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再現五一三事件：
馬來西亞文學與離散文學文本中的記憶政治

Representing May 13:
The Politics of Memory in Selected Malaysian and Malaysian Diasporic Texts

余旭浩
Eu Xi Hao

指導教授：柏逸嘉 博士
Advisor: Guy Beauregard, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the contested memories of the May 13 Incident—that is, memories of the series of violent conflicts that erupted on 13 May 1969 after the third general election in postcolonial Malaysia—to examine how selected Malaysian and Malaysian diasporic texts represent and reshape memories of this event. Chapter One analyzes the contested historical memories of the May 13 Incident by focusing on the points of contention between an official report and unofficial historical texts, examining how historians writing in the 1970s have challenged the official racialized framings of this event, and highlighting how more recent oral history projects have sought to give voice to the survivors. Chapter Two foregrounds how Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* portrays the May 13 Incident as an epochal event that marks a shift to an ethnocentric national identity in Malaysia. This chapter also attends to traces in Lim's novel of American empire operating in various Asian sites, traces that resituate the conflict in wider Cold War and inter-Asian contexts. Chapter Three discusses how Preeta Samarasan's novel *Evening is the Whole Day* challenges official racialized framings of May 13 with the discourse of class inequality that operates within and across racial boundaries. This chapter also analyzes how Samarasan's novel, with its double narrative structure, highlights the lingering colonial legacies that led to the violent conflict. Chapter Four examines how Hanna Alkaf's young adult novel *The Weight of Our Sky* strives to develop an ethics of just memory. This chapter also focuses on the effects of remediation as this novel was adapted into a webcomics series. Chapter Five concludes this thesis by attending to a recent cultural text on the May 13 Incident —Lau Kek-Huat's documentary film *The Tree Remembers*—in order to delineate how it

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highlights memory's multidirectionality through which additional stories of oppression may be articulated.

Key Words: May 13 Incident, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Preeta Samarasan, Hanna Alkaf, Asian American studies, postcolonial studies, memory studies

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概要

本論文旨在探討於五一三事件相關的記憶中有爭議性的部分，采選了部分馬來西亞文學文本與馬來西亞離散文學文本的內容，對其如何再現與重塑相關記憶展開研究。五一三事件指的是於1969年5月13日在馬來西亞第三屆全國大選以後，所爆發的一系列暴力衝突。論文第一章通過對官方歷史記載和非官方歷史文獻記載的並列對比，來對該歷史事件的歷史記憶展開梳理。本章節也檢視了1970年代的歷史學家如何使用包含了階級與種族議題的論證框架，來挑戰官方對於該事件的種族化詮釋。而近來的口述歷史項目，也是通過給予倖存者言說的空間來挑戰該論證框架。第二章主要介紹了林玉玲（Shirley Geok-lin Lim）的小說《馨香與金箔》（*Joss and Gold*）如何將五一三事件描繪為一個劃時代的事件—一個標誌了向種族中心主義轉換的國族認同的事件。不僅是這部小說，林玉玲在其他作品也強調了此事件的深遠意義。此外，本章節也通過關注美國帝國在亞洲各個地點的運作痕跡，來探討此小說如何將五一三事件重置在更廣泛的冷戰和亞際背景下展開討論。第三章則聚焦於普瑞妲莎瑪薩蘭（Preeta Samarasan）的小說文本《傍晚就是一天》（*Evening is the Whole Day*），討論其藉由對跨種族邊界的階級不平等議題的呈現，來挑戰官方對五一三事件的種族化詮釋。並分析了小說文本是如何通過其雙重敘事結構，來突出殖民歷史遺產導向此暴力衝突事件的事實。第四章著重討論韓娜奧卡芙（Hanna Alkaf）的青少年小說《我們天空的重量》（*The Weight of Our Sky*）中所呈現的一個公正的記憶倫理。本章節也分析了小說被改編為網絡漫畫系列時的再處理效果。第五章是對前四章所述重點的歸納與總結，並簡單對近期五一三事件的相關文本展開基本敘述與討論。另外，本章節也探討了廖克發的紀錄片《還有一些樹》是如何點出記憶的多向性，並指出此多向性促成了更多關於壓迫的故事的訴說。

