EXPLORING THE POSTMODERN MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITY IN SELECTED WORKS OF MALAYSIAN PROSE FICTION IN ENGLISH

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by

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MENEROKA PELBAGAI KESEDARAN KENDIRI POSTMODERNISME DALAM KARYA TERPILIH FIKSYEN PROSA MALAYSIA DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memberi fokus kepada representasi pelbagai kesedaran kendiri postmodernisme dalam karya terpilih fiksyen prosa Malaysia dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Konsep pelbagai kesedaran kendiri postmodernisme merangkumi dua konsep, iaitu konsep kendiri berganda (Freud, 1919) serta konsep kendiri protean Lifton (1993). Penulis-penulis yang terlibat dalam kajian ini termasuklah Karim Raslan, Dina Zaman, Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan dan Angeline Woon untuk meneroka dinamisme kesedaran kendiri pelbagai postmodernisme di dalam bertindakbalas terhadap cabaran-cabaran yang dibawa oleh perubahan-perubahan sosial dan budaya yang disebabkan oleh globalisasi, transnasionalisme dan diaspora. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengkaji sekumpulan penulis kontemporari yang berbakat di mana, cara penulisan mereka menggambarkan pemisahan daripada semangat nasionalisme, sentimen-sentimen tempatan dan perkauman yang dipamerkan oleh para penulis Malaysia pada tahun-tahun menjelang abad ke 21. Para penulis baru ini mendekati isu-isu kendiri dan identiti di dalam ruang lingkup yang luas, mencerminkan pandangan postmodernisme dalam karya penulisan mereka kesan daripada pengaruh perkembangan teknologi, kesalinghubungan komunikasi yang canggih dan pergerakan bebas masyarakat di seluruh pelosok dunia. Kajian kualitatif ini mengaplikasikan metodologi kritikan retorik untuk mengkaji kecenderungan postmodernisme dalam penulisan para karyawan melalui analisa elemen-elemen tekstual yang terkandung di dalam karya-karya penulisan tersebut. Ianya menggunakan konsep pelbagai kesedaran

kendiri postmodernisme bagi menganalisa kemampuan kendiri untuk sentiasa berubah mengikut perubahan persekitaran sosial. Ia mengetengahkan idea berkaitan dayausaha untuk menunjukkan bahawa setiap individu adalah agen yang aktif dalam menentukan halatuju kehidupan mereka. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan kendiri sentiasa berubah mengikut perubahan yang dialaminya untuk meneruskan kelangsungan hidup apabila berdepan dengan kesulitan. Dengan mengetengahkan wujudnya pelbagai kesedaran kendiri postmodernisme dalam hasil karya para penulis kontemporari, kajian ini dapat menunjukkan keberadaan ruang pascamoden dalam fiksyen prosa Malaysia dalam Bahasa Inggeris.

EXPLORING THE POSTMODERN MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITY IN SELECTED WORKS OF MALAYSIAN PROSE FICTION IN ENGLISH

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to examine the representation of the postmodern multiple subjectivity in the works of a few contemporary Malaysian writers. The concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity comprises of two other concepts which are the concept of the double (Freud, 1919) and the concept of the protean self by Lifton (1993). The writers that comprise the corpus of this study include Karim Raslan, Dina Zaman, Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon to explore the dynamism of the postmodern self in responding to the challenges brought about by the social and cultural changes that have taken place due to globalisation, transnationalism and diaspora. This research also endeavours to study a group of vibrant and contemporary Malaysian writers whose mode of writing reflects a break away from the nationalistic fervour, local and communal sentiments shown by Malaysian writers in the years preceding the 21st century. These new writers approach issues of the self and identities in a much broader sense, mirroring a postmodern outlook in their works as a result of the influences of technological developments, sophisticated interconnectivity of communications and free movements of people across the globe. This qualitative study employs the methodology of rhetorical criticism to examine the postmodern tendencies in the works of the writers through an analysis of the textual elements within the texts. It utilises the concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity to analyse the ability of the self in transforming regularly because of the changing circumstances presented by the social environment. This research forefronts the idea of agency to demonstrate that individuals are active

agents in determining their course of action in life. The findings of this study suggest that the self is always shifting with each changing circumstance that it experiences in order to continue its survival in the face of difficulty. By demonstrating the existence of the postmodern multiple subjectivity in the writings of contemporary writers, the study is therefore able to illustrate the emerging postmodern space within the field of Malaysian prose fiction in English.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   General Overview

