues have in people's thoughts and consciousness. Indeed this is why the aforementioned bundles can create the sorts of disjunctures they do. Yet another aspect of modernity to be negotiated. Ideally represented, these ideas form an interconnected web, as I hope has been clear. However, for reasons of clarity and intelligibility these arguments have been presented discretely.

The Platform

The ideal platform from which to ground the projects and theme would be a place which is itself undergoing negotiations. As has been mentioned already, Malaysia is

just that sort of place. Much of the impetus for this thesis is a direct result of living in Malaysia. The country has historically been a meeting place for others. Malacca's importance was due to its geographical position where the two sets of Asian trade winds met, therefore where Chinese and Indian/Arab trade goods could meet (though because of the timing of the winds, the traders themselves could only meet if they remained in Malacca for an entire season). To a certain extent this remains the case. On one hand, Malaysia is where the forces of Islam, the West, and Japan (and increasingly China) combine in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. The various modernities these forces represent and espouse form part of the backdrop for the more personal negotiations discussed in the previous section. On the other hand, in cinematic terms, Malaysia is also where Hollywood, Bollywood and the East Asian cinemas (Hong Kong, Taiwan, and to a lesser extent Japan and China) collide.

In the previous section, it was argued that 'the West' provided the foundational 'modernity' in respect to which the various Malaysian positions were/are articulated (positively or negatively). However, main is not the same as only. Other global modernities include those represented by Japan (modern but not Western) and Islam. The Malaysian nation-state is itself a 'mouse-deer' amongst these 'elephants,' and as the saying goes, it must walk carefully. Examples herein are the 'playing off' of Japan (the 'Look East' policies of the 1980s) and the West (Vision 2020 which espouses a largely liberalist vision of modernity), and the 'tight-rope' act the government undertakes regarding Islamicisation and PAS. By and large, these national negotiations have been successful, particularly in comparison with the tragic events in Indonesia during and since the economic crisis of 1997. Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister currently in prison on corruption and indecency charges, would very likely disagree on this point.

Throughout the thesis the impact of the 'global' negotiations have upon the

'local' has been argued. This is not a new insight (for example Miller 1994, 1995, 1997), but remains an issue that needs an occasional reassertion. The reasons for which were discussed in the second section of this chapter. Again, this is not an 'academic' point, as the global intrudes into the lives of Malaysians on a daily basis: from world news and popular television to government rhetorics and policies. Negotiation is not all 'consumption' however, and the active construction, manipulation, assimilation, or dismissal of stimuli such as those mentioned above are aspects of Malaysian daily life. The negotiation of modernity is something that occurs on the 'local' level, and importantly *within* the local level. As an instance within the Malay section of Malaysian society, rural Malays are less integrated into the processes of modernity than are urban Malays (whether that means less affected is another matter entirely). Within the urban population NQTs are less integrated than are long-term urban Malays and Chinese Malaysians. Chinese-Malaysians are arguably even more integrated than are long-term urban Malays. An important consideration here is that this tight integration positions the urban Chinese-Malaysians as an internal 'Other,' along with the external 'Other' (Westerners), who can serve as exemplars of modernity, both in terms of its benefits and dangers.

Although the Malaysian cinema industry has, to date, been less successful with its negotiations, it remains the case that the industry and its personnel do attempt to find a path between immense culture industries (such as the Indian and Hollywood cinemas). Historically, even in the days when the industry was controlled by non-Malays (not to mention non-Malaysians), the films produced were distinctive. And while 'distinctive' is not the only marker for a successful negotiation, international (or even national for that matter) success would be a more pleasant description, it does suggest that none of those forces have squashed Malaysian cinema as yet. However, an inter-national negotiation is one thing, an

intra-national negotiation is another. For the most part Zaharom Nain's critiques of the industry hold true (1994), the industry remains KL-centric and for the most part in the hands of people from a particular social constellation (predominately long-term urban middle class). This generalisation is not intended as either a condemnation or as a universalisation of the entire industry's population. Attempting to 'pin down' a positionality is not the same, I hope, as a criticism of that positionality. Ideally, as stated in the Introduction, the disclosure of general presumptions within the industry may even aid the industry in reclaiming its audience. Be that as it may, the Malaysian film industry faces its own sets of negotiations.

Malaysia, then, both within and outwith its political boundaries in many ways serves as a 'condensed' example for the theoretical points under discussion. Indeed, as stated, many of these theoretical points came about as a result of living in Malaysia. The final point to make is that film, and by extension Malaysian film, has been a particularly informative arena for the analyses of these negotiations. As the industry itself is sited within various negotiations, the films are laced through with the negotiations that Malaysian society and Malays themselves are undertaking. This latter point brings us to the thesis.

The Thesis

[E]ssentializing conceptions eschew their own historicity.

By historicizing the very processes that account for subjects as they take shape (or resist assuming certain forms), we can begin to see a modern Japanese literary history rather different from that narrativized and overdetermined according to standards imposed from afar (Fujii 1993: xiv).

The final point made in the preceding section left us begging the question, why

should film be particularly productive for the analysis of these negotiations with modernity? Fujii (1993) gives us some hints in the above quote (though in the context of Japanese literature). Whereas Fujii discusses the historicisation of process, this thesis attempts to go one stage further (although it is implicit in Fujii's work), and highlight a 'culturisation' as well as historicisation of Malay cinema. In short, as films are produced in a society, they (at least partially) embody, and are embodied by, that society. As this thesis has shown, the dynamics of particular groups within Malay/Malaysian society, their negotiations with inter and intra-national discourses, rhetorics, forces and processes occur within the films made by individuals positioned within, or indeed between, these groups. That the disjunctures within the films sometimes parallel, sometimes clash, and sometimes manifest themselves in unexpected ways/places, illustrates the importance of a more 'open' approach, and that this form of approach is not only useful, but necessary.

As a symbolic medium, film is not in a one-to-one relationship with reality, in other words film may be 'realist' but it is never 'real.' Meaning is not 'closed,' but remains open to various (contested) interpretations, re-interpretations, and appropriations. Furthermore, both as a symbolic medium and as a constructed artifact, there are layers of meaning embedded in the films (as suggested in the Introduction - watch a film without sound to get an idea of how much meaning comes via the dialogue, sound-track, and incidental sounds). These layers add to the overall message-as-intended but remain 'open.' One of the rhetorical devices employed in this thesis was the multiple readings of various scenes and films to illustrate this point. That some of these readings will have more validity, virtue in McKeon's usage (1987), is partially conditioned by the position of the viewer. While this is a far from unique argument, there is a history of discussions of the subjective position in both anthropology and film studies, it combines with the thesis put forward above, to

accentuate the need for a different background understanding of the films. It is also the necessary goal of the writer/director to establish themselves as the arbitrators of validity/virtue, as is demanded by the modern narrative form (McKeon 1987). How successful the author/director is in this task goes a long way to determining how successful their vision is. That the success of this goal is dependent upon the author/director's ability to 'connect' with their audience suggests that the points raised regarding the 'culturisation' of film are of practical importance to the cultural producers.