關鍵字：五一三事件、林玉玲、普瑞妲莎瑪薩蘭、韓娜奧卡芙、亞美研究、後殖民批判、記憶研究

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Table of Contents

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

List of Figures

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Chapter One

The Politics of Remembering May 13

On 10 May 1969, postcolonial Malaysia held its third general election. Advocating against both the 1967 National Language Act and Malay special rights, the Opposition gained considerable ground in this election as the incumbent Alliance government lost its two-third majority, leading to victory processions on May 11 and May 12 in the capital city Kuala Lumpur (Comber 68). On 13 May 1969, a counter-victory procession held by one of the parties in the Alliance led to a series of violent conflicts in Kuala Lumpur that later spread to other major cities on the West coast of peninsular Malaysia (70).[1] The Yang di-Pertuan Agong—the Paramount Leader of the constitutional monarchy of Malaysia—declared a state of national emergency and Parliament was suspended until 1971. When it was resumed, Malaysia's Parliament passed the New Economic Policy (NEP) and National Culture Policy (NCP), policies that fundamentally

[1] The violent conflict that erupted on 13 May 1969 has been referred to in many different appellations. Anthony Reid refers to it as the "Kuala Lumpur Riots"—a naming that seems to limit the significance of the event to the Malaysian capital city and overlooks the spread of violence to other areas of Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Kua, *May 13* 71; 79-80), the declaration of the state of national emergency following the event (50), and the suspension of state elections in East Malaysia (89).

The official 1969 NOC report on the event repeatedly characterises it as "racial disturbances" (vii) and "communal clash" (67). The wordings of the official NOC report have influenced historians—examples include Nancy Slider, Felix V. Gagliano, Michael Stenson, Kua Kia Soong, and Leon Comber—to refer to the event as "the 13 May 1969 racial riots," "communal riots," "the 13 May Riots," and the "May 13 Incident," terms that they appear to use interchangeably without delineating the distinctions between them. This lack of distinction between race and community stems from the NOC report's indiscriminate translation of the Malay term *kaum* and all its derivations—wordings from the Malay version of the NOC report—into either race or community (77-78).

In my thesis, I will refrain from referring to the event as "communal riots" because the word *communal* and all its derivations, as Stenson argues, implies a "degree of social cohesion" that obscures the internal conflicts and divisions among the Chinese, Indians, and Malays (53). I will also avoid using the term "May 13 racial riots" insofar as it implicitly precludes interpretations of the event that are not based on race—interpretations based on class or the inner contradictions of the Alliance political formula, for example. Lastly, I have chosen not to refer to the event as "riots"—although the violent confrontations, looting, burning, and killing that transpired seem to support its usage—because this wording similarly precludes interpretations of the event as a premeditated coup d'état. In my thesis, I will therefore employ the more neutral term "the May 13 Incident"—and its shortened form "May 13"—to describe this complex event, apart from occasions where I am quoting directly from scholars and other writers who may use different terms to depict the event.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

realigned the social, political, and economic structure of the nation. In other words, the May 13 Incident ushered in a new dominant socio-cultural and political structure in Malaysia that persists to this day. As the renowned postcolonial and Asian American writer Shirley Geok-lin Lim states, "[b]efore May 13th, communal relations and political discourse assumed a merit-based, non-raced ethos; after May 13th … , non-merit, race-based-hierarchical, Malay-supremacist social and governmental structures were enforced as the new normal" ("The Breaking" 44).