The main crux of this study is to explore the shift or transformation in the writings of a few of the Malaysian contemporary postcolonial writers in incorporating elements of postmodernism into their creative works. The period under study is from the 1990s to the early 2000s to explore the proliferation of postmodern elements in the works of these contemporary writers. This study contends that the postmodern sensibilities projected by these writers revolve around the exploration into the theme of the postmodern self or particularly, the postmodern multiple subjectivity. The emergence of the postmodern self runs parallel to the phenomenon of the evolution of the postmodern society, a society which is inextricably linked to the development of postmodernism not only as a social theory but also as the natural outcome of monumental social and cultural changes that have taken place as a result of capitalism, globalisation, transnationalism, diaspora and others. These revolutionary developments have affected the country more intensely since the 1990s as a result of Malaysia's increased integration into the global economy. This open door policy also brought in foreign ideas and cultural influences which to some extent, have altered the lifestyle of contemporary Malaysian society.

This chapter attempts to provide a general background to the developments within Malaysian Literature in English or more specifically, Malaysian prose fiction in English, as an exploration which was initially borne out of postcolonial writing. Then it will discuss the main considerations which support the study comprising the research objectives, the problem statement, the scope of the study, the definition of

salient concepts and a discussion on the selection of the writers involved in this study. Lastly, it will outline the general organisation of the dissertation.

1.2   Background of the Study

The history of Anglophone writing in Malaya was pioneered by Gregory W. de Silva in the 1930s (Nor Faridah Manaf, 1998, as cited in Gaik, 1999). Gaik (1999) further added that this was followed by the emergence of local writers such as Johnny Ong, Lloyd Fernando, Tan Kok Seng and Lee Kok Liang who became prominent after the Second World War. The writing endeavours of these writers can be read as the early beginnings in the tradition of postcolonial prose writing within the country. Other writers who emerged during the same period included Ee Tiong Hong, Wong Phui Nam and Edwin Thumboo who became active in the genre of poetry.

After years of British imperialism, Malaya eventually found its voice in the years after the Second World War with the production of *The New Cauldron* in 1949, the first Malaysian hybridised literary text (Vethamani, 2005, p.2) written in "Engmalchin" which comprised all the three languages of the three main races; Malay, Chinese and English. The first novels in English appeared in the 1950s and were commonly set against the backdrop of the Second World War. These novels reflected the turmoil which beset the nation during times of war and highlighted the chaotic situation of the country as a result of divergent ethnic and communal interests. In the subsequent decade of the 1960s, the writing trend of writers was characterised by "straightforward social records", "stereotyped characters" and "melodramatic plots" (Vethamani, 2005, p.6), which negated the emergence of a truly Malaysian English literary orientation. These novels showed strong postcolonial undertones as they underscored the interests of the local population, even though they mainly represented

the interests of the different ethnicities that inhabited the country. Poetry was the dominant mode of Anglophone literary writing, which highlights the slow development of creative writing during these decades.

Quayum (2007) asserts that both Singapore and Malaysia shared similar routes yet the development of English literature in the latter's case is "discouragingly small" compared to the former and contends that the negative developments in this field was due to the drought in writings using the colonial language, a development largely affected by the socio-political tensions prevalent within the nation during the time. To quote Quayum (2018), these socio-political reasons have "fragmented the literary scene along ethnic lines, making the writers culturally insular rather than encompassing, in their imagination" (2018, p.1)

As a newly independent country, the multiracial and pluralistic setting of Malaya could sometimes cause a considerable political strain in the relationship between the races, comprising mainly of Chinese, Indians and Malays. The collapse of the system established by the British was due to the delineation of the social, political and economic spheres that were strongly segregated along racial lines. The Malays, except for a privileged few, were identified as farmers; the Indians mainly known as estate labourers while the Chinese represented the majority of merchants and traders. These separate racial and social identities caused a lot of confusions and ill feelings among the races before culminating into the 1969 racial riots[1]. The consequences of the riots were as devastating as the conflict itself and eventually resulted in the tightening hold of the government on the language policy of the country whereby during the 1970s, the prominence of the English language was abrogated in

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[1] 1969 racial riots was a vicious and bloody racial rioting which resulted from strained and unstable relations between the major races consisting of the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

favour of the Malay Language. The Malay language was foregrounded as the national language of the country to inculcate a sense of belonging and foster a common identity among the people of Malaysia. This was the beginning of the literary drought or the void (Quayum, 2007; Chin, 2007) in the production of Malaysian prose fiction in English, a period which saw great writers such as Ee Tiong Hong and Shirley Geok-lin Lim imposing a self-exiled situation as both migrated to foreign countries as a result of the drastic changes. As it is, the fate of MLE in general was greatly impeded by its status as a colonial language and peripheral literature. This is because it was immensely regarded as a hindrance to Malaysia's ideals to uphold the Malay language as a means by which to unite the multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Hence, MLE was seen more as an impediment rather than a contributing factor to the country's agenda for nation-building.