There is another argument for the position taken in this thesis. Film, as with prose narrative, did not develop out of previous media such as *wayang kulit* or *bangsawan*, but has been 'transplanted.' However, it is also the case that precedent media have had influences upon the subsequent development of film after its introduction to Malaya/Malaysia. Therefore, the validity of the conventions (and perhaps even the codes) of narrative cinema need to be verified, rather than assumed to be so. As was argued in the first chapter, it is not that 'the subject' or 'agency' did not exist in indigenous literary and/or pictorial forms, but that there were different modes of expressing these issues. Malay audiences, through their long exposure to non-Malay cinemas, are also conversant with 'Hollywood' cinematic codes. However, these modes engender particular arenas of expectation, such as those regarding representational conventions. The expectations may come into conflict with socio-cultural expectations and modes of representation, such as the portrayal of privacy and private actions and activities. As has been argued here, as well as by Fujii (1993) and Chow (1995), this has implications for the study of film, whether 'non-Western' or 'Western,' where the socio-cultural background is arguably even more presumed (for counter examples, see Rothman 1988; or Traube 1994).

A further implication of the position taken in this thesis is that 'commercial'

films are relevant, if not more relevant, an area of research/analysis than 'serious' or 'art-house' films. If we take the points made above and extend their logic, then 'commercial' film with its implied mass appeal, rather than the more elite-to-elite discourse of the 'art-house' cinema, would be where the various negotiations mentioned above (as opposed to an intra-group discourse) would take place. This is indeed a point which has not been lost on Cultural Studies, as for instance in Žižek's use of popular films to illustrate his more abstract theorising (Žižek 2000: *passim*). Again, I believe there is a message here for both anthropology and film studies.

Coda

To make the long journey back to the scene from *Suami, Isteri dan...?*, which initiated my discussion of Malay cinema in the Introduction, we can now provide some insight into what is initially a jarring and unexpected occurrence. To remind ourselves, the scene is of Lydiawati and Rosyam Nor talking together in Lydiawati's family home. At first, the camera shot, and our viewing position, is within the room. However, at a certain point, the camera is moved outside the house and the remainder of the scene is shot framed through a window. Moving the camera also shifts the viewer's perspective, we are also now watching the discussion from outside the house, looking in through the window. The move also breaks the narrative, at least in terms of Realist conventions. The move involves re-placing the camera and sound equipment, as well as all those involved in filming. Filming through the window is not an arbitrary decision, but one that involved thought and effort on the part of the filmmakers. Further, the new shot was deemed important enough to not only physically relocate the shot, but to break the continuity of the narrative, and the verisimilitude of the scene.

There are various modes in which we could analyse the scene from *Suami*,

Isteri dan...? We could argue that the scene is a commentary on voyeurism, either on the part of the audience or of cinema in general. We could also argue that the scene is an aesthetic choice, that the interest of the depiction is in fact an issue of cinematography and stylistics, the window framing the action, frames within frames, etc. We could also argue that the scene is the result of narrative incompetence on the part of the filmmakers, that it is a slippage into pre-modernity and pre-modern discursive and/or artistic modes of representation. These propositions have some cogency, although as Bourdieu has pointed out, aesthetics are socially and culturally conditioned (1984: *passim*). We should bear in mind that ideas regarding voyeurism may not be valid cross-culturally. Further, as has been argued at length through this thesis, the matter of any irreparable schism between pre-modern and modern has yet to be decided.

There is yet another possibility we might argue. If the information and arguments put forward throughout the thesis are considered, aspects of cinema's 'cultural embeddedness' may provide another answer. Bearing in mind arguments made in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 regarding urbanisation, social censure and propriety, and privacy, there is basis for arguing that this shot through the window is to demonstrate the 'public-ness' of the action taking place in the scene. In effect, the scene in question is the filmic equivalent of visitors to a household calling from the gate, a graphic representation of the (unspoken) statement; "We are not spying on them or sneaking around. We (the camera crew, and by extension the viewers) are not intruding into their privacy or private space. Look, you can see them through the window!"

The rationale for this thesis has not been to 'rewrite the rules' for either anthropology or film studies, but to open up some new discourses in, and possibilities for, both disciplines. To look afresh at film and society through a mutual

re-analysis. In the case presented here, if we start from the thesis that film is a part of society in which it is produced:

we are more likely to grasp the interanimation of differences, plural expression, changes, and more change as a diversified cluster of self-reflective and other-directed acts and reactions that lead to the creation of the new and the different (Fujii 1993: 10).

We, as social and cultural analysts, may even avoid being immortalised by our own Graham Greene.

APPENDIX 1:

**Box Office Figures for Malaysian Films
1996-2000**

Box-office figures for Malay-language films 1996-2000:²

1996

AMELIA - 228, 000.
CINTA METROPOLITAN - 697, 000.
IMPIAN - 593, 000.
KECIL-KECIL CILI PADI - 57,000.
LITAR KASIH - 302, 000.
LURAH DENDAM - 612, 000.
MARIA MARIANA - 4.723 million.
MERAH - 1. 471 million.
SCOOP - 140,000.
SIAPA DIA - 291, 000.
SUAMI, ISTERI, DAN ... - 658,000.
SUPERSTAR - 489,000.
SURATAN KASIH - 621,000.
SUTERA PUTIH - 538,000.
TRAGEDI OKTOBER - 2.910 million.
YES TUAN - 114, 000.

1997

AZAM - 106,000
BAGINDA - 266,000.
GEMERLAPAN - 823,000.
GEMILANG - 1. 762 million.
GHAZAL UNTUK RABIAH - 464,000.
HANYA KAWAN - 375,000.
LAYAR LARA - 733,000.
PUTERI IMPIAN - 1.339 million.
SATE - 406,000.

1998

BADAI MENTERA - 16,000.
IMAN ALONE - 84,000.
JIBON - 52,000.
KEMBARA - 30,000.
LENJAN - 363,000.
MARIA MARIANA II - 3.159 million.
PANAS - 430,000.
PENYAIR MALAM - 60,000.

² Some of these figures may be on the low side, as they do not include takings from events such as screenings for charity.

PUTERI IMPIAN II - 1. 587 million.

RAJA MELEWAR - 61,000.

SILAT LAGENDA - 142,000.

1999

BARA - 2.340 million

BURUNG BESI - 16,000.

JOGHO - 68,000.

KLU - 326,000.

NAFAS CINTA - 1.029 million.

PEREMPUAN MELAYU TERAKHIR - 280,000.

SENARIO THE MOVIE - 4.579 million.

2000

ANAKNYA SAZALI - 218,000.

LEFTENAN ADNAN - 1.076 million.

MIMPI MOON - 555,000.

PASRAH - 2.741 million.

SENARIO LAGI - 4. 373 million.

SOAL HATI - 1.383 million.

SYUKUR 21 - 953,000.

Figures provided by Finas. Figures are given in Ringgit Malaysia, which at time of writing was RM5.49 to £1.

APPENDIX 2:

**Films and Videos Banned in Malaysia
1997**

senarai filem DIHARAMKAN

Lembaga Penapisan Filem Malaysia
Kementerian Dalam Negeri

Tajuk	Bahasa	Tarikh	Bentuk	Pelakon	Pengarah	Pengeluar	Negara Asal
The Main Line Run	English	02-Jan-1997	VHS	Hugo Speer Andrew Joseph	Howard Ford	Howard Ford	Amerika
Wajah Tiga Perempuan	Indonesia	02-Jan-1997	VHS	Rima Melati Rano Kamo	Nico Pelamonia	Hendrick Gozali & Sapia Suteja	Indonesia
Immortals	English	02-Jan-1997	VHS	Eric Roberts Tia Carrere	Brian Grantt	Elie Samaha	Amerika
The Show	English	02-Jan-1997	VHS	Russel Simmons Slick Rick	Brian Robins		Amerika
If These Walls	English	03-Jan-1997	VHS	Demi Moore Sissy Spacek	Nancy Savoca	Laura Greenlee	Amerika
The X-Files	English	03-Jan-1997	VHS	David Duchovny Gillian Anderson	Rob Bowman	Joseph Patrick Finn	Amerika
Wong Loong Yoh Ming Tien	Kantonis	04-Jan-1997	VHS	Wu Yim Kwong Chan Ming	Wong Yat Chieng	Wong Wai Yuen	Hong Kong
The X-Files(Die Hand Die Verletzt)	English	04-Jan-1997	VHS	David Duchovny Gillian Anderson	Kim Manners	Joseph Patrick Finn	Amerika
Green Snake	Kantonis	06-Jan-1997	VHS	Maggie Cheung Wu Kao Chin	Tsui Hark	Ng See Yuen	Hong Kong
Devil's Woman	Kantonis	06-Jan-1997	VHS	Tsui Kamu Kong Maryam Chan	Oho Chan	Eddie Wong	Hong Kong
Kaattai Vessel	Tamil	07-Jan-1997	VHS	Aranpandian Saganya	Salve Vinagagan	Hogan Nadarajan	India
Even Mounting Meet	Kantonis	07-Jan-1997	VHS	Liu Haino Hui Cheng Wei Chien	Lui Kao Cheng	Chen Yung Shen	Hong Kong
Musthaffa	Tamil	08-Jan-1997	VHS	Naplean Kaundamani	Aravindraf	P.G. Shnkant	India
The Wacky Adventure	English	08-Jan-1997	VHS	Paul Bartel Karen Black	Paul Leder	Liam Naughtone & Paul Leder	Amerika
Crazy America	Kantonis	08-Jan-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Hai Kang Fang Yun	Kantonis	08-Jan-1997	VHS	Hoh Chung Koong Lau Ma Li	Lai Yuan	Ko Chun Choi	Hong Kong
Zhi Ge Ni Ren	Kantonis	09-Jan-1997	VHS			Lai Cheng Yat	Hong Kong
The Game	Kantonis	09-Jan-1997	VHS	Ken Lok Tat Wah Cheryl Im	Mak Tin Pong	Alfred B.H Tam	Malaysia
Veerana	Hindi	09-Jan-1997	VHS	Hemant Birje Sahila Chadha	Tulsi Ramsay	Kanta Ramsay	India
My Dear Sindhu	Tamil	10-Jan-1997	VHS	Suman Lily	Sunil Varma	Thankachan & Padnamahan	India
Lucky Star	Kantonis	10-Jan-1997	VHS	Kung Snit Fa Samo Hung	Frankie Chan	Hu Wah Lai	Hong Kong
Shocking Asia	Kantonis	11-Jan-1997	VHS	Li Chung Keong	Emerson Fox	Geisi Gasteig	Hong Kong
Money Train	English	11-Jan-1997	VHS	Wesley Snipes Woody Henson	Joseph Roker	Jon Peters	Korea
Vampire	English	11-Jan-1997	VHS	Cheryl Pollak Anthony Geary	David A Comba	Charles Lippincott	Amerika
Madonna Exposed	English	13-Jan-1997	VHS	Madonna	Mark Gentile	Jane Sparango	Amerika
Micheal Bolton Soul Passion	English	13-Jan-1997	VHS		Bud Schaetzle	David Foster	Amerika
Kadal Pura	Tamil	14-Jan-1997	VHS	Nagesh Mansur Ali Khan	Ac Deeba Raj	Puan Mangathamani & Puan Raja	Amerika

Feeling Minnesota	English	14-Jan-1997	VHS	Keanu Reeves Vincent Donofrio	Walt Lloyd	Danny Devito	Amerika
To Be No. 1	Kantonis	14-Jan-1997	VHS	Cheung Chi Lam Lee Chiu Yin	Li Wai Man	Tam Teng Nam	Hong Kong
The Game	English	14-Jan-1997	VHS	Mark Gorman Stephen Wastell	Stefa Avalos	Manuel Avalos/Paul Martin	Amerika
Candlelight's Woman	Kantonis	15-Jan-1997	VHS	Carrie Ng Lau Yuk Chui	Yeung Kuen	Victor K.O. Yeung	Hong Kong
Bleu Lanteru	Kantonis	15-Jan-1997	VHS	Mok Siu Chong Ng Man Tak	Lau Ka Yung	Lau Ka Yung	Hong Kong
Tequila Sunrise	English	15-Jan-1997	VHS	Mel Gibson Michale Pfeiffer	Robert Towne	Thom Mount	Amerika
Dog Day Afternoon	English	16-Jan-1997	VHS	Al Pacino John Cazale	Sidney Lumet	Martin Bregman & Martin Elfand	Amerika
Chong Gik Fong Wan	Kantonis	16-Jan-1997	VHS	Lam Soon Tak Chan Man Si	Chui Kin Yu	Pang Xiap Yung	Hong Kong
Champion	English	16-Jan-1997	VHS	Louis Mandylor Dannytrejo	Peter Gathings Bunch	Wayne Beswick/Peter Mcalercy	Amerika
The Hottest Biy	English	16-Jan-1997	VHS	Gwen Somers Dennis Mathtlws	Deborah Shames	Lynn Larkyn	Amerika
Nen Hong Sing Tel	Kantonis	16-Jan-1997	VHS	Ho Oi Wan Kook Lung	Wong Chung Kwong	Wong Wai Yun	Hong Kong
Sweeper	English	17-Jan-1997	VHS	Ed Lauter Knister Dalton	Joseph Mershi	Joseph Merphi/Richard	Amerika
Boys	English	17-Jan-1997	VHS	Cho Weng Lien Mak Kwok Pong	Hou Weng Chry	Hou Weng Chry	Hong Kong
The Substitute	English	17-Jan-1997	VHS	Tom Berenger Ernie Hudson	Robert Mawdel	Morrie Eisenman	Amerika
The Return Of Texas Chainsaw Massacre	English	18-Jan-1997	VHS	Renee Zellweger Matten Mcconnaughey	Kim Henkel	Robert J.Khun & Kim Henkel	Amerika
Amber Waves	English	18-Jan-1997	VHS	Henry Van Dahlan Rae Dawn Chang	Joe Holland	Dink Hagan	Amerika
Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead	English	20-Jan-1997	Laser Disc	Andy Gracia Christopher Lloyd	Gary Fleder	Carry Woods	Amerika
Vita Erotica	Kantonis	20-Jan-1997	VHS	Cheung Kok Weng Loh Kah Ying	Loh Chi Leung	Raymond Chow	Hong Kong
Dennis Penis, Very Important Penis	English	21-Jan-1997	Vtr	Dennis Penis		Lucy Robinson	Amerika
Critical Decision	English	21-Jan-1997	Laser Disc	Kurt Russell Hale Barry	Stuart Baird	Joel Silver	Amerika
Jill In Burning Island	Kantonis	21-Jan-1997		Ng Kai Lung Kam Seng Mo	Chu Ying Peng	Law Tiew Wai	Hong Kong
Rock Music Video Mtv	Kantonis	21-Jan-1997	VHS	Cheung Kok Weng Lon Kah Ying			Hong Kong
The Voyeur	English	21-Jan-1997	VHS	Kimdawson Al Sapienza	Deborah Shames	Lynn Larkin	Amerika
The Human Animal Part 2	English	21-Jan-1997	VHS		Desmond Mornes	Clive Bromhall/John Macnish	Britain
White Tides	English	22-Jan-1997	VHS	Roddy Piper Tawny Kitean	Serge Rodnunsky	Serge Roonunsky	Amerika
Special Action Force	Kantonis	22-Jan-1997	VHS	Chian Siao Hau Hu Hui Khang	Lung Sen	Wang Pai Chuan	Hong Kong
Harley Davidson & Marlboro Man	English	22-Jan-1997	VHS	Mickey Rourke Don Johnson	Simon Wincer	Jere Henshaw	Amerika
Friends Episod 305	English	22-Jan-1997	VHS	Jeniffer Aniston Courtney Cox	Betsy Borus	Todd Steven	Amerika
Adrenalin-Fear-The Rush	English	23-Jan-1997	VHS	Christopher Lambert Natasha Henstridge	Albert Pyon	Tom Kamowski	Amerika
Mudder Most Horrid Ep.2 The Girl From Lpanema	English	24-Jan-1997	VHS	Dawn French Martin Jarvis	Bob Spiers	Jon Plcwmn	Amerika
Jill In Burning Island	Mandrin	25-Jan-1997	VHS	Ng Kai Laung Kaw Seng Mo	Chui Jim Peng	Law Tien Wai	Hong Kong
Saturday Night Fever(Part 1 & 2)	English	25-Jan-1997	VHS	John Travolta Karen Lynn Gomey	John Badham	Robert Stigwood	Amerika