For recent Malaysian governments, however, the May 13 Incident appears to have little significance. "That [the May 13 Incident] was the past. We [the former Pakatan Harapan government] are now looking at the present and the future," said then Malaysian Home Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on 13 May 2019 as he responded to a renewed call for the declassification of official documents regarding the events on and around May 13 (Tan), a call renewed and intensified by the fact that 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of these traumatic events. This anniversary heightened political leaders' and NGO leaders' pursuit of truth about the May 13 Incident, a pursuit that was manifested not only through their renewed calls for the declassification of official documents, but also through their demands to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Both Gerakan president Dominic Lau and Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) advisor Kua Kia Soong argued for the need for such a commission because of popular distrust of the credibility of the official 1969 National Operations Council (NOC) report ("May 13-Gerakan"; Kua "50 Years On"). However, Malaysia Law Minister Liew Vui Keong rejected the request for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the grounds that the official 1969 NOC report was "complete with all

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

sorts of information and facts related to the tragedy" ("Gov't Shoots Down").[2] Instead of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Liew insisted in 2019 that the government should focus on strengthening national unity and the economy ("Gov't Shoots Down"). The government at that time thus rejected demands for additional inquiry into the May 13 incident by endorsing the credibility and veracity of a 1969 report and arguing for the need to focus on the present—naming issues such as national unity and the economy—instead of dwelling on the past. Is, however, May 13 a past event that has no bearing on Malaysia's present and future?

The repeated invocation of May 13 in the political sphere of Malaysia—a repetition that has been described as the *spectre of May 13*—attests to its continued relevance to present-day Malaysia. The ruling party and Malay special rights advocates have repeatedly evoked this spectre whenever the Opposition challenges the status quo by questioning racially discriminatory affirmative action programs. For example, Terengganu UMNO Youth information chief Razak Idris warned at the 2006 UMNO general assembly that "Malay rights cannot be challenged, otherwise the Malays will run amok and the May 13 riots will happen all over again" (Kuppusamy).[3] Other UMNO delegates attending this assembly similarly brandished their *keris* and declared their determination to "bathe in blood" in order to protect Malay privileges (Kuppusamy).[4] Politicians from the ruling party have also evoked the spectre of May 13

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[2] The National Operations Council (NOC) was an interim government body established by Tunku Abdul Rahman that administered Malaysia during the emergency period that followed the May 13 Incident (Comber 71). In 1969, it released an official report that detailed events that transpired during the violent conflict and provided causes that led to the incident. I will discuss this report in more detail below.

[3] As indicated in "Appendix: List of Abbreviations" appended to this thesis, UMNO is the acronym of the United Malays National Organization. It is the dominant political party in Barisan Nasional (BN), the former governing coalition that ruled Malaysia uninterruptedly for 61 years since independence (Chin and Welsh 3).

[4] The *keris* is a Malay dagger with a wavy-edged blade (*OED* "kris | creese | crease, n."). It typically symbolizes Malay ethnic pride.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

when the Opposition has called for further democratization. For instance, PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang argued in 2015 against the DAP proposal for the reinstatement of local council elections.[5] He warned that it might lead to other May 13 racial riots ("Hadi's May 13 Warning"), a warning he repeated in 2018.[6] Such threatening imagery also persists in the rhetoric of the politicians who have advocated for Malay special rights. In 2018, for example, Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali threatened in a rally that his party was ready to "run amok all over the country" because of challenges towards Malay special rights exemplified by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (Zahiid). Running amok, *keris* bathed in blood, and the May 13 racial riots—such recurring imagery and phrases in political discourse point to the fact that the spectre of May 13 haunts the political sphere of Malaysia to this day. May 13 is therefore not a past event that belongs solely in the past with no relevance to present-day Malaysia. The government's exhortation in 2019 to leave May 13 in the past and focus on the present is at best ineffective—and at worse naïve—when politicians have been utilizing the event to impede contemporary reforms.