Due to the changes in governmental policies concerning language use in Malaysia, the 1970s and 1980s writings became "greatly influenced by racial consciousness" (Mohd. Mydin, 2009, p.50). This period saw the voices of the Malaysian writers intensifying but they appeared in the forms of writings sharply characterised by racial undertones and ethnic idiosyncrasies. This particular fact was reflected in the production of Malaysian English literature which proved to be more inward-looking and dominated by communal concerns or "ethnocentric" in their treatment of themes (Mohd. Mydin, 2009, p.56). Rather than being reactionary to the negative othering of colonised identities experienced during the days of Western imperialism, Mohd. Mydin, (2008) maintains that as a result of multiculturalism in the Malaysian society, "the other is to be located within rather than beyond the nation's boundaries" (p.194). It is without a doubt that these writers were mainly focused in the attempt of centring their own distinct cultural identities which took precedence over

and above anything else. Mohd. Mydin (2008) contends "the notion of Malaysian identity is one that is made up of a sense of dichotomy, one identity being the accumulation of all that one has acquired of one's ethnicity" (p.197), be it language, tradition, religion and others. Mohd. Mydin asserts that the identity of the "Other" is constituted being "the cultural heritage of the other ethnic groups in the country one is, and has been, in contact with" (2008, p.197). This gives rise to the idea that postcolonial writing in Malaysia is greatly influenced and coloured by ethnic and cultural concerns of the various races that make up the entire nation.

Despite the shortcomings of MLE during these decades, one writer however, ironically emerged onto the literary scene with what Quayum (2007) has conferred to be the most conspicuous dialogic or syncretist[2] form of Anglophone writing in Malaysia. This brilliant writer who came to be known as Lloyd Fernando, produced historical novels of international quality: *The Scorpion Orchid* and *Green is the Colour*. From her reading of Fernando's fictions, Mohd. Mydin (2009) firmly contends that the author has "successfully raised awareness of the complexities of being a member of a multi-ethnic, multicultural society where inter- and intra-racial dialectic is a known reality, which he accomplishes without focusing on any one ethnic group" (p.59). In addressing the issues of multiculturalism in the reviews of the works of numerous authors in the Malaysian context, Mohd. Mydin divides the "authorial defined social reality of Malaysian writers into three categories; the person-oriented reality, the ethno-cultural or communal-oriented reality and lastly, the nation- oriented reality" (2009, p.59). From the point of view of this dissertation, the intersections of all these three different narrative modes can be interpreted as a significant drive

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[2] Syncretist is a term that denotes the fusion of two distinct traditions to produce a new and distinctive whole (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p.256)

towards a more multicultural and pluralistic form of Malaysian literature in English. To some extent, it also helped to create an environment of acceptance and openness towards different kinds of lifestyles and world views which in turn inspired a few later writers to venture into a more postmodern leaning in their narrative preoccupation.

The 1990s saw the rejuvenation of Malaysian literature in English after the government restored the status of the English language in the country (Chin, 2007). According to Chin, the post 1990s saw "the rhetoric of nationalism" in the writing mode of English literature in the country being "replaced with 'transnationalism', 'multinationalism' and 'globalism' (2007, p.267), a development which underscored a fresh and new outlook of a much better prospect for the Malaysian Anglophone literature writing. The momentum of the 1990s was carried over to the onset of the 21st century with the coming of new writers whose writings were not merely focusing on the local cultures but are also inclusive of other cultures originating from outside the geographical borders of the country. This came about as a result of the increased connectivity not only via trade but also through closer political ties with other foreign countries experienced during the boom in the Malaysian economy during these years.