The Funeral	English	28-Jan-1997	VHS	Christopher Walken Benicio Del Toro	Abel Ferrara	Marry Lane	Amerika
No Way Home	English	28-Jan-1997	VHS	Tim Roth James Russo	Buddy Giovinazzo	Lisa Bruce	Amerika
Brandal Brandal Metropolitan	Indonesia	28-Jan-1997	VHS	Amelia Confessa Paula Rumoku	Yunginradjaja	Yunginradjaja	Indonesia
Murder Most Horrid Ep.6(Yrs)*Smashing Bird	English	28-Jan-1997	VHS	Dawn French Mark Mc Gann	Dewi Humphreys	John Plowman	Britain
The Dark Dancer Disc 1&2	English	30-Jan-1997	Laser Disc	Shannon Tweed Jason Carter	Bob Burge	Pamela Vlastag	Amerika
Jilllin Burning Island	Kantonis	30-Jan-1997	VHS	Ng Kei Lung Kam Seng Mo	Chu Yeng Peng	Law Tien Wai	Hong Kong
Nhk Japan # 291 Parley Playground	Jepun	30-Jan-1997	VHS			Nhk International	Jepun
Mercy	English	31-Jan-1997	VHS	John Rubinstein Amber Kain	Richard Shepard	Rolfe Kent	Amerika
The Outsider	English	31-Jan-1997	VHS	David Liesude Starey Williams	David Bishop	Avi Nesher	Amerika
Ranjang Setan	Indonesia	31-Jan-1997	VHS	Richie Ricardo Linda Lolita	Tjut Djali	Ram Soraya Sudarko	Indonesia
Friday The 13th VII: Jason Takes Manhattan	English	31-Jan-1997	VHS	Jensen Dagget Scott Reeves	Rob Hedden	Randolph ChevelDave	Amerika
Nhk Japan 295* Parsley Playground*	English	31-Jan-1997	VHS			Nhk International	Jepun
Rumble In L.A.	English	31-Jan-1997	VHS	Shann Neck Kassi Crews	Shann Neck	Shann Neck	Amerika
Artdeco Detective	English	31-Jan-1997	VHS	John Dennis Johnston Brion James	Chil Ppo Nora	Philippe Nora	Amerika
Nhk Japan-Parseay Playground #298 #297	English	01-Feb-1997	VHS			Nhk International	Jepun
Comedy Carpers Percy	English	03-Feb-1997	VHS	Hywel Bennet Denholm Elliot	Ralph Thomas	Betty E. Box	Britain
Scream	English	03-Feb-1997	VHS	David Arquette Neve Campbell	Wes Craven	Cary Woods	Amerika
Nhk Japan-Parsley Playground 300, 301, 302, 303	English	03-Feb-1997	VHS			Nhk International	Jepun
The Stendahal Syndrome	English	03-Feb-1997	VHS	Asia Argento Marko Leonard	Dario Prgento	Dario Prgento	Amerika
A Little Miracle	English	03-Feb-1997	VHS	Richard Hench Agnese Zeltipa	Matt Oppenheimer	Matt Oppenheimer	Amerika
Yngwie Malmsteen	English	04-Feb-1997	VHS	Yngwie Malmsteen Mike Vescera	Takeshi Yoshida	Takeshi Yoshida	Jepun
In The Eat Of The Sun	Mandrin	04-Feb-1997	VHS	Zia Yu Ning Chui	Kiang Wen	Chi Pow	China
Story Of Nam	Kantonis	04-Feb-1997	VHS	Lau Cheng Wan Wong Shi Kei	Toh Kei Fang	Toh Kei Fang	Hong Kong
Meng Qui Tian Ze Tai	Kantonis	05-Feb-1997	VHS	Lau Yu Tai Lau Wai Peng	Kuk Kok Leung	Chiu Chen Koong	Hong Kong
Saint Jack	English	05-Feb-1997	VHS	Ben Sazzara Denholm Euric	Peter Bogdanovich	Roger Korman	Amerika
The Tick Heroes Ep. Tk-209	English	05-Feb-1997	VHS		Hank Tcker	Hank Tucker	Amerika
Malam Jumaat Kiwon	Indonesia	05-Feb-1997	VHS	Alan Nuan Doddy Wijaya	Sisworo Gautama Putr	Ram Soraya	Amerika
Ambes Waves	English	06-Feb-1997	VHS	Lenny Von Dohlen Rae Dawn Chong	Jol Holland	Dirk Hagen	Amerika
Deadly Deal	English	09-Feb-1997	VHS	James Mason Luc Yerenda	Fernando Di Geo	Gallano Jaso	Amerika
Friends	English	12-Feb-1997	VHS	Jeniffer Aniston Courtney Cox	Betsy Bords	Tod Steven	Amerika
Nhk Japan-Parsley Playground 305	English	15-Feb-1997	VHS			Nhk International	Jepun
Zindagi Ek Juua	Hindi	15-Feb-1997	VHS	Anil Kapoor Madhuri Dixit	Prakash Mehra	Prakash Mehra	India
Fatal Choice	English	17-Feb-1997	VHS	Henry Silva Charles Napier	Jeno Hodi	Gene Lebrou	Amerika
Nhk Japan-Parsley Playground 307, 308	English	17-Feb-1997	VHS			Nhk International	Jepun