Some have argued that only the truth about May 13 can banish this lingering spectre. Kua Kia Soong argues that this spectre can only be "put to rest" by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that courageously "confront[s]" the "real history" ("50 Years on"). In my thesis, I seek to take up Kua's call for the pursuit of a "real history" of May 13. However, I will at the same time question the very possibility of such a "real

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[5] PAS stands for the Malaysian Islamic Party. DAP is an abbreviation of the Democratic Action Party. See the appended "Appendix: List of Abbreviations" for these and other abbreviations in this chapter.

[6] In 2018, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang repeated this warning about local council elections while being questioned in London (Tee).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

history" by examining contested historical memories of May 13, memories whose contested nature can be elucidated through a juxtaposition of existing historical accounts. In doing so, I will investigate representations of May 13 by asking questions such as: how is the May 13 Incident represented in official accounts and in historical texts? How has it been framed and reframed? How might the discourses embedded in such framings and reframings unsettle one another? In this introductory chapter, I will attend to the contested historical memories of May 13 through a juxtaposition of historical accounts. My goal is to examine the framings and reframings of May 13 in these representations, with a focus of the discourses they justify and challenge.

My investigation of these historical accounts will enable me to ask: how do writers —both in Malaysia and in the diaspora—deal with these contested memories via diverse literary representations? How are these memories, to borrow from Astrid Erll, refigured in their collective memories, or more specifically their cultural memories ("Literature")? In the body chapters of my thesis, I will examine selected Malaysian and Malaysian diasporic texts—including Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* (2001), Preeta Samarasan's novel *Evening is the Whole Day* (2009), and Hanna Alkaf's young adult novel *The Weight of Our Sky* (2019)—that deal in various ways with the difficult and contested memories of May 13. I plan to investigate both historical and literary representations of May 13 without, I hope, moving too hastily—to borrow from Lisa Yoneyama—to domesticate contested memories. The goal of this thesis is to ask: how is the May 13 Incident represented in historical and literary and other cultural texts? How might the discourses embedded in these representations unsettle one another? To answer these questions, we first need to return to a key document produced in 1969.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

I. Contested Historical Memories

The official 1969 National Operations Council report mentioned above centres its narration of May 13 on the 1969 General Election but frames it with a historical overview of the Sino-Malay distrust in British Malaya and post-independence Malaysia. This distrust was exacerbated by racialized and polarizing political campaigns for the 1969 election that exploited Malays' fears of being "overwhelmed" by the non-Malays and questioned the Malays' presumed Indigenous status (NOC vii; 21); and racialized campaigns from the "immigrant races" that also attacked Articles 152 and 153 of the Constitution, provisions that cemented Malay special rights and the status of the Malay language as the national language and sole official language of Malaysia (vii; 83). This Sino-Malay distrust was further escalated by members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and secret societies who infiltrated the Labour Party of Malaya (LPM) (NOC vii; 25-26). Against this backdrop, the 1969 General Election took place. On 9 May 1969—the day before the polling day—the LPM flouted police instruction and organized a large funeral procession through the centre of Kuala Lumpur for a LPM youth who died after attacking the police, a procession that was attended by marchers who carried portraits of Mao Zedong and the Red flag while chanting Maoist slogans (NOC 27-28). The marchers also provoked Malay bystanders with provocative slogans such as "Death to the Malays" and "Blood debt will be repaid with blood" (28).[7]

Due to police restraint, the General Election on 10 May 1969 proceeded without any serious incidents (NOC 28). In this election, the then ruling coalition, the Alliance, won 25.84% fewer seats compared to the previous election and opposition parties gained considerable ground in both state and federal elections (Comber 68). On May 11