The resurgence in the English prose fiction literary mode in the 1990s was in fact a development very much influenced by the advent of globalisation and the relative prosperity under the then Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohammad's era. As the Malaysian economy was now geared more towards industrialisation, this meant fostering stronger and multiple ties with the outside world became a matter of great necessity. In discussing the shift in the Malaysian language policy, Campbell (2009) makes a distinction between "language nationalism" and "developmental nationalism". Drawing on the arguments of Gill (2005, 2006, 2007), Campbell (2009) states that the years prior to the 1980s were influenced by a strong

emphasis on language nationalism as a means for "nation-building and the solidifying of national identity and respect for that identity" (2009, p.185). However, due to the conditions of globalisation, this new phenomenon required a shift in the way people correlated and understood language in relation to Malaysia's national interest and development. The belief behind the idea of developmental nationalism coincided with the view that "respect for a nation and its culture comes through economic and development, which essentially provides power" (2009, p.187). Hence the advent of globalisation necessitated Malaysia to change its language policies whereby in 2003, the country gave recognition to the importance of the English language. This once marginalised language has attained a new threshold and was eventually turned into a medium of instruction for the teaching of Mathematics and Science in Malaysian schools. In accordance with this new development, English literature was also incorporated into the education system.

As a result of the shift made by the nation to ease its language policies pertaining to the status of English, it eventually created a markedly favourable environment onto the English language writing scene, a development which was very much awaited and celebrated by the writers within the Malaysian English literary field. At the same time, the emphasis put on the development of English language within the country has also enabled its literary domain to flourish. Consequently, in line with the economic and political developments, MLE simultaneously reflected the changes that were happening within Malaysian society as a result of the exposure to other elements such as the plurality of values and issues originating from other cultures or places far beyond the territories of the country.

Critics claim that we are now witnessing the emergence of a new type of writers, mostly diasporic and postmodern in artistic orientation but whose thematic concerns are still very much rooted to the socio-historical backdrop of the nation. In her article "Transcultural Aesthetics and Postcolonial Memory", Poon (2016) contends that now there exists "novels written by a younger generation of transnational and diasporic Malaysian and Singaporean writers" (p.3) who have gained greater global prominence and visibility. These writers, originally from the two countries in question, but are now based in other parts of the world, include writers like "Tan Twan Eng, Tash Aw, Rani Manicka, Preeta Samarasan, Vyvyane Loh, Sandi Tan and Bali Kaur Jaspal" (Poon, 2016, p.3). Some of these writers received international accolades due to their brilliance in terms of artistry in writing and attained international recognition evidently shown in the publication of Manicka's *Rice Mother* (2003), Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2006) and Samarasan's *Evening is the Whole Day* (2008) by international printing companies.

This research aims to examine the writings of these new contemporary writers who divulge significantly from nationalistic, communal or parochial instances often demonstrated by other Malaysian writers both in the past as well as the present. From the point of view of the researcher, the textual approach of the writers who comprise the corpus of this study; Karim Raslan, Dina Zaman, Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon, detracts from elements of an exclusively racial, cultural as well as national agenda. This study therefore believes that the works of these writers contain strong postmodern elements in terms of their thematic structures and textual characteristics. This dissertation attempts to demonstrate this by employing the concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity to forefront the idea of an emerging postmodern space within MLE.

1.3   The Postmodern Multiple Subjectivity

This dissertation will now attempt to introduce the concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity. The postmodern multiple subjectivity constitutes the concepts of the double (Freud, 1919) and the protean self (Lifton, 1993). Both concepts will be discussed at greater lengths in chapter three, the chapter which explains the conceptual framework underpinning this research. As it is, both these concepts are directly against the modernist idea of the self as essentially stable and unchanging. In the researcher's point of view, both these concepts align with the postmodern idea of how the self is always in a state of flux and constantly transforming, due to it being subjected to myriad forms of social contexts.

The concept of the double (Freud, 1919) highlights the duality of the self whereby the self is able to manifest opposing characteristics if it encounters certain situations in life. The idea of the double emerged in the works of Western authors at the end of the 19th century as a reaction to the great changes that were taking place in Europe during the time. In the words of Tucker (1971) "Major wars and other extensive disturbances of society are among those occasions which cause man to ask himself fundamental questions about his identity—an identity which he finds existing on various levels or even in fragmentation" (p.xx). Tucker (1971) contends that "the theme of the double prominently appeared just when introspective German Romanticism was nascent" (p.xx). To the researcher, this suggests the close connection between the first appearance of the concept of the double and this particular period of Western literary development or what we generally term as Romanticism.

On the other hand, the protean self (Lifton, 1993) is an expression of the complexity and dynamic changes of the present postmodern world whereby the self is able to display many different, and sometimes conflicting identities to suit the situation. Hence, from the point of view of this study, the idea of the fragmentation of the self is very much connected to the concept of the protean self because it demonstrates a self that is fluid and multiple as it responds to a wide variety of external influences originating from the contemporary postmodern social milieu.