Cry Killer	Kantonis	18-Feb-1997	VHS	Poon Sau Yen	Yam Hoi Yao	Ng Yit Fan	Malaysia
Spring Is In The Air	English	19-Feb-1997	VHS			Nhk Japan International	Jepun
Spirit On Wheels	Mandrin	20-Feb-1997	VHS	Xie Yun Yi	Yuan Zai Xian	Tcs Telemovie	Singapore
Tales From The Crypt Ep. 64 "About Face"	English	22-Feb-1997	VHS	Imeeda Stanten	Tom Sanders	Giebert Adler	Amerika
Riddle In A Murder	Kantonis	22-Feb-1997	VHS	Ann Tsui Wai	Yow Dar Chi	Kuan Wai Man	Malaysia
Mundanal Mudichu	Tamil	22-Feb-1997	VHS	Oorvasi	K.Bhagyaraj	Yow Dar Chi	India
Devil Angel	Kantonis	24-Feb-1997	VHS	Yung Si Man	Foo Lap	Woo Ton	Hong Kong
Doctor Mack	Kantonis	24-Feb-1997	VHS	Liew Qing Yun	Lhi Zhi Yi	Zheng Zhi Wei	Hong Kong
Ellen 7	English	24-Feb-1997	VHS	Ellen Degeneres Holly Fulger	Andy Ackerman	Richard Day/Mark Grossan	Amerika
Bad Company	English	25-Feb-1997	VHS	Eric Roberts Lance Henniksen	Victor Salva	Daniel Grodnik	Amerika
Power 98	English	25-Feb-1997	VHS	Eric Roberts Jason Fredrick	Jamie Hellman	Carol Curb	Amerika
Anak Pontianak	B.Melayu	25-Feb-1997	VHS	Jins Shamsudin Hashimah Yan	Roman A Estella	Ran Ran Shaw	Malaysia
The Rich Girl	English	26-Feb-1997	VHS	Jill Schoelan Don Michael Paul	Joel Bender	Michael B. London	Amerika
L Dream Of Jeannie # Get Me To Mecca On Time	English	27-Feb-1997	VHS	Barbara Eden Larry Hagman	E W/ Swackhames	Sidney Sheldon	Amerika
The Gun For Hire	English	28-Feb-1997	VHS	Janiffer West Savich Butch Engle	Durrel Essex	Durrel Essex	Amerika
Praneela	Tamil	02-Mar-1997	VHS	Beeman Raju/Unni Pramila/Sairabanu	K.S Gopalakrishnan	Sri Krishna Films	India
Dinky Dis 25	English	02-Mar-1997	VHS	Tiada	Mel Bradford	Mel Bradford	Australia
Comedy Capers Percys	English	04-Mar-1997	VHS	Leigh Lawson Elke Somer	Ralph Thomas	Betty E. Box	Britain
Baywatch V Ep. 5005 Air Buchannch	English	04-Mar-1997	VHS	David Hasslehoff Pamela Anderson	Roy Campanella	James Pergola/David W.Hagar	Amerika
Executive Decision	English	04-Mar-1997	VHS	Kurt Russell Halle Berry	Stuart Bainz	Joel Silver	Amerika
The Kil	English	04-Mar-1997	VHS	C. Thomas Howell Sarah Tringger	John Mark Robinson	Peter Abraham/Robert Levy	Amerika
Kes Juvana Sr.6.Ep. Terlanjur	B.Melayu	04-Mar-1997	VHS	Mira Normila Ahmad Zuraidah Mat Piah	Ta Mee Eng	Annie Saw	Amerika
Street Shark Ep.253-201 "Shark Quest "	English	04-Mar-1997	VHS	Andy Rannels D.Kevin Williams	Ron Myrick	Ron Myrick	Amerika
Salaam Bombay	Hindi	05-Mar-1997	VHS	Shaliq Syed Anita Kanwar	Mira Nair	Mira Nair	India
Sumpah Orang	B.Melayu	07-Mar-1997	VHS	P.Ramlee Daeng Idris	Tiada	Run Run Shaw	Singapore
The Innecent Sleep	English	07-Mar-1997	VHS	Michael Gainbon Rupert Graves	Soh Michell	Mathew Vaughn	Britain
The People V Larry Flynt	English	10-Mar-1997	VHS	Wody Hardson Country Love	Milos Forman	Oliver Stone	Amerika
Kes Juvana Ep. Ibu Tinku	B.Melayu	10-Mar-1997	VHS	Mohd Zaidi Mazlan Kamaruddin Shariff	Tan Mee Ing	Annie Saw	Malaysia
War Of The Dragon	Kantonis	11-Mar-1997	VHS	Tam Tar Wah Leung Kam Yan	Yip Chau Yee	Wai Kar Fai	Hong Kong
Red Blooded 2	English	11-Mar-1997	VHS	Kristoffer Ryan Wintus Bert Young	David Blyth	Nicholas Stiliadis	Amerika
Isi Neraka	B.Melayu	12-Mar-1997	VHS	Saadiah Ahmad Mahmood	Jamil Sulong	Malay Film Productions	Singapore
The Apartment Eps.12	English	12-Mar-1997	VHS	David Arnett Matt Bortenghi	Arlene Sanford	Tim Berry	Amerika
The Midnight Show	Kantonis	12-Mar-1997	VHS	Lai Siu Tian(Pengacara)	Chan Kar Yang		Hong Kong
Semurai	B.Melayu	12-Mar-1997	VHS	Nasir Bilal Khan Khadi Khalid	Azhar Z. Abidin	Rozhan Hj. Md. Sayuti	Malaysia
Mogha Mull	Tamil	12-Mar-1997	VHS	Archana Jokekhar Nedumoodi Vennu	Gana Rajakaran	J.Dharmambal	India

The Apartment Eps.001-010	English	13-Mar-1997	VHS	David Amott Matt Borlenghi	Arlene Sanford	Tim Berry	Amerika
The Apartment Eps.13 Leap Into On Open Grave	English	12-Mar-1997	VHS	David Amott Matt Borlenghi	Arlene Sanford	Tim Berry	Amerika
The Scarlet Letter	English	13-Mar-1997	VHS	Demi Moore Gary Oldman	Roland Joffe	Andrew G. Vajna	Amerika
The Highlander II The Quickening	English	13-Mar-1997	VHS	Christopher Lambert Virginia Madsen	Russel Mulcany	Peter S. Davis	Amerika
The Sweet Nothing	English	13-Mar-1997	VHS	Michael Imperioli Mira Sorvino	Gary Winick	Rick Bowmar/ Gary Winick	Amerika
Miami Rhapsody	English	15-Mar-1997	VHS	Antonio Banderas Gill Bellows	David Frankel	Barry Jossen & David Frankel	Amerika
Metallica-Live Shit	English	15-Mar-1997	VHS		Wayne Ishan	Curt Marvis	Amerika
Mawas	B. Melayu	17-Mar-1997	VHS	Aman Shah Zainal Tj	Aziz M. Osman	Aman Shah	Malaysia
Faces Of Culture Ep. 203	English	17-Mar-1997	VHS			Ira R. Abraham	Amerika
Hot City	English	17-Mar-1997	VHS	Fred Williamson Jim Brown	Larry Cohen	Fred Williamson	Amerika
Scarface	English	17-Mar-1997	VHS	Al Pacino Steven Baller	Brian Depalma	Martin Bergman	Amerika
Drama Korea	Korea	17-Mar-1997	VHS				Korea
Lover Of The Last Empress	English	17-Mar-1997	VHS	Leung Kar Fei Yau Suk Ching	Liu Wei Qiang	Heung Hwa Keung	Hong Kong
Hideway	English	18-Mar-1997	VHS	Jeff Goldblum Christine Lathi	Brett Leonard	Gary Lucchesi	Amerika
Out For Justice	English	19-Mar-1997	VHS	Steven Seagal William Forsythe	John Flynn	Steven Seagal/Arnold Kopelson	Britain
Swell'I Know The Trip Beggars Banquet	English	19-Mar-1997	VHS				Britain
Candyman Pt1 & li	English	19-Mar-1997	VHS	Virginia Madsen Tony Todd	Bernard Rose	Steven Golin	Amerika
Virtuosity	English	19-Mar-1997	VHS	Danzel Washington Kelly Lynch	Brett Leonard	Gary Lucchesi	Amerika
Vault Of Horror #25 On A Dead Man's Chest	English	19-Mar-1997	VHS	Yul Vasquez Paul Hipp	William Friedkin	Gilbert Adler	Amerika
Pilihan Lagu - Lagu Rohani Terbaik Vol 1	Indonesia	20-Mar-1997	Cd			Brocite Corp	Indonesia
Killer	English	20-Mar-1997	VHS	Anthony Lapaglia Mimi Rogers	Mark Malone	Robert Vince & William Vince	Amerika
Tales From The Crypt Ep. 41 Only Skin Deep	English	21-Mar-1997	VHS	Peter Onorati Snerrie Rose	William Micone	Gilbert Adler	Britain
Az/Dc - No Bill	English	21-Mar-1997	VHS	Angus Young Malcum Young	David Mallet	Warner Music (M) S/B	Amerika
Road Kill	English	21-Mar-1997	VHS	Andrew Porter Sean Bridgers	Tony Elwood	Tony Elwood	Amerika
Die Hard With A Vengeance	English	21-Mar-1997	VHS	Bruce Willis Jeremy Irons	John Mc Tierman	John Mc Tierman	Britain
Final Justice	Kantonis	21-Mar-1997	VHS	Lau Ching Wan Tsang Chi Wai	Zmao Chong Ji	Ma Feng Guo	Hong Kong
Tales From The Crypt Ep. 39	English	22-Mar-1997	VHS	Bruce Davison Cushi Conaway	Roaman Fienae	Gilbert Adler	Britain
Clip Dance 2,3 & 4	English	21-Mar-1997	VHS		Tidak Dapat Dikesan	Pony Canyon Inc	Amerika
Sunday Report 97	Kantonis	21-Mar-1997	VHS	Lee Mun Chen (Pengacara)	Tsang Sur Cheng	Pony Canyon Inc	Amerika
Stealing Beauty	English	24-Mar-1997	VHS	Sinead Cusack Jeremy Irons	Bernado Bertolucci	Jeremy Thomas	Amerika
Bang Somat Sitangan Satu	Indoesia	25-Mar-1997	VHS	Advent Bangun Sally Marcelina	Tomy Bumama	Harkishin	Idonesia
Hantu Jorang Kong	B. Melayu	25-Mar-1997	VHS	Hashimah Yon Aziz Jaafar	K.M. Basker	Run Run Shaw	Singapore
60 Minit Non Stop Hil Rohani	Indonesia	27-Mar-1997	VHS	Tiada	Tiada		Indonesia
Tmz Countdown	English	28-Mar-1997	VHS	Tony Rich Toni Frayton		Tmz	Amerika