[7] The original Malay slogans were "Malay si" and "Hutang darah bayar darah" (NOC 28).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

and May 12, opposition parties such as DAP and Gerakan held several victory processions in Kuala Lumpur. The NOC report described their victory processions—some of which had no police permits—as "racially provocative" since they were filled with insulting slogans such as "Death to the Malays, aborigines go back to the jungle," "End of the Malays," and "Now we rule, what can you do about it" (NOC 29-33).[8] With Sino-Malay tensions ramped up by racialized election campaigns, Malays are depicted in this report as becoming increasingly anxious about their "adverse" economic and political condition and fearing for their future (NOC 5; 36). On 13 May 1969, indignant UMNO youths gathered in front of the Selangor Menteri Besar Dato Harun bin Haji Idris's residence to hold a counter-procession that celebrated the Alliance's victory (NOC 44). After hearing news that some Malays on their way to the procession were attacked by a group of Chinese in Setapak, some of them broke away from the crowd and started the violent conflict (NOC 51-52). The official NOC report thus foregrounded the Malays' economic and political disenfranchisement and the opposition parties' racially provocative marches as the main causes of the May 13 Incident. The report also portrays the Chinese as the main culprits—they were the instigators with their attack at Setapak, the main members of the MCP and secret societies (NOC 7; 25-26), and the major "immigrant race" that attacked provisions of the Constitution that established Malay special rights.

The official account of the May 13 Incident presented in the NOC report has attracted significant controversy and dissatisfaction. Kua Kia Soong argues that the 2006 controversy over the biased portrayal of the May 13 Incident in a Malaysian

[8] The original Malay slogans were "Mati Melayu, sakai pergi masok hutan [sic]," "Habis Melayu," and "Sekarang kita perentah apa boleh buat" (NOC 29-33).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

university Ethnic Relations textbook reflected widespread public disbelief of the official history concerning the May 13 Incident (*May 13* 1). He also faults the NOC report for being "fraught with contradictions and inadequacies" (2). In 2007, Kua published *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969* to attempt to debunk the official history with evidence from declassified documents housed at the Public Records Office in London.[9] The book was highly controversial because of its allegation that the May 13 Incident was a coup d'état orchestrated by Tun Abdul Razak to seize power from Tunku Abdul Rahman. Many senators in Malaysia subsequently demanded an official ban on the distribution of this book ("New Book"). Both official and unofficial historical accounts thus sparked significant controversies that revealed the contested and unsettled nature of the memories of the May 13 Incident.

Kua's controversial study *May 13: Declassified Documents* attempts to challenge and unsettle the official history of May 13 Incident with different interpretations of the same events. For example, while the NOC report states racialized political campaigns as one of the main causes of the tragedy, Kua attributes these racialized politics to the "contradictions inherent in the Alliance Formula" (23). The Alliance was formed when UMNO and MCA—two "communalist parties"—joined forces in order to win the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council Election over the IMP, the party favoured by the British (Kua 16).[10] As communalist parties in an alliance, they had to strive to keep the

[9] These declassified documents include reports from foreign correspondents as well as confidential memoranda and dispatches from the personnel of the British High Commissions, the British Cabinet Office, the British embassy, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Ministry of Defence (Kua, *May 13* 5-6).

[10] As indicated in "Appendix: List of Abbreviations," the MCA is the acronym of the Malaysian Chinese Association. The IMP stands for Independence of Malaya Party. The IMP was established by Dato Onn and displayed more liberal tendencies that won them the favour of the British colonial authority (Kua, *May 13* 14). The MCA and UMNO leaders—Malay rulers and Chinese businessmen—had common interests because they wanted to "defeat the workers' revolt" to defend the status quo that benefited them (Kua, *May 13* 16).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

"electoral front intact" while simultaneously securing the support of their "communalist base[s]" with communalist politics (17). This was the inherent contradiction in the Alliance Formula: as communalist parties, they appealed to their communalist bases with communalist politics; however, they simultaneously needed to assure their base that the other communalist parties in the Alliance with potentially conflicting stances did not constitute a threat. This inherent contradiction weakened their political positions and encouraged the opposition parties to attack them during their election campaigns with increasingly communalist rhetoric (29-30; 32).[11] The racially provocative processions organized by the opposition were also a result of this racialized political climate engendered by the ruling political party—the Alliance (42). In short, Kua argues that the racialized politics and the provocative processions that led to the May 13 tragedy were initiated and conditioned by the Alliance's political formula. In contrast to the official NOC report, he thus assigns blame to both the Alliance and the opposition parties instead of levelling all the blame on the opposition.

Apart from refuting its official conclusion, Kua also questions the NOC report's claim that communists were involved in orchestrating the riots. He argues that such accusations were unfounded by quoting statements from senior political leaders admitting that their earlier accusations against the communists were false—leaders including Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Minister of Home Affairs Tun Ismail, and a NOC member Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie (Kua, *May 13* 47-48).[12] After thus

[11] Kua also points out that the government had carried out "mass arrests" of opposition leaders in 1968, which left the main opposition parties in the 1969 election with leaders who expressed communalist sentiments (*May 13* 29). In other words, Kua claims that the unscrupulous actions of the government exacerbated racial tensions and facilitated racialized election campaigns.

[12] Kua's doubts about communist involvement are shared by many other historical accounts of May 13. Like Kua, Leon Comber, Anthony Reid, and Anthony Short both quote Tun Ismail's acknowledgement that the communists were taken by surprise by the riots as well (Comber 73; A. Reid 271; Short 1087). Only the NOC report and Tunku Abdul Rahman's memoir *May 13: Before and After* allege substantial communist involvement in May 13 in the historical accounts that I have reviewed.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

refuting many of the claims in the NOC report, Kua presents his main argument: the May 13 Incident was a coup d'état designed by Tun Abdul Razak—the leader of the emerging Malay state capitalist class—to seize power from Tunku Abdul Rahman—the leader of the old-guard Malay aristocracy. Kua puts forward this argument by referring to British correspondents' dispatches and confidential memoranda (3).[13] Referring to dispatches from Bob Reece, Kua argues that the gathering in front of the Selangor Menteri Besar's residence was pre-planned and the gathered "young Malay hoodlums" initiated the riots at Kampong Baru by burning two Chinese lorries (41; 43-44). The exact nature of the gathered crowd became even murkier when Tun Razak's statement was taken into consideration—the NOC report claimed that the crowd consisted of UMNO youths who intended to participate in a victory procession that had obtained police permit (NOC 38; 43);[14] however, the head of the NOC Tun Razak—who wrote and signed the preface of the official NOC report—declared to the Australian High Commission that the UMNO didn't plan to organize a victory procession and the crowd only gathered to demonstrate their support for the party (Kua 45). These discrepancies within the NOC members' positions, in Kua's assessment, further weaken the credibility of the NOC report. After offering a different interpretation of the nature of the gathered crowd, Kua contends that the May 13 tragedy was a coup planned by Tun Razak by citing a BHC memorandum that acknowledged the shift of power to the military forces and foreign correspondence that questioned his "swift assumption of authoritarian rule"

[13] Since the 1960s, there has been a struggle between the Malay aristocrats and the emerging Malay state capitalists (Kua, *May 13* 25). The Malay aristocratic class preferred "gradualist measures" to provide economic utilities to the rural Malays since their economic interest relied mainly on non-Malay and foreign capitalists (25-26). In contrast, the state capitalists advocated for the expansion of state capital to create a strictly Malay state capitalist class and strengthen their base which consisted of the Malay middle class (26).

[14] The NOC report also claimed that the gathered UMNO youths were armed because they heard rumours that the UMNO procession would be attacked by the Chinese—they armed themselves in the interest of self-defence (NOC 44).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

and his liaison with the chiefs of the security forces (56; 117). In other words, Kua claims that Razak's swift ascendency into authoritarian power and his close connections with the military leaders indicated that the May 13 Incident was an attempted coup d'état.

Kua's controversial contention points to a longstanding disagreement among historians of the May 13 Incident: was the May 13 Incident a conspiracy and a plot that originated from the government? Anthony Reid acknowledges that government actions —such as the silencing of the Malaysian press and treating of elected opposition leaders as "guilty outcasts" instead of as leaders—gave the impression that the government leaders were taking advantage of the violence and chaos to "change radically the basis of the Malaysian political system" (271-72). However, Reid argues that these suspicious government actions were "a result not of deliberate policy but of demoralization"—the leaders were demoralized by the exhausting election campaign and the unsatisfactory election result (272). In contrast to Reid who excuses suspicious government actions as a result of demoralization, Subky Latiff echoes Kua in his assessment of May 13 to argue that the May 13 Incident didn't occur spontaneously—it was "planned quickly and purposely" to topple Tunku Abdul Rahman through a "coup d'état" (161).[15] The premeditated nature of the May 13 Incident was also supported by some narrative accounts offered by participants and witnesses of the incident. For example, one of the UMNO youths who gathered in front of the Selangor Menteri Besar's residence Ahmad Mustapha Hassan—a UMNO youth leader at the time who later went on to become Tun

[15] Subky Latiff is not as bold as Kua in his assertion of a coup d'état. Unlike Kua, he does not directly identify Tun Abdul Razak as the planner and perpetrator of the coup. He merely implies that Tun Razak was "pleased with the defeat of the Alliance" and utilized the defeat to "press the Tunku to give up his power" (161). He also implies Tun Razak's involvement by claiming that "Tun Razak had his own role in the developments . . . [after] 10 May 1969" (161). However, he ultimately concedes that "the identity of the planner of the incident cannot be stated with accuracy" (161).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Abdul Razak's press secretary—published a memoir titled *The Unmaking of Malaysia: Insider's Reminiscences of UMNO, Razak and Mahathir* in 2007. Although memoirs cannot simply be read as historical documents, this memoir nevertheless provides additional helpful details about the May 13 Incident. In this memoir, Hassan claims that the UMNO youths gathered only with the intention to participate in a counter-victory procession but suddenly "long knives (*parang*) and other sharp weapons appeared as if from nowhere" and "headbands were handed" only after the violence began (31). In a 2008 interview with Martin Vengadesan,[16] Hassan also claims that this unexpected development suggested that "there were some elements in the UMNO who were opposed to Tunku's leadership and who had come with an ulterior motive and planned something more sinister" (Vengadesan).[17]

In addition to the points noted above, Kua's study also pushes back against the NOC report's defence of military and police conduct. Quoting from the telegrams of the British High Commissions, Kua claims that the military force that was brought in to stem the violence conversely engaged in looting and showed biased treatment against the Chinese by ignoring the actions of "Malay rioters" and being partial in arresting participants and enforcing curfew (*May 13* 53). Quoting *Daily Telegraph* journalist Ian Ward, Kua also states that the Royal Malay Regiment fired indiscriminately at Chinese shophouses (64). The NOC report had addressed these allegations about military misconduct by stating that only 7 persons reported cases of looting that were carried out by the military—claiming that the looting conducted by the military was "relatively

[16] It should be noted that in Vengadesan's article, the following quotation is not identified explicitly as a quotation from Vengadesan's interview with Hassan. I confirmed the source of the following quotation through personal communication with Vengadesan on 19 April 2020.

[17] In his memoir Hassan does not state his belief with quite as much conviction. He merely suggests that some "irresponsible elements" had "pre-planned and fanned" the mob that took over the UMNO counter-victory procession (31).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

minor" (67). As for the accusation of military bias against the Chinese, the NOC report had argued that given that "2000 Military and 3600 Police" were deployed to control the violence, the total casualties among the Chinese who were alleged to be targeted "would have been enormous" (67).[18] Similar to Kua, Anthony Reid also claims that the Royal Malay Regiment "tolerated or joined the looting and burning" of Chinese properties