1.4   Statement of the Problem

This dissertation is premised on the belief that the works within MLE have often been seen through an exclusively postcolonial lens. However, this study contends that the writings of contemporary writers show an overwhelmingly new approach in relation to their writing style and warrants a closer look to see the changes that have taken place within MLE, especially in terms of the genre of prose fiction. At a glance, it can be said that studies documenting the preoccupation of new authors within this field is still insufficient and more investigations are needed in order to have a much better understanding of the literary works of local, contemporary writers.

From the investigation of this study, a few studies relating to Karim Raslan, Dina Zaman and Tash Aw have been conducted by divulging on a number of issues. A study by Versay Kudus (2008) has been done on Dina Zaman to analyse the rising social and political influences of women in the public domain, a topic which can be deemed as specifically postcolonial in nature. Jerome's (2008) study of both Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman took on a slightly different approach when he employed the use of queer theory to investigate the works of both writers. The main focus in Jerome's

(2008) study pertains mostly to the Malay male identity by exploring aspects of their sexuality.

In the most recent study on Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman, Babu Ali (2018) portrays individuals who have conflicting identities as a consequence of fragmentation caused by the influences of myriad forces at work on the part of the society. Babu Ali's (2018) study of both these writers is significantly postmodern but its approach is different from the present study in many ways. Babu Ali (2018) focuses on Jacques Lacan, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida to describe the construction of the fragmented self in the writings of both authors. The present study, however detracts from Babu Ali's (2018) study as it selects a more conceptual approach and forefronts the concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity to examine the works of not only Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman but also other contemporary writers such as Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon. The studies that have been mentioned so far are examinations done mostly focusing on the changes in the Malay identity as opposed to my study which is not ethnically bound but is more related to an exploration of the individual self.

This dissertation also views that not many studies have been done to trace or connect the relationship between MLE and the postmodern theory perhaps due to the predominance of postcolonialism within this field. This can be seen from the studies that have been done on Aw which are largely historical and postcolonial in outlook. The studies done by Fan (2013) and Janoory et al. (2016) privilege the discourse of history in examining Aw's texts. In terms of these two historical studies on Aw, the second study done by Janoory et al. (2016) appears to be more relevant to the present research. In their analysis of the process of historical writing, Janoory et al. (2016) claim that historical writing undergoes the same process as novel writing. This is

because everything that is written is subject to the writer's subjectivity. They regard Aw's novel, *The Harmony Silk Factory* as a pseudo-historical novel and the fact that the characters in this novel present conflicting views on the same events in the story is proof of the writer's part in constructing history according to his or her biased perspective. This study however prefers to employ a postmodern perspective to Aw's novel and would view the contradictory accounts as characteristic of postmodern writing that negates a unitary reality.

Other studies conducted on Aw's works include Gabriel (2016), Chen (2016), Chang (2016) and Lim (2021) discuss the issues of heterogenisation, the formation of national identity, the cultural memory of postcolonial rule and the relationship between history and the Chinese diaspora. The studies done by these scholars are strictly postcolonial in essence as they look at aspects which relate mostly to postcolonial concerns. This dissertation believes that Aw's novels can be read using widely different perspectives and thus far, no research has been done to excavate the strong postmodern sensibilities of the texts of this particular author. To the researcher, Aw's writings differ from other postcolonial texts in terms of their thematic as well as stylistic structures. Hence this study hopes to uncover these elements in order to investigate the postmodern tendencies of his texts.

In relation to Zen Cho, a study by Chin (2021) entitled "Interracial relations and the post-postcolonial future in Zen Cho's *Spirits Abroad*" analyses Cho's utilisation of fantasy and science fiction genres in her texts. Based on Zen Cho's *Spirits Abroad*, Chin (2021) explores the idea of a future post-postcolonial Malaysian society which can be inclusive, pluralistic, and intercultural. These ideas pose a challenge to the established ethnocentric politics of the country as they help to articulate of an other-Malaysia that is made up of interstitial spaces and hybridised identities which would

destabilise the hierarchies and boundaries between the native and migrant, self and other. To the researcher, Chin's (2021) analysis offers new ideas and ways to approach the present literary postcolonial issues. Hence, it also helps to inform this research of particular issues such as the relationship between identity, ethnicity and culture. This is because this study will analyse the works of Zen Cho using a different trajectory as it is more of an exploration of the idea of self and identity from the postmodern point of view.

In the case of Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon, even though their works have not been considered in any academic study, this research however, has found significant amount of evidence that their writings subscribe to a postmodern writing mode and are relevant to the present dissertation.