The Young Undercover	Kantonis	29-Mar-1997	VHS	Lee Sau Yan Cheong Chi Lam	Lee Wai Mun	Lam Ling Nam	Hong Kong
Die Hard	English	31-Mar-1997	VHS	Bruce Willis Alan Rickman	John McTiernan	Lawrence Gordon/Joel Silver	Britain
Rangbaaz	Hindi	31-Mar-1997	VHS	Mitun Chakraborty Shilpa Shirodkar	Kanti Shah	Kanti Shah P.Lahja	India
Power 98		11-Apr-1997	VHS	Eric Roberts Jason Gedrick	Jamie Hellman		Malaysia
The Last Boyscout		03-May-1997	VHS	Bruce Willis Damon Wayans	Tony Scott		Amerika
Nine 1/2 Weeks		05-May-1997	VHS	Micky Rourke Kim Basinger	Adrian Lynne		Amerika
Kounter Feit		09-May-1997	VHS	Bruce Payne Hilary Swank	Jason Mallory Asher		Amerika
Chinese Ghost Story 3		09-May-1997	Vcd	Tony Leung Jacky Cheung	Chin Siew Tung		Hong Kong
Crying Freeman		09-May-1997	VHS	Tony Leung Jacky Cheung	Chin Siew Tung		Hong Kong
Romeo And Juliet		13-May-1997	VHS	Leonardo Dicaprio Claire Danes	Baz Luhrman		Amerika
Samsung Coming Pr Film		14-May-1997	VHS				Korea
Sleeping With Strangers		15-May-1997	VHS	Adrienne Shelly Kymberly Huffman	William T. Bolson		Amerika
Hong Kong 97		15-May-1997	VHS	Robert Patrick Bron James	Allert Pyun		Amerika
Lethal Weapon		20-May-1997	VHS	Mel Gibson Danny Glover	Richard Donner		Amerika
The Club		20-May-1997	VHS	Chen Wei Meng Xu Shao Jiang	Kirk Wong		Hong Kong
War Of The World Vol. 3		22-May-1997	VHS	Fared Martin Lynda Mason Green	Neil Feamly		Amerika
Excuse Me Please		23-May-1997	VHS	Li Ching Wu Yau Han	Jiang Pei Li		Amerika
Lethal Weapon 3		30-May-1997	VHS	Mel Gibson Danny Glover	Richard Donner		Amerika
The People V Larry Flynt	English	03-Jun-1997	VHS	Wody Harrelson Courtney Love	Milos Forman	Oliver Stone	Amerika
Girls Without Tomorrow 1992		04-Jun-1997	VHS	Lau Ka Ling Fung Bo Bo	Wong Chi		Hong Kong
Vampire Vs Vampire		04-Jun-1997	VHS	Lam Cheng Yin Ching Siu Hoa	Lam Cheng Yin		Hong Kong
Spooky-Spooky		06-Jun-1997	VHS	Cheung Kin Tien Chan Yew	Hung Kam Po		Hong Kong
Lady Killer		06-Jun-1997	VHS	Wei Hong Yang Qing Qing	Li Jun		Hong Kong
Con Air	6-Jun-1997						Amerika
Momonoki2-N7 123		10-Jun-1997	VHS				Amerika
White Cargo		11-Jun-1997		David Bradley	Sharmon Tweed	Daniel Reardon	Amerika
White Cargo		11-Jun-1997		David Bradley	Sharmon Tweed	Daniel Reardon	Amerika
Mission Of Condor		12-Jun-1997	Vcd	Jen Dek Hua Mo Sar Jong	Lee Zhou		Hong Kong
Lair Of The White Worm		12-Jun-1997	VHS	Amanda Dowahue Hugh Grant	Keith Russel		Britain
Lethal Weapon 3		12-Jun-1997	VHS	Mel Gibson Danny Glover	Richard Donner		Amerika
Fortune Hunters		13-Jun-1997	VHS	Xie Xian Qian Xiao Hou	Yeung Kuen		Hong Kong
Jin Pin Mei		18-Jun-1997	VHS		Ceng Ya Jun Huang Zhong Su		Hong Kong
The Jail In Burning		21-Jun-1997	VHS	Ng Kei Lung Takashi Kaneshiro	Chu Yin Ping		Hong Kong

