

**THE DYNAMIC TENSIONS OF THE POSTMODERN  
SELF: FRAGMENTING IDENTITIES IN THE  
SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF KARIM RASLAN  
AND DINA ZAMAN**

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**THE DYNAMIC TENSIONS OF THE  
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STORIES OF KARIM RASLAN AND DINA  
ZAMAN**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is solely my very own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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SHAIK HUSSEINUDIN B. BABU ALI

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**KETEGANGAN DINAMIKA KENDIRI PASCAMODEN: FRAGMENTASI  
IDENTITI DALAM CERPEN TERPILIH KARIM RASLAN DAN DINA  
ZAMAN**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini memfokuskan tentang kendiri pascamoden yang digambarkan melalui watak-watak dalam cerpen terpilih hasil karya Karim Raslan dan Dina Zaman. Ia meneroka pengaruh dan kesan pascamoden ke atas kendiri sehingga mengakibatkan berlakunya fragmentasi ke atas ‘kendiri’ atau ‘*self*’. Fokus analisa kajian ini melibatkan pembinaan kendiri pasca moden, bagaimana kendiri merundingi identiti budaya, agama, jantina dan seksual dalam konteks pascamoden Malaysia. Ia juga meneroka strategi yang digunakan oleh penulis untuk menidakkan idea-idea dominan berkaitan dengan budaya, agama, jantina dan seksualiti. Pendekatan yang dilaksanakan untuk kajian ini adalah pendekatan pascamoden yang bertujuan mendapatkan pelbagai tingkat makna dan pemahaman yang dipercayai mempunyai kebolehan memberikan pandangan yang lebih lengkap dan menyeluruh tentang ‘kendiri’. Kajian ini menggunakan tiga teori pascamoden iaitu, Jacques Lacan dan teorinya Psikoanalisis untuk meneroka dan menerangkan bagaimana ‘kendiri’ pascamoden dibentuk, Jean-Francois Lyotard dan teori “*phrase regiment*” atau frasa rejimen bagi mengkaji bagaimana ‘kendiri’ merundingi dan menggulingkan idea-idea dominan tentang budaya, agama, jantina dan seksualiti. Strategi pembacaan Jacques Derrida, dekonstruksi, digunakan untuk mengenalpasti konflik yang berkaitan dengan idea-idea dominan untuk dianalisis serta

mengenalpasti strategi-strategi yang digunakan oleh kedua orang penulis untuk menggulingkan idea-idea dominan didalam cerita-cerita mereka. Dapatan daripada kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa 'kendiri' pascamoden yang dikaji berada didalam keadaan fragmentasi dan berkonflik. Mereka menggunakan keadaan fragmentasi dan konflik mereka untuk merundingi sesuatu keadaan dimana mereka boleh berfungsi dan diterima oleh masyarakat umum dan dimasa yang sama mereka boleh mengekalkan kebebasan peribadi mereka didalam kehidupan peribadi mereka untuk membolehkan mereka mencapai keinginan, tujuan atau hasrat mereka. Mereka dapat merundingi keadaan ini dengan berada didalam keadaan yang sentiasa berubah ataupun '*flux*' dimana konflik dan ketegangan dinamika diuruskan secara bersituasi dan mengikut keadaan dengan berlandaskan tujuan, hasrat serta keinginan peribadi mereka.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on the postmodern 'self' in the portrayal of the characters in Karim Raslan's and Dina Zaman's selected short stories. It explores the dynamic tensions and the impact of postmodernism on the 'self' which result in the fragmentation of the 'self'. The focus of the analysis of this study involves the construction of the postmodern 'self', how the postmodern 'self' subverts and negotiates cultural, religious, gender and sexual identities within the context of postmodern Malaysia. It also explores the strategies that are employed by the authors to subvert dominant ideas pertaining to culture, religion, gender and sexuality in their stories. The approach undertaken in this study is a postmodern approach which aims to achieve multiple levels of meaning and understanding which is believed to have the capacity of revealing a more complete and rounded view of the 'self'. This study utilises the theories of three postmodern thinkers namely, Jacques Lacan and his theory of psychoanalysis to explore and describe how the postmodern 'self' is constructed, Jean-Francois Lyotard and his theory of 'phrase regiments' to examine how the postmodern 'self' subverts and negotiates his or her identity within their given environment and Jacques Derrida and his reading strategy of 'deconstruction' to identify the areas for analysis as well as to identify the strategies used by the two authors to subvert the dominant ideas regarding culture,

religion, gender and sexuality through their stories. The findings of this study indicate that the postmodern 'self' is both fragmented and conflicted with his or her environment. At times, the 'self' uses this state of fragmentation quite consciously to benefit himself or herself in order to negotiate an acceptable place for himself or herself in society. Simultaneously, the 'self' also maintains a degree of personal freedom and makes choices within the private sphere of the 'self's life' that are preferred or desired by the 'self'. Through the fragmented and compartmentalised state of the 'selves's' lives, these individuals are actually able to subvert the dominant ideas regarding the four areas mentioned, in their private lives, in order for them to live their lives as they prefer and desire as well as remain and function as a part of the mainstream society. The dynamic tensions and conflicts faced by these individuals are managed by them by remaining in a state of flux and dealing with the dynamic tensions and conflicts on a situational basis that depend on their personal goals, intentions, desires or pursuits.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter will include a discussion on the background of the study, the authors involved in the study and their socio-cultural and political background, the statement of the problem, the objectives, limitations and scope of the study, definition of key terms and the organisation of the study.