The researcher is of the view that there is a lack of studies done on the postmodern self and subjectivity especially in the Malaysian literary field. Although there have been studies that deal with this issue in the past, yet it is on other types of postmodern self such as the idea of fragmentation by Babu Ali (2018) and a study by Muhamad and Abdul Rani (2014) which focuses on the issue of multiple self-identity and its relationship with the idea of fragmentation. This study however utilises the concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity and forefronts the idea of the doubling and the transformation or metamorphosis of individuals, which bring out the qualities of the many-sidedness, the multiplicity as well as plurality of their selves. Another significant dimension to the postmodern multiple subjectivity is the idea of agency that has not been emphasised by postmodern theorists as they believe that the individual self is totally at the mercy of the push and pull of myriad social forces that exert their influence within society. The idea of agency in this dissertation corresponds to the idea that the self is not totally loss but has means to be able to adapt or even reject any

situation or condition that it may be subjected to. Hence, this study may contribute to the developing body of knowledge on not only the types of postmodern self but on postmodernism in general in relation to the Malaysian literary context.

The researcher believes that the concepts relevant to the present research are embedded in the texts that form the corpus of this study. This study takes into account the developments of the contemporary world with the issues of capitalism, globalisation, transnationalism and diaspora, which have influenced and altered the thinking of the present cosmopolitan Malaysian society. This research also believes that the influence of these social forces has to some extent changed and shifted the literary preoccupation of a few Malaysian authors within the field of MLE. This dissertation therefore strongly believes that the writings of contemporary writers who are the focus of this study detract from an exclusively postcolonial framework and warrants a closer scrutiny to explore the nuances, allusions and thematic concerns of this newly evolving genre within MLE. Based on the analysis done on this group of relatively new Malaysian writers, it is found that they display thematic trends and writing styles which reflect an international flair, a break away from the nationalistic fervour, local and communal sensibilities espoused by Malaysian writers in the years preceding the 21st century. These writers approach issues of the self and identities in a much broader sense, mirroring a coalescing of values as a result of advanced technological developments, sophisticated communication interconnectivity and free movements of people across the globe; all the aspects which have helped to characterise the present millennium.

1.5   **Significance of the Study**

From the standpoint of this dissertation, the study of the works of local authors in the field of Malaysian prose fiction in English is important in order to enhance their visibility in the local Malaysian context. This is owing to the fact that the production of literary works in MLE can still be considered as in short supply. Hence, this study would be a way to highlight and draw attention to the works of these contemporary authors to encourage new and future writers to contribute to the field.

This dissertation also aspires to contribute to the already expanding body of knowledge on the different types of postmodern self. This endeavour would also simultaneously contribute to the knowledge on the theory of postmodernism in general. As this research is partly an attempt to demonstrate the emerging postmodern space within MLE, it is therefore beneficial in terms of the initiative to enrich and ensure the continuity of this field.

To the researcher, a postmodern form of enquiry would contribute in instilling awareness in the individuals or readers to be critical of developments pertaining to claims of progress that are said to be done for the well-being of society. Hence, a postmodern approach would help to sustain the awareness of individuals to continue to question the status quo and suggests forms of possible revisions to ensure its relevance to the present society.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to investigate the shift or transformation in Malaysian postcolonial writing into postmodernism as demonstrated by a group of the country's contemporary writers from the 1990s to the early 2000s. Hence, it attempts to meet the following objectives:

1. To examine how the postmodern multiple subjectivity is represented within Malaysian prose fiction in English.

2. To analyse the ways in which the postmodern multiple subjectivity reflect the authors' inclinations towards postmodern writing.

3. To analyse how the emerging postmodern space evolved within the literary postcolonial Malaysian prose fiction in English.

1.7 Research Questions

The research questions that form the foundation of this study are as follows:

1. How is the postmodern multiple subjectivity represented within Malaysian prose fiction in English?

2. How does the postmodern multiple subjectivity reflect the authors' inclinations towards postmodern writing?

3. How has the emerging postmodern space evolved within the literary postcolonial Malaysian prose fiction in English?

1.8   Scope and Limitations of the Study

The authors involved in this study come from a period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. These writers include Karim Raslan, Dina Zaman, Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon. While there may be other writers who can be considered as postmodernist in narrative strategy, this dissertation however, focuses its investigation on mainly the works of the writers thus far mentioned.

This study also restricts itself to a particular emphasis on prose fiction writing. Therefore, it distances itself from a discussion on the development of other literary forms that may exist such as poetry or drama. As it is, this research is neither an exclusive attempt to examine the development of Malaysian literature in general nor an analysis of the works of new postcolonial writers by and large.