The Massacre Of Nanjing The Surviving		22-Jun-1997	VHS	Liu Yong Xin Liu De Kui	Huang Pei		Hong Kong
Threesome Bhg. 1 And 2		30-Jun-1997	U-Matic	Lara Flynn Boyle Stephen Baldwin	Huang Pei		Hong Kong
One Good Cop		08-Jul-1997	VHS	Michael Keaton Rene Russo	Heywood Gould		Amerika
Return To A Better Tomorrow		08-Jul-1997	VHS	Michael Keaton Rene Russo	Heywood Gould		Amerika
Golden Memories Love Songs		09-Jul-1997	Laser Disc				Singapore
Invisible Mom Disc 1/2		10-Jul-1997	Vcd	Dee Wallace Stone Russ Tamblyn			Amerika
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.27-28		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.15-16		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.21-22		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.19-20		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.23-24		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.17-18		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Guangzhou Godfather Ep.25-26		11-Jul-1997	VHS				Hong Kong
Billy Bathgate		14-Jul-1997	VHS	Dustin Hoffman Nicole Kidman	Robert Benton		Amerika
Friends Ep.312	English	29-Jul-1997	VHS	Jenifer Courtney Cox	Thomas Schlamme	Todd Stevam	Amerika
Pirates		6-Aug-1997	VHS	Kevin Bacon Kyra Sedgwick	Noah Stern		Amerika
The Champion		9-Aug-1997	VHS	Louis Mandylor Danny Trejor	Peter Gathings Bunch		Amerika
Mad Max Pt.1&11	English	14-Aug-1997	VHS	Mel Gibson Joanne Samuel	Genge Milker	Byron Kennedy	Amerika
Kipas-Kipas Carl Angin		19-Aug-1997	VHS	Barry Prima Dewi Permatasari	S.A Karim		Indonesia
Walot Merah		19-Aug-1997	VHS	Barry Prima Dewi Permatasari	S.A Karim		Indonesia
Hard Feeling		20-Aug-1997	VHS	Chan Kei Ming Soon Hin	Chow Chin Weng		Hong Kong
Angling Dama2		20-Aug-1997	VHS	Barry Prima Baron Hermanto	Toro Margens		Indonesia
Against The Odds Balance Of Power		22-Aug-1997	Beta		Martin Tabot		Jepun
Overnight Sensation Balance Of Power		22-Aug-1997	Beta		Martin Tabot		Jepun
The Game		23-Aug-1997	VHS	Josepld Campanella Graig Alan	Cole Mckay		Amerika
Lucky Dragon		23-Aug-1997	VHS	Lam Wei Cheng Ho Nam	Wang Sau Jun		Hong Kong
Grease Killer		26-Aug-1997	VHS	Fong Choong Sun Ku Kwan Choong	Shi Bing Jen		Hong Kong
The Jail Breakers		27-Aug-1997	VHS	Wu Qi Long Takashi Kaneshiro	Zhu Yann Ping		Hong Kong
The Vengeance Of Six Dragons		29-Aug-1997	VHS	Chin Siew Hou Wei Yin Hung	Choong Yan Kit		Hong Kong
Hero Dream		29-Aug-1997	VHS	Chin Siew Hou Chin Ka Lok	Lau Keong Fu		Hong Kong
Midnight Blue		15-Sep-1997	VHS	Damiam Chapa Annabel Schofield	Shoot Snider		Amerika
Beyond Hypotemia		16-Sep-1997	VHS	Liew Ching Yin Wu Chien Lian	Patrick Leong		Hong Kong
Kounterfeit		17-Sep-1997	VHS	Bruce Payne Hillary Swank	John Mallory Asher		Amerika
Powder Burns		18-Sep-1997	VHS	Jay Irwin Elizabeth Harry	Serge Rodnunsky		Amerika
Street Fury		22-Sep-1997	VHS	Ku Tian Le Michael Tse	Deng Yan Chen		Hong Kong

Table with 1 column: Title. Rows include: Bury Me High, Joyride, The Killing Fields, How Slow Zu Vol.5, How Slow Zu Vol.3, How Slow Zu Vol.1, How Slow Zu Vol.4, How Slow Zu Vol.2, This World Then The Fireworks, 7 Years In Tibet, This World Then The Fireworks, Double Tap, Wishmaster, Double Tap, Poison Ivy 3 The New Seduction, Mad About You * One More With Feeling, Demolition University, Red Blood 2, Vendetta, Slave Of Sword, Requital, Deadly Takeover, Men With Guns, Commando, Field Of Honour, Hunting List, Forced Nightmare, Back To Back(Re-Edit), Innocent Target, Vampire Family, Toyol, 97 Lan Kwang Fong, The Prince Of Portland Street.

Table with 5 columns: Date, Format, Director, Cast, Country. Rows include: 29-Sep-1997 VHS Lee Sai Fong/Chian Ka Le Hui Hui Chong Shu Siao Meng Hong Kong; 05-Oct-1997 VHS Tobey Maguire Amy Hathaway Quinton Peeples Amerika; 07-Oct-1997 VHS Sam Waterston Dr Haings Ngor Rolland Joffe Amerika; 10-Oct-1997 VHS Niuuh Soon Hock Malaysia; 10-Oct-1997 VHS Niuuh Soon Hock Malaysia; 10-Oct-1997 VHS Niuuh Soon Hock Malaysia; 10-Oct-1997 VHS Niuuh Soon Hock Malaysia; 10-Oct-1997 VHS Niuuh Soon Hock Malaysia; 23-Oct-1997 VHS Chris Hanley Brand Wyman Michael Oblwitz Amerika; 25-Oct-1997 VHS Brad Pitt David Thewlis Jean Jaques Anaud Amerika; 25-Oct-1997 VHS Billy Zane Gina Gershon Michael Oblwitz Amerika; 27-Oct-1997 VHS Stephen Rea Heater Lockclear Greg Donner Amerika; 27-Oct-1997 VHS Tammy Lauren Andrew Doivoff Robert Kurtzman Amerika; 28-Oct-1997 VHS Stephen Rea Heater Lockclear Greg Donner Amerika; 28-Oct-1997 VHS Jaime Pressly Michael Des Barnes Kurt Voss Amerika; 04-Nov-1997 VHS Paul Raiser HelenDavid Stienberg Paul Reiser Amerika; 10-Nov-1997 VHS Corey Haim Ami Dolenz Kevin Tenney Amerika; 13-Nov-1997 VHS Karin Salin Kristoffer Ryan Winter David Blyth Amerika; 18-Nov-1997 VHS Lu Liang Wei Zheng Ze Shi Liang Xiao Xiong Hong Kong; 22-Nov-1997 VHS Mo Shou Chong Chen Bao Lian Zhu Yan Ping Hong Kong; 25-Nov-1997 VHS Wang Yu Qin Han Wu Dun Hong Kong; 26-Nov-1997 VHS Jefft Speakmann Ron Silver Rich Avery Amerika; 26-Nov-1997 VHS Donal Lo Gue Gregory Sporteder Kan Skogland Canada; 05-Dec-1997 VHS Arnold Schwarzenegger Ray Dawn Chong Mark L. Lester Amerika; 05-Dec-1997 VHS Evertt McGill Ron Bransteder Hans Scheepmaker Amerika; 10-Dec-1997 VHS Lu Liang Wei Luo Shu Feng Zhu Yan Ping Hong Kong; 11-Dec-1997 VHS Lin Jen Ing Woo Jin Joo Liu Tze Yu Hong Kong; 13-Dec-1997 VHS Michael Rooker Ryo Ishibashi Roger Rooker Hong Kong; 16-Dec-1997 VHS David Heavener Richard Norton David Heavener Amerika; 17-Dec-1997 VHS Chen Zhi Wei Wu Jun Ru Cheng Zhi Wei Hong Kong; 17-Dec-1997 VHS Sidek Hussin Mahmud Jun Malek Selamat Malaysia; 19-Dec-1997 VHS Zhau Lei Zhang Rui Ling Hong Zong Cai Hong Kong; 19-Dec-1997 VHS Jen Dek Hwa Yuen Yong Yee Zhang Qian Ven Hong Kong.