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The corpus of Malaysian literature in English over the last two decades has come to include several works of contemporary writers that depict a myriad of human lives and conditions which in turn paints a new emerging identity of Malaysian life. These writers offer us a picture of the Malaysian life that not only presents the logocentric, acceptable and oftentimes 'traditional' way of the Malaysian experience but also interweave within its fabric the voices, lifestyles, realities and condition of the fragmented and sometimes marginalized strata of Malaysian society. Issues and realities of the diverse, fragmented and pluralistic part of Malaysian society, which could be uncomfortable or distasteful for some, have been opened up and discussed as a part of the modern Malaysian reality in the works of these writers.

Several of these writers themselves could be dealt with caution and suspicion due to their new 'voices' which some may consider to be controversial or sometimes even blasphemous within the local context where concepts such as religion, culture, gender and sexuality are

concerned. Among such new writers are Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman who portray the Malaysian experience as one that is destabilized and dynamic, characterized by new hybrids of culture and characters.

Their courage and audacity to explore the 'hidden side' or the 'other side' of Malaysian life that most of us might feel curious about and yet find uncomfortable to explore, let alone accept, makes them relevant writers for this study. Their works represent an act of questioning that undermines the logocentric totalitarian notions of our local society. Their deep psychological insight into the human psyche which tries to negotiate an existence within the local context, offers the reader many avenues for thought and understanding about what it means now to be a part of the Malaysian or even the Asian world. Their post-modernistic outlook and sensitive observation allows us to look not only at the whole 'systems' of hegemony but also at 'the holes' in it as well as 'around' the system which renders any one prophetic explication by means of 'grand narratives' or absolute 'truths' futile.

What is particularly noticeable about their works is their ability to weave a fabric of the Malaysian experience at a macro and a micro level where one is able to view how the characters relate to the mainstream society as a whole as well as deal with their lives at a more personal and psychological level thus highlighting the dynamic tensions that involve fragmented 'selves' particularly where issues such as religion, culture, gender are concerned.

## 1.2 Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman

Karim Raslan's early biography as written in the chapter entitled "*Roots*" in his book, "*Ceritalah 1: Malaysia in Transition*", (Raslan, 2004) informs that he was born in 1963 in Petaling Jaya, Selangor to a Malay father and an English mother. His childhood days were spent between Kuala Lumpur, where his father worked and Kuala Kangsar, the hometown of his paternal family. Upon the untimely demise of his father due to an automobile accident, his family moved to England where he continued his schooling and eventually attended Cambridge to pursue a degree in Law. Called to the Bar in *Inner Temple*, he spent some time writing leader editorials for *The Times* on north and south-east Asia. He later returned to Kuala Lumpur and practiced law in a large legal firm and eventually left the profession to work on a novel. After several years as a freelance writer and editor for several newspapers, journals and magazines he returned to legal practice. He now still writes as well as speaks and advises in seminars and conferences on the Malaysian paradigm of equity through growth and the New Economic Policy in South Africa (Raslan, 2004).

He is currently the Chair of the *World Economic Forum's Regional Agenda Council on Southeast Asia* (Wahyudi, 2010). His literary works include, "*Heroes and Other Stories*" (1996), "*Ceritalah 1: Malaysia in Transition*" (1996), "*Ceritalah 2: Journeys Through Southeast Asia*" (2002), "*Ceritalah 3: Malaysia the Dream Deferred*" (2009) and "*Ceritalah: Indonesia*" (2010) (Wahyudi, 2010). He has also published a book on tourism called "*Sabah, Malaysian Borneo*" (2005) for the Sabah Tourism Board (Trove, 2018). He has written in newspaper columns such as *Ceritalah* in The Star newspaper from 20<sup>th</sup> July 2010 till 16<sup>th</sup> November 2015 and his translated articles also appeared in Sinar Harian and

Sin Chew Daily. His columns entitled *Menjajat Asia Tenggara* have appeared in The Jakarta Globe, Kontan in Indonesia as well as in Today in Singapore in 2003.

Dina Zaman was born in Kuala Lumpur in 1969. Her father worked with the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Government of Malaysia. She was educated in several countries due to her father's work and returned to Malaysia when she was eleven. She then went on to obtain a degree in Mass Communication and Creative Writing from Western Michigan University and later a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Lancaster University. She has been writing for the local media since. Her works include, "*Night and Day*", (1997) and "*I am Muslim*" (2007). She has co-edited with M.A Quayum, "*Silverfish New Writing 3*" (2003) and her stories have appeared in "*Skoob Pasifica Anthology 2: Pen is Mightier than the Sword*" (1994), "*Nineteen: A Collection of Stories by Women*" (2003), and "*Silverfish New Writing 5*" (2005) (Quayum, 2007). She also has several plays and monologues including, "*Why Did He Sleep with Me If I am so Fat*" (1995), "*Penganggur Terhormat*" (1995), "*After the Doctor's*" (1996), "*Gula Girls*" (1999), "*Stories from the Palace*" (2000) and "*Harikiri*" (2003), (Quayum, 2007). She has a short story entitled, '*After Dark, My Love*' in K.L. Noir: Red in 2013 published by Buku Fixi or Fixi Novo, "*The King of the Sea*" in 2012 published by Silverfish Books and her latest publication is entitled, "*Holy Men, Holy Women*" in 2018 which was published by Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, Malaysia.

Her poems "*How to Go to Heaven*" and "*Carpe Diem*" won prizes in the NST-Shell Poetry Competition in 1995 and her short story, "*And She Became an Angel*" was shortlisted for Ian St. James Award, London, 1999. She was a feature editor with "*Malaysiakini.com*" and is currently a columnist who writes about social issues with a focus on Muslim life,

child advocacy and HIV/AIDS issues for an online news portal [www.themalaysianinsider.com](http://www.themalaysianinsider.com) (NTwriters.com, 2010).

These two authors have been selected to be the focus of this study for several reasons. First of all, both these authors are writers of postmodern fiction in Malaysia who write in English. Their works offer glimpses into the contemporary postmodern society of urban Malaysia. They present themes and characterization in their stories that do not represent nor control the culture, ideologies and hegemony of mainstream Malaysian society. Instead they offer the reader a rich and detailed account of “thick descriptions” (Schiralli, 1999, pp. 91-95) where detailed description of actual behavior, typically resulting from the interaction of individuals within a certain context is provided. This allows the reader or the viewer to see and understand the dynamics and tensions that lie below a superficial level.

These two authors have also been selected because they present the reader with “little narratives” (Rice, Phillip. & Waugh, Patricia, 2001, p. 325) or narratives about the common everyday lives of the characters in their works. Instead of presenting the reader with the lives of mainstream characters whose lives are socially and politically approved, little narratives break free of philosophical and political totalization which is one of the key tenets of modernism (Lyotard, 1991, pp. 66-67). As a reader of their stories, it can be noted that both these writers dare to bring into their stories taboo subjects, which might cause discomfort to some, in the context of Malaysian society. The exposé of these ‘little narratives’ comment on the state of contemporary society, which in turn offers the potential to reflect upon pre-existing beliefs about the Malaysian urban society and its metamorphosis with particular reference to culture, gender, sexuality and religion.

Their texts have both “literary value” in the sense of their manner and means of expression as well as possess a “textual value” or a cognitive quality as these texts provide a means of further understanding ourselves and our social environment (Schiralli, 1999, pp. 82-83).

The stories of Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman complement and contrast one another in the sense that they offer different vantage points to view the urban postmodern society that is depicted. Karim Raslan’s stories depict and expose facets of the upper and middle class strata of postmodern urban Malaysia, whereas, Dina Zaman focuses on the lives of the working class and sometimes marginalized individuals like maids, taxi drivers, street vendors and prostitutes.

It is important to take into account all stratum and influences of a particular society in order to gain a better understanding of its workings and its changes. Lacan explains the socialization of these influences in terms of the process of the Oedipal complex (Lacan, 2006, p. 95) where an individual’s identity is formed according to the idealised ‘reality’ of the parent or the society through assimilation and enculturation. This is a continuous process where the individual forms or redefines identity by means of ‘secondary revisions’ (Lacan, 2006, p. 76). In postmodern society, the secondary revisions could come from a variety of sources and could constitute a variety of forms where binary notions like ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ becomes blurred, fluid, personal and even conflicting.

Lyotard support this notion by claiming that it is the individual who selects and compartmentalises what the individual wants at a personal level and in a particular situation (Lyotard, 1991, p. 15) and again this process which determines beliefs, values and decisions and so on is also impermanent and fluid in nature. Lyotard’s theory explains how the fragmentation of the ‘ideal self’ is manifested and managed.

Derrida explains the multi-facetness of reality and the truth by saying that the notion of ‘a truth’ or a true ‘centre’ is not present. He explains this phenomenon by his theory on the concept of *différance* (1978, p. 198) where one signifier only leads to another signifier thus making a permanent and fixed ‘truth’ not possible. It is the individual who creates the ‘truth’ by means of an ‘external point of reference’ or the transcendental signified (1978, p. 281) which is actually a notion that is formed collectively by a society and reinforced in individual by means of socialization that gives rise to the presence of a logocentric point of reference. In a postmodern society, the point of reference may be derived from several sources thus rendering a signifier and what it signifies unstable and fluid, especially at a more personal level.

Even though not included in this study, Foucault too describes the dynamics of social change in terms of power which circulates from all directions as in Lacan’s concept of secondary revisions and Lyotard’s ideas of a personal goal driven choices of values, beliefs and decisions. According to Foucault, power is neither an effect of subjective capabilities nor structural mechanism, but rather a name for a complex strategic situation that constitutes social identity through the exclusion of a constitutive outside (Torfing, 1999, p. 304).

Changes in society and the catalyst for change can come from all directions and it may not always be top-down, such as from state to citizens, from the upper classes to the lower classes or from scholars to the masses. Individual identity and society are mutually defined and it might be inadequate to simply put all the responsibility or blame on one party or influence, such as blaming ‘the decadent West’ for all the ‘social ills’ encountered in local society as often depicted by the local media or our local ‘guardians of morality’. Instead

one might want to consider the “dynamic, unstable ‘play’ of influences and ‘traces’ that are always in a state of flux, supplementing and complementing or even competing and contrasting with one another that consequently manifests in the identities of the characters that appear in the works of the authors concerned.

This study examines the fragmentation of the self and the dynamics that are involved in negotiating the self in postmodern society. The concept of negotiation is actually a form of a ‘revision’ or ‘adjustments’ that are made to an ‘identification’ (Wenger, 2008, p. 188) where an individual generates meanings that are applicable to new situations or to assert themselves in a particular situation (Wenger, 2008, p. 197). For example, ‘a couple’ is a form of identification but how a couple relate to each other within a particular social context or situation is negotiated by them.

### **1.3 Locating the Writers in their Own Socio-Cultural and Political Context: The Malaysian Gauntlet**

The contemporary postmodern urban Malaysian society could be viewed as a collage of individuals and families who are an outcome of several decades of socio-economical, theological and cultural influences. Despite fervent top-down ideological engineering precipitated by Tun Dr. Mahathir’s government with the introduction of the phrase ‘bangsa Malaysia’ or the Malaysian race (Milner, 2011, p. 161) which aspires towards the establishment of a logocentric Malaysian identity, the reality is far from it. In fact, it could be argued that Malaysia, underneath the superficial politically imposed ‘armour’ or ‘skin’ lies a silent reality that defies any such grandiose notion of what constitutes Malaysian identity.

At a macro level, unlike other countries, where issues like politics and religion might not be a major catalyst towards the evolution of a postmodern society, it would be rather difficult to discuss the plural interpellation or influences that affect the postmodern Malaysian without including them. Also, unlike the Chinese or Indians who can be Chinese or Indian regardless of religion in Malaysia, a Malay cannot be a Malay in Malaysia without being Muslim and due to the fact that most of the characters found in the short stories, which are the focus in this study, are Malay, it would not be adequate if matters like the National Economic Policies and the effects of political Islam are not included.

The usually 'top-down' efforts and influences of nation building and religion could be one way viewed from a Marxist perspective, as a form of "state apparatus" a concept that was promoted by Louis Althusser. "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISA) and "Repressive State Apparatuses" (RSA) (Ferretter, 2006, pp. 83-95) represent how a state controls people. ISA is the established and institutionalized means such as the armed forces or the police, whereas, RSA would include things like religion, legal system, education, culture, media and communication which comprise a major part of conventional life.

These efforts are a conscious endeavour towards establishing a sense of contrived 'desired identity' and 'desired logocentrism' among the people. Ideally, the continuous indoctrination of ideologies that are promoted will immerse individuals in an environment where the ideologies turn people into "subjects" who will eventually become positioned or 'interpellated' to see their world in a certain way while at the same time believing that they are individuals who possess the freedom of thought and interpretation.

The situation in Malaysia is one where, in addition to those expounded by the policy makers and nation builders, there is a whole range and repertoire of ideologies coming from several other different origins and sometimes they can be contradicting or inconsistent in nature which results in fragmentation and diversity of world views. Despite this perplexing condition, their influences somehow appear to achieve, at least superficially or at a public level, a “naturalised” and “normalised” state where most people come to ‘think’ of certain conditions or states to be unquestionable or naturally true“ (Ferretter, 2006, pp. 83-95). However, in the postmodern Malaysian context, this ostensive ‘reality’ cannot be as simple as it is understood by the policy makers and ‘nation builders’ for every ideological ‘reality’ brings along the *différend*. A *différend* is a conflict that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments. One side’s legitimacy does not imply the other’s lack of legitimacy. Applying a single rule of judgment derived from a particular ideology such as tradition, social norms or gender roles , to settle a *différend* would ‘wrong’ at least one of them if that side does not believe in this rule (Lyotard, 1988, p. xi). The *différends* mentioned here are not only interpersonal but to a greater degree intrapersonal as well.

*Différends* can also occur within a certain domain of influence, for example, religion, modernisation, education or national identity or at an inter-domain level.

The ideologies that one is exposed to brings with every one of it a sense of a ‘reality’ or a code of desired behaviour for each situation and each individual and each and every one of them is something that is passed on from one source to another.

“Reality would be that object called the ‘baton’ [témoin] that the relay runners transmit to each other.” (Lyotard, 1988, p. 32).

Any 'recipient' of any ideology or ideal does not simply receive and accept it as it is intended in its entirety but has to interpret it in his or her own terms and understanding of what it is or what it means.

A presentation does not present a universe to someone; it is the event of its (inapprehensible) presence. A given is given to a subject, who receives it and deals with it. To deal with it is to situate it, to place it in a phrase universe (Lyotard, 1988, p. 61).

It is here when the 'given' is subjected to differends and the 'placing' of the 'given' in the schema of the subject's 'reality' requires a linking of the phrases via a set of rules that are 'proper' or a 'genre of discourse' as Lyotard terms it, in order for the subject to attain certain 'goals' or an end. Although, the 'given' might bring with it a whole regiment of equivocal 'phrases', the 'subject' selects and situates it in the subject's own personal universe. "Reality entails the differend. This heterogeneity, for a lack of common idiom, makes consensus impossible<sup>1</sup>. (Lyotard, 1988, pp. 55-56)".

Lyotard demonstrates the multiplicity of what is interpreted as 'reality' by using a simple sentence as an example to show the equivocal nature of how phrases function in contributing towards an understanding of something.

A phrase can be formulated in such a way that it co-presents several universes. It can be equivocal, not only with regards to the sense but also with regard to the referent, the addressor or the addressee.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyotard demonstrates this by using the name Stalin as an example. So many phrases can be attached to that particular name which not only describes different senses for it and place the name on so many instances but also obey heterogeneous regimens and/ or genres (Lyotard, 1988, p. 55).

“I can come to your place” – Equivocation can affect ‘I’, ‘come’ by, OR ‘your’. Restricting ourselves to the modal ‘can’ – here are some co-presented universes. (Lyotard, 1988, pp. 80-81)

- 1.1 I have the ability to do it. – ability (description)
- 1.2 I have the time to do it. – ability (description)
- 1.3 You have a place and I know the address—ability (description)
- 2.0 It’s possible that I’ll do it. –eventuality (description)
- 3.1 I desire to do it. – wish (representative as in I want, I desire)
- 3.2 I desire that you tell me to do it. – wish (regulation as in I order you, I beg you)
- 4.0 I have permission to do it. –right (description)

The interpretation or selection of the phrase by a ‘subject’ depends on the association of what is received with the ‘trace’, to borrow Derrida’s term, of what that particular idea conjures up in the subject’s mind or to which idea or ideas it is linked. This again operates by utilising the ‘genre of discourse that is particular to the given ‘subject’ which is based on a personal goal or intention. The determining factor could be a result of a whole assortment of ideologies and beliefs the ‘subject’ has accumulated, be it through indoctrination or otherwise, through the course of his or her lifetime. It would be rather impossible to identify all these influences but one could identify some overt factors that would be peculiar to the Malaysian context. The *différends* that result consequently are equivocal in nature and hence cannot be equitably resolved for a lack of a general rule of judgement applicable to all cases.

In the following sections, some of these imposed macro-level influences will be discussed further to demonstrate how the combined effects of multiple ideologies results in

fragmentation of society which is manifested in the diversity and plurality of lifestyles as the ones depicted in the short stories that are included in this study.

#### **1.4 Nation Building: From National Economic Policy to Vision 2020**

The influence of government policies, such as the New Economy Policy (NEP) of 1971 to 1990 gave rise to a new breed of urban middle class, predominantly Malays who range widely from the conservative traditional minded individuals on one end to the ultra-modern western types of individuals, which by the way is only a convenient way of superficially classifying them for in reality they are far more complex than that. The diversity in their being can be seen depicted in films, dramas, television, news reports, internet, literature, as well as observed during one's daily interactions with others. It could be argued that such diversity occurs as a result of individuals' attempt at reconciling the various *différends* which they might encounter from the impact of macro-level influences or ideologies that results from nation building endeavours of those in power with those that are personal or with those that have been 'inherited' through socialisation such as cultural beliefs and traditional beliefs. The 'impact' of these *différends* is not always the same for every individual nor is the attempt at 'reconciliation' in any way uniform, for the linking of the 'phrase regiments', which in turn is governed by an 'end' or a 'goal' peculiar to any particular individual, is more likely to not follow a similar 'path' or a 'chain' of phrases that could be applicable to all. Lyotard summarises the unique nature of this phenomenon as follows.

Intuition is the immediate relation of cognition to objects. This relation only takes place when objects are given 'to us'. This immediate giving, in turn, only takes place 'in so far as the mind [of an individual] is affected in a certain way' by the object (Lyotard, 1988, p. 61).

The 'end' or the 'goal' determines the 'genre of discourse' with which an idea or an object is linked and cogitated would inevitably result in the diversity that occurs among individuals. In this instance, any manner of logocentric thought that aspires towards a universal reality becomes null and void.

Before proceeding any further along this line of thought, it might be helpful to get an overview and background of these macro-level influences that are peculiar to the Malaysian fabric of society and state.

The NEP was devised with the underlying rationale that economic inequalities was the primary reason for inter-racial conflicts that precipitated in the race riots of 1969 (Crouch, 1992, p. 23). Therefore, it was imperative for the government of that time to embark on a massive scheme to restructure society to ensure that there is equality among the various races on an economic plateau. This meant creating extra provisions and opportunities for the predominantly agrarian Malay community in the areas of education, commerce and agriculture, to name a few. During this era, for example, thousands of Malay students were educated in specially created boarding schools and were sent abroad and locally on scholarships to pursue a tertiary education (Mohamad, 2009, p. 127). Nevertheless, this policy was not very welcomed by Malaysians of other races as it was viewed as a subtle form of discrimination against them. This act itself spawns a myriad of significance as well as *différends* to the benefactors as well as those it ignored.

The rapid economic expansion in the country from 1970 to 1980 resulted in an increased populace of the urban middle class and the implementation of the NEP, despite the dissatisfaction it caused in certain quarters, made sure that Malays constituted a large part of the modern urban strata of society and by the “late 1980s the urban, educated middle class constituted a large part of a society in which, Malay peasants and non-Malay labourers no longer made up the majority” (Crouch, 1992, p. 40).

Tun Dr. Mahathir, during his prime ministership of the 1980’s and the 1990’s, advocated the creation of the ‘New Malay’, “a Malay who was more entrepreneurial, assertive, a person less tradition-bound and less inclined towards the type of self-effacing, deferential behaviour that can lead to easy domination by other ethnic groups” (Milner, 2011, p. 208).

In the spirit and enthusiasm of modernity, which provided the optimistic vision of a better life, there was an increased interest and emphasis placed on science and technology and commerce that were seen as solutions for rapid economic growth in the country and the former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad’s Vision 2020, which was introduced in 1991 under the National Development Policy, aimed to change a basically traditional ethnic society into a progressive and enlightened society that would be on par with the developed nations of the world (Khoo , 2006, p. 65).

The efforts at restructuring the Malaysian society would have probably created a condition which could be likened to Conner’s concept of “time-space compression” (Connor, 1997, p. 254) where the intensification of the process of solidity, specificity and historical resistance of a particular place is dissolved where some parts of society, specifically urban society spearheads into the ‘future’ while other are ‘lagging behind’. This phenomenon

could not only be evident at a societal plane but also at a more personal inner plane of the individuals' psyche where parts of an individual psyche 'spearheads' into the 'future' or 'modernity' while other parts still cling on to more 'traditional' notions depending on the individuals 'end' or 'goals'. The terms 'future', 'modernity' and 'traditional' are used here for the sake of convenience for those too are subject to *différends* depending on individual perspectives and beliefs.

Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, not only focused on achieving modernity and economic resilience for the country, but also focused on projecting an international identity for Malaysia which included solidarity with the third world countries as well as a projection of Malaysia's Islamic heritage to the world (Hng, 2004, p. 148). This new form of Muslim identity requires the Islamic community to be able to address political and socio-economic issues in a realistic manner and to evolve beyond rhetoric and become problem solvers (Hng, 2004, p. 139). But conditions are not as simplistic as that for in Malaysia the very notion of Islam is also a pluralistic one with its own fair share of conflicts.

## **1.5 Second Wave Islamic Invasions**

Upon independence in 1957, post-colonial political analysts had generally expected the role of Islam in national affairs would be eventually replaced with Western type secularism, however, they turned out to be totally mistaken as history has revealed the reverse (Funston, 2006, p. 51).

An integral part of Malay identity is religion and one cannot be Malay without being a Muslim (Milner, 2011, p. 2) and to ensure uniformity in religion all Muslim students

undergo a compulsory Islamic education programme in school. The curriculum for government funded schools is designed by the Islamic Education Division under the Ministry of Education and this is merely the basics provided by the government (Malaysia, Departments and Divisions, 2008).

In addition to this basic effort, the Malay society has also been influenced by various Islamic movements in the past until the present and these movements do not necessarily agree in all matters of religion and political practices. K.S Jomo and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, in their essay entitled, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements" state that it has become rather difficult to identify Malaysian Islam as a "unitary force" as it is often marked by differences and fragmentation (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992). It is ironic that the religion which brought about a social philosophy or truth to the fragmented Arab tribes and united them in the past has become the instrument used by some to separate people in the modern era. According to Asghar Ali, as one has to understand reality with all its complexity, reality about religion is also multi-layered, as religion can be a soothing balm for suffering human beings it can also be a rich source of exploitation (Asghar Ali, 2007, p. 4).

Regardless of the motivations of the main Islamic groups in Malaysia, their presence and influence has left an impact on Muslim society and Malays in this country.

The first one is called Jamaat Tabligh which is a missionary movement that has its roots in India and it became socially visible in Malaysia around the 1950's. This group emphasises the need to adopt the lifestyle and practices of the Prophet which would lead to the eradication of social problems. Their approach is simple and inoffensive as they adopt an

apolitical stance. They go around preaching as well as recruiting men to join them as it is considered obligatory on Muslims to carry out missionary duties (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992, pp. 80-81). This group's view that to be a 'true' Muslim one has to emulate the Prophet and his lifestyle inevitably ignores aspects of modernity such as globalisation and what is generally known as 'progress'.

Another movement that preached its interpretation of Islam was the Darul Arqam movement. This cult like movement was founded in 1968 by twelve Muslims under the leadership of a former religious school teacher and PAS activist called Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992, pp. 81-85). They believed that an Islamic society had to be first established before the question of an Islamic state even arose and to materialise this master plan they actually established a settlement in Sungai Penchala where families would coexist in a place where everyone practices "true" Islamic values. They rejected the attires and practices of the mainstream Malay society which they believed had become contaminated with the values of the Judeo-Christian world and replaced it with attires of the Arabs, renouncing all forms of "non- Islamic" entertainment such as music and television and maintained strict segregation between the opposite sexes outside of marriage and kin. They provided their own education for their children, established their own clinics and produced food items to avoid consuming anything that might have been manufactured by non-Muslims.

Unlike the Jamaat Tabligh group, the Arqam group was highly vocal in its condemnation of other Islamic movements such as ABIM and PAS as well as the government. There were also internal disputes within the movement over matters pertaining to polygamy and as a result several of its key figures left the group. Then, in 1986 charges of heresy were

brought against the movement and it was finally banned in Malaysia but not without it leaving behind its legacy of fundamentalist ideologies and 'underground' followers (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992, pp. 81-85).

On a more modernistic mode, The Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement or *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) formed in 1971 by the alumni of the National Association of Malaysian Islamic Students had strong support from students in institutions of higher learning. Their leaders were a combination of individuals with secular or religious tertiary qualifications and hence they were able to influence a wide range of society from schools, the government bureaucracy and communities not under the influence of PAS (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992, p. 85). This movement sought for the establishment of an Islamic state, while opposing secularism and nationalism which they considered to be legacies of the un-Islamic colonial traditions. The movement emphasised the importance of education and the quality of Islamic training. They reached out to people by having talks as well as circulating various types of publications. Although they were initially highly critical of the government they eventually came to support several government policies that promoted Islam in the early 1980s, precipitated by its leader Anwar Ibrahim's decision to join the ruling party, joining forces with Tun Dr. Mahathir in their pursuit of a modernist approach to Islam for the country (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992, pp. 85-93).

The politically active, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, (PAS) was formed in 1951 as a reaction to the difference of opinion regarding the type of country to be established in Malaysia after the departure of the British. According to their view of Malay nationalism, the new country should be one that reflects Islam in all respects of life, such as, law,

politics, economy, education, taxes, interests and so forth, all under the leadership of an “*ulamak*” or an Islamic clerical leader. In the 1980’s PAS abandoned its nationalistic concerns and gravitated towards a more purist vision of Islam, much inspired by the Iranian revolution. This party considers the Islamic version of the ruling coalition government to be un-Islamic (Jomo, K.S & Ahmad Shabery Cheek, 1992, pp. 93-105).

On a much smaller scale there are of course numerous underground “Islamic cults” in existence of which several have been declared as “deviant” by the religious authorities and yet enjoy the secret patronage of Malays, especially from the urban upper or middle class strata of society like the one described by Dina Zaman in, “I am Muslim” (Zaman D. , 2007, pp. 32-48) or the much more controversial “Tok Ayah Pin” cult and his “Sky Kingdom” in Besut, Terengganu, which received extensive media coverage in 2005.

Despite the national focus on orthodoxy in Malaysia by the parties that wield power, old cultural and spiritual beliefs are still very much a part of the fabric of Malay society. This is evident in frequent reports of ‘ghost’ sightings reported in the media, the presence of mystical forms of martial arts (*silat*) and the ‘*bomohs*’ who are even consulted by leading Malay political figures (Funston, 2006, p. 57).

Considering the various types of ideologies and identities offered by the various Islamic groups, simple classification of Muslims like the four types proposed by Rippin (1993, pp. 34-43) which classifies Muslims as “traditionalist”, “radical Islamists”, “modernists” and “secularists” might not be applicable in the postmodern Malaysian context anymore. Efforts to classify Malay culture or Muslim culture into categories and types have become a futile effort as Joel Kahn (Kahn, 1992) frames it in his book, ‘*Fragmented Vision*’.

By reducing Malay culture to a search of convenient markers of identity, casting it in a mould of a shallow invented tradition designed to dupe the masses, or discovering in it some kind of a hidden protest – all these approaches, while offering insights, ultimately reduce Malaysians themselves to mere shadows, unable to recognise that their culture is not real at all”. “...contemporary Malay culture is being created in the context of a debate with “the west” on one hand and the notions of modernity on the other (Kahn, 1992, p. 174).

In Malaysia, not all Muslims could be considered to be in support of any one particular form of Islamic resurgence or even the government’s Islamisation programme as there could be a substantial number of them who might remain sceptical and yet feel apprehensive about revealing their own views for fear of unwelcomed repercussions from various sources or these individuals could belong to their own small sects of Islamic groups or have their own personal ideas or ‘brand’ of Islam as is evident in some of the stories included in this study. Here is a situation where various types of ‘cultures’, presuming that there is no one specific and particular form of Malay culture (Milner, 2011, p. 10), and various interpretations of Islam intermix.

This process is similar to what Ooi in his paper, *Beyond Ethnocentrism*, refers to “internal hybridisation”<sup>2</sup> or the “Arabisation” of the Malay culture which he calls a paradox (Ooi, 2009, pp. 452-453).

Paradoxical as it may seem, Malay ethnocentrism, in an effort to compete with other ethnicities and to stave off spontaneous hybridization, is

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<sup>2</sup> where a particular religion modifies and redefines the culture of a particular ethnic group which results in a ‘revised’ version of an earlier culture (Ooi K. B., 2009, p. 452).

effectuating an extra-cultural hybridization, transforming itself through broad imports (2009, p. 453).”

Whatever the aims or goals may be, the fact remains that any form of ‘hybridisation’ gives rise to *différends* in an individual. Hybridisation would also not only affect a community in a uniform superficial manner but rather in an individualised and fragmented manner as explained earlier. It is a matrix of *différends*.

The task of reconciling *différends* and selecting phrases towards an end or a goal is not only something that affects adults but also young children in the Malaysian context.

## **1.6 Educating Little ‘Sybils’**

In order to discuss the effects of living in a postmodern society, some aspects of education in Malaysia will be highlighted in this section. This does not mean that the education system will be discussed in its entirety, which incidentally might very well be a good one, nor will it be criticised, but bring to light some areas that might result in students being bombarded with conflicting ideologies that come from their home or social environment.

The National Philosophy of Education (Malaysia, 2008) on which the curriculum is based for schools in Malaysia clearly states that education in Malaysia is an ongoing process designed to develop the individual intellectually, physically, spiritually and emotionally in order to create well balanced individuals who will become useful citizens to the country. This philosophy, as good as it may be, implies that a particular type of person should be created in order to fulfill the country’s aspirations. It also implies that individuals who do

not conform to it will not actually achieve “optimum identity” (Kroger, 2007, p. 8) as discussed in the section dealing with identity. It also disregards the effects of living in a postmodern society which is characterized by fragmentation and diversity and in fact demands a certain degree of conformity to the hegemony of society. To facilitate this view of education, every lesson that is taught utilising the national curriculum, which is designed by the Curriculum Development Centre, is required to have a “moral value” and “creative and critical thinking skills” incorporated into the lesson in addition to the main content. The ministry of education has identified a list of moral values for the convenience and clarity of the teachers as well as the students. Non- Muslim students have a whole subject on moral education (Malaysia, Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Moral, 2005-2008) which functions as a counterpart to the basic Islamic education (Malaysia, Departments and Divisions, 2008) that is found in the curriculum. The moral values taught are usually explicit in nature via stories, anecdotes and simulations. The problem that this might create in students could be the inconsistencies between what is taught in school and what they observe and experience in their actual environment, be it in real life or in the media in the ‘hyperreal’ world. In a postmodern society, this could result in some confusion due to conflicting messages and ideologies encountered.

The higher order thinking skills, which are listed in the syllabus (Malaysia, Sukatan Pelajaran KBSM, 2005-2008), KSSR (starting 2010) and KSSM (starting 2017) that are promoted simultaneously with the notion of conformity require that students be creative and critical in their endeavours and to look at things from a pragmatic point of view. On one hand the student is told to follow the prescribed ‘right’ way and on the other hand the student is asked to be creative and critical. These ideas are juxtaposed against a backdrop

of the ‘hyperreal’ postmodern society, nation building and religion, and again confusion might ensue as the students, who eventually grow up to be adults in this country, try to ‘interpellate’ themselves to different and sometimes conflicting ideologies as they encounter various situations in life, much like the characters in the stories which are included in this study. So, with regular exposure to schooling, children could very well become ‘experts’ at linking *différends* with the ‘desired’ or ‘appropriate’ phrases to cope with the demands that are placed upon them.

James Flynn, a researcher from the University of Ortago, who studies I.Q tests and I.Q achievements attests to the fact that ‘intelligence’ levels have increased over the years and one of the reasons he attributes towards this trend in the manner in which people think. He says in an interview that,

People in the 1900 were not scientifically oriented but utilitarian and they used logic, but to use it on the hypothetical or on abstraction was foreign to them. They didn’t settle questions of fact by logic, they settled them by experience. (Witchalls, 2012)

The determining factor is how a particular *différend* is perceived by an individual and the ‘end’ or the ‘goal’ that is peculiar to that particular individual and that establishes the phrase regiment and how it is linked and the choice of the genre of discourse used to facilitate that linking process.

The question is not even that of obedience, but of obligation. The question is to know whether, when one hears something that might resemble a call, one is held to be held by it. One can resist it or answer it, but it will first be received as a call, rather than for instance, as a fantasy. One might find oneself placed in a position of addressee for a prescription (the request being a modality of prescription) (Lyotard, 1988, p. 107).