1.9   Definition of Key Terms

Self: A more straightforward definition of the self is given as "qualities, attributes, values, feelings and moral sentiments that a person assumes to be his or her own" (Tsekeris, 2017,) which denotes how individuals perceive themselves to be. The self, according to postmodernism, is fragmented (Allen, 1997), fluid and unstable. It can also change and exhibit multiple identities (Wade, 2002) and is essentially socially constructed. Hence, the self is malleable and devoid of an authentic or core entity. For this study, the definition of the self given by Allen (1997) would be applied due to its suitability to the concept of the postmodern multiple subjectivity utilised in this research.

Identity: An identity is mainly "the traits and characteristics, social roles and social group memberships that define who one is" (Oyserman et al., 2012, p.69). Hall

(1990) defines identity as the intersections of race, gender, positions in society and other social aspects that give the individual a certain form of societal identification. Hence, if we take into consideration both definitions, identity is generally taken to mean how the individual is seen through the public eye.

Simulacra: According to Baudrillard (1994), simulacra is the whole process of creating the simulacrum from the beginning of the simulation process. With repeated simulations, each object becomes a hyperreal. The hyperreal will eventually become a simulacrum as it begins to take its place as a separate object with no origins.

Subjectivity: An abstract or general principle that encourages us to imagine or helps us to understand why our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience (Mansfield, 2000, p.3).

The double: The situation whereby the self can be seen as "doubling, dividing and interchanging" (Freud, 1919, p.90). This means that the original self can transfer mental processes from one character to another character, or what can be called as the second self. This second self possesses the same knowledge, feelings and experience as the original self. As a result, the original self becomes intensely doubtful and confused about his/her own self as he/she finds himself/herself possessing thoughts, emotions and desires identical to the second self. The concept of the double, as utilised by this study, maintains Freud's precepts of the double concept whereby the individuals project the doubling and dividing of the self. Nevertheless, this process is viewed by this dissertation as more psychoanalytical in nature. This means the concept of the double, as analysed by this study, does not denote a physical doubling or division

but relates more to the psychological aspect that demonstrates the inner struggles of the characters in the texts investigated in this research.

Protean Self: The protean self is a self that can transform and adapt to the changes originating from the environment. Another dimension to this type of self is the idea of individuals becoming active agents in determining their course of action in life (Lifton, 1993).

Agency: According to Ortiz (2001, as cited in Taylor and Windquist, 2001, p.6), the agency is defined as the state or capability to determine one's actions in an individual, collective, or otherwise social sense. The term is used to describe the state of being present, active, or self-actualised in the performance of political, ideological, philosophical, selfhood, or community, despite any system which infringes upon or otherwise precludes this ability. As a conscious state of activity, 'agency' suggests a distinct, yet culturally variable, postmodern impulse towards self-consciousness to subvert or undermine social or political oppression.

1.10   Selection of Writers and Texts

This study focuses on the period of postmodern developments from the 1990s to the early 2000s. Hence the writers selected; Karim Raslan, Dina Zaman, Tash Aw, Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon are contemporary writers who produce works within this period. These writers are selected based on the strong postmodern tendencies in their writing which began with Karim Raslan's and Dina Zaman's incursions into postmodern writing in the 1990s. Karim Raslan's and Dina Zaman's texts clearly depict the double consciousness or subjectivity of the characters in their stories, a salient feature of postmodern writing. The postmodern narrative of local writers continued with the next generation of contemporary writers such as Tash

Aw and Zen Cho whose writings appeared at the beginning of the turn of the century with a more diverse incorporation of the postmodern concepts which deal with the multiplicity, ambiguity and fluidity of the characters. This momentum was carried further by other new writers such as Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon, with their exploration of the genre of science fiction, a strong postmodern trait which delves into the possibility of the self as being polymorphous or having the consciousness of both human and machine.

1.11   Plan and Organisation of the Study

This study consists of seven chapters. The introductory chapter will provide a general background of the whole research. Other features include an explanation on the research objectives, problem statement, scope of the study, definition of important concepts as well as the limitations of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 would mainly comprise of the previous critical reviews done on the works of the authors. In chapter 3, the conceptual framework and methodology of the research would be discussed to explicate the conceptual foundations of this study. It would include a review on the methodology of rhetorical criticism. This methodology would be utilised as a tool to analyse the textual contents of the novels chosen for the purpose of this study.

In the subsequent chapter, which is chapter 4, an exploration on the works of earlier writers such as Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman would be conducted to trace the break away from a staunchly postcolonial writing preoccupation of Malaysian writers to a more postmodernist leaning focusing specifically on their exploration of the idea of the divided self.

Chapter 5 would deal with the analysis of Tash Aw, which the present research regards as the first Malaysian postmodern writer by virtue of his intense preoccupation with postmodern elements. Chapter 6 would examine the writings of Zen Cho, Sharmilla Ganesan and Angeline Woon to investigate the proliferation of postmodern elements within MLE. In the final chapter, chapter 7, the researcher would attempt to provide a conclusion to the entire discussion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss three significant dimensions; firstly, the meaning of the terms modernism and postmodernism, secondly, past studies done on postmodernism in MLE and thirdly, critical enquiries into the works of the writers involved in the research. This dissertation is premised on the belief that postcolonial writing has dominated the Malaysian English literary field in the years preceding the 1990s. Because of this very reason, the researcher attempts to trace the emergence of postmodern literary writings mainly from the period of the 1990s onwards through studies that have been done by other scholars within the field of MLE. The discussion would then include an inspection on the recurrent themes and issues, which are found to be common in the writings of the authors who form the corpus of this study.

2.2 Postmodernism

In order to provide a background to the research, this section will discuss the concepts and meaning of the terms modernism and postmodernism. For ease of discussion, this dissertation will attempt to firstly discuss the term modernism before going on to explain on what is meant by the term postmodernism. According to Klages (2006), modernism is associated with the modern era that came about with the period of European Enlightenment which began around the middle of the eighteenth century. Modernism therefore refers to the broad aesthetic movements of the twentieth century and its main concern is mainly about establishing order, "about rationality and rationalization, creating order out of chaos" (Klages, 2006, p.168). Hence, for

modernism, the more ordered a society is, the better it will function. Because of the strong concern towards order, Klages (2006) states modern societies are always on guard against anything labelled as disorder. Thus, modern societies rely on continually establishing a "binary opposition between order as opposed to disorder" (Klages, 2006, p.168) to maintain the stability of the order.

According to Lyotard (1984), the period before the 19th century looked upon science as paramount and it became a discourse of legitimation by which to measure the validity of all other narratives that existed during the time. Hence, science was appropriated as a tool to uphold the metanarratives, which were greatly responsible in maintaining the stability and order of the modern period. These metanarratives took the form of the major grand narratives of modernism or what was understood as the widely held belief of the Enlightenment metaphysics that have dominated the Western mind in the fields of religion, science, the arts and literature.

Lyotard defines the word postmodern as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984, p.xxiii); a situation which to him, describes the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies in the beginning of the 20th century. He believes that the social transformations during this era have altered the belief in the metanarratives that have predominated modern society since the period of the Enlightenment. The monumental changes in the form of world wars and new technological advances have caused people to question the legitimacy of the metanarratives that have governed the society for long periods of time. Because of these changes, the society increasingly believed that these grand narratives could no longer be relied upon as the ultimate truth and began to search for other ways to make sense of the dynamic changes which have occurred all around the world. Hence, postmodernism began as a pattern of thought originating as a reaction to modernism (Uzun & Ucma, 2010). The inherent

postmodernist scepticism towards any form of totalising or transcendental truths arises out of the belief that these assumptions negate the idea of human freedom thus rendering the theories and models of modernism as incompatible with the transformations of the society in the later 20th and early 21st century.

Postmodernism itself has been a problematic term to define, a view mirrored by Bertens (1995) as he claims that no single definition of postmodernism has been uncontested or has been widely accepted by the academic community. In order to account for its origins, Bertens (1995) quotes Frederic Jameson's view that postmodernism is borne out of the cultural logic of late capitalism as it encroaches upon our day-to-day existence by the ever-increasing commodification of both the private and the public domains. Bertens (1995) is of the view that postmodernism in general engenders a deep sense of loss in mankind's ability to represent the real or the authenticity of any truth claims; "No matter whether they are aesthetic, epistemological, moral or political in nature, the representations that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted" (p.10).

The difficulty in defining the terms postmodern and postmodernism, according to Bertens and Fokkema (1997) is largely because both terms were applied at widely different levels at the earliest stages of their conception. These scholars profess that the postmodern and postmodernism were firstly "applied to the experimental art of the 1950s and 1960s and to the various pop art movements and manifestations that joined it after the mid-1960s (Bertens & Fokkema, 1997, p.4). The rejection of postmodern literature and postmodern art towards modernism generally centred upon what they perceived as the modernist pretentious and self-serving views of art and the artist. The debates on this issue were conducted exclusively by American critics whose ideas of