City Kids 1989
Spiritual Love
Young And Dangerous
Act Filmlet Ver.1
Scorpio

23-Dec-1997	VHS	Liu De Hua Mo Shou Long	Pan Wen Jie		Hong Kong
24-Dec-1997	VHS	Zhou Run Fa Zhong Chu Hiong	Taylor Wong		Hong Kong
29-Dec-1997	VHS	Zheng Yi Jian Chenxilao Choon	Andrew Low		Hong Kong
29-Dec-1997	VHS		See Mee Gee		Malaysia
31-Dec-1997	VHS	Guan Xue Hua Hong Xin	Chen Jian De	Big Bright	Hong Kong

KEMBALI

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[[meja bantuan](#) | [berita KDN](#) | [buku pelawat](#) | [cari](#)]

FILMOGRAPHY

Title	Translated Title	Director	Date
Adik Manja	Spoiled Child	Othman Hafsham	1980
Ali Setan	N/A	Jins Shamsuddin	1985
All That Heaven Will Allow	N/A	Vincente Minnelli	1964
Anak Bapak	Daddy's Boy	P. Ramlee	1966
Axe Fight, The	N/A	T. Asch	1971
Azura	N/A	Deddy Borhan	1984
Bawang Putih Bawang Merah	White Onion Red Onion	S. Roomai Nor	1959
Berbahagia di Singapura	Love in Singapore	Jaafar Wiryo	1952/3
Bermadu	Bigamist	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Black Widow	N/A	U-Wei Hj. Shaari	1994
Blood and Sand	N/A	Rouben Mamoulian	1941
Booloo	N/A	Clyde Elliot	1937
Bunga Perchintaan	Beautiful Love Affair	L. Krishnan	1951
Chronique d'un été	Chronicle of a Summer	Jean Rouch	1961
Dari Jemapoh ke Manchesteé	From Jemapoh to Manchester	Hishamuddin Rais	1998
Day England Fell, The	aka The Union Jack is Down	Shigeo Tanaka	1942
Dead Birds	N/A	R. Gardner	1964
Death Wish	N/A	Michael Winner	1974
Diamond Anniversary Celebrations of Queen Victoria	N/A	possibly Richard John Appledon	1897
Esok Masih Ada	Tomorrow is Still to Come	Jins Shamsuddin	1980
Fantasia	Fantasy	Aziz M. Osman	1992
Feast, The	N/A	T. Asch	1968
Femina		Aziz M. Osman	1993

Title	Translated Title	Director	Date
Fenomena	Phenomena	Aziz M. Osman	1989
Gemilang	Glamorous	Yusof Haslam	1997
Ghazal untuk Rabiah	A Song for Rabiah	Jeyakumar	1997
Hanchor Hati	Broken Heart	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Hang Jebat	N/A	Hussain Hanif	1961
Hang Tuah	N/A	Phani Majumdar	1956
Hanya Kawan	Just Friends	Harith Iskander	1997
Hapulah Airmata Mu	Don't You Cry Anymore	M. Amin	1976
Hawai-Marei oki Kaisen	The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya	Kajiro Yamamoto	c. 1942
Home From The Hill	N/A	Vincente Minnelli	1960
Ibu Tiri	Step-Mother	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Ibulah Shorga	Heavenly Love of a Mother	S. Sudarmaji	1968
Jimi Asmara	N/A	Erma Fatimah	1995
Jogho	Champion	U-Wei Hj. Shaari	1997
Jungle Princess, The	N/A	William Thiele	1936
Kaki Bakar	The Arsonist	U-Wei Hj. Shaari	1995
Keluarga Si Comat	Family of Comat	Aziz Satar	1975
Laila Majnun	N/A	B.S. Rajhans	1933
Layar Lara	The Melancholy Screen	Shuhaimi Baba	1997
Lenjan	N/A	Ismail Yaacob	1998
Lepas Perang Dunia Kedua	After the Second World War; or possibly The Second World War is Loose	no director recorded	no production details
Life of an American Fireman, The	N/A	Edwin Porter	1903
Lips2Lips	N/A	Amir Muhammad	2000
Loang Maut; aka Loceng Maut	Death Bells	Naz Achnaz	1976

Title	Translated Title	Director	Date
Malaysia Five	N/A	J. Aristorenas	1976
Man with a Movie Camera, The	N/A	Dziga Vertov	1929
March to Singapore	aka All-Out Attack on Singapore	Shingajoru Sokogeki	1943
Marei No Tora	Tiger of Malaya	Masato Koza	1943
Maria Mariana	N/A	Yusof Haslam	1996
Maria Mariana II	N/A	Yusof Haslam	1998
Mata Hantu	Ghost's Eye	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Mekanik	Mechanic	Othman Hafsham	1983
Menanti Hari Esok	Waiting for Tomorrow	Jins Shamsuddin	1976
Menantu Derhaka	The Rebel Son-in-Law	B.S. Rajhans	1942
Mutiara	Pearl	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Nanook of the North	N/A	Robert Flaherty	1922
Nelayan	N/A	possible director Khairuddin aka Tairo	1938
Panas	Hot	Nurhalim Ismail	1998
Penarik Becha	The Trishaw Peddler	P. Ramlee	1955
Penyair Malam	Night Poet	Kamal Ishak	1997
Perempuan Melayu Terakhir	The Last Malay Woman	Erma Fatimah	1999
Permata di Perlombongan	Jewel in the Slum	Mahadi Mohd. Said	1952
Perempuan, Isteri dan...?	Woman, Wife and...?	U-Wei Hj. Shaari	1993
Original title: Perempuan, Isteri dan Jalang	Original title: Woman, Wife and Whore		
Phantom of the Opera	N/A	Rupert Julian	1925
Pontianak	Vampire	B. N. Rao	1958
Puteri	Princess	Rahim Razali	1987
Puteri Impian	Dream Princess	Aziz M. Osman	1997
Puteri Impian 2	Dream Princess 2	Aziz M. Osman	1999

Title	Translated Title	Director	Date
Putus Harapan	Broken Hope	B.N. Rao	1953
Raiders of the Lost Ark	N/A	Steven Spielberg	1981
Raja Bersiong	King with Fangs	Jamil Sulong and Yamazaki	1967
Ramli Ramlah	N/A	Jaafar Wiryo	1952/3
Ringgit Kasorrga	N/A	Shuhaimi Baba	1994
Sayang Salmah	Darling Salmah	Mahadi J. Murat	1996
Selubung	The Veil of Life	Shuhaimi Baba	1992
Semarang	N/A	no director recorded	1937
Sembilu	Loves' Grief	Yusof Haslam	1994
Sembilu II	Love's Grief II	Yusof Haslam	1995
Senario-The Movie	N/A	Aziz M. Osman	1999
Seniman Bujang Lapuk	The Nitwit Movie Stars	P. Ramlee	1961
Sergeant Hassan	N/A	Lamberto Avellana	1958
Seruan Merdeka	Cry Freedom	B.S. Rajhans	1946
Setia	Loyal	A.C Simons	1953
Silat Legenda	Legendary Warriors	Hassan Mutalib	1998
Spinning Gasing	Spinning Top	Tan Teck	2000
Suami, Isteri dan...?	Husband, Wife and...?	Pansha	1996
Terang Boelan	Full Moon	Albert Balink	1938
Terang Bulan di Malaya	Moonlight in Malaya	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Terpaksa Menikah	Forced to Marry	Krueger	1932
Third Man, The	N/A	Carol Reed	1949
Tiga Kekasih	Three Darlings	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Topeng Shaitan	Devil's Mask	no director recorded	c. 1938-1942
Tsu-Feh Sofiah	N/A	Rahim Razali	1985
Untuk Sesuap Nasi	For a Mouthful of Rice	L. Krishnan	1952/3
Wanita Bertudung Hitam	The Woman Wearing Black	Mahadi J. Murat	1992
When The Daltons Rode	N/A	George Marshall	1940

Title	Translated Title	Director	Date
XX Ray	N/A	Aziz M. Osman	1992
XX Ray II	N/A	Aziz M. Osman	1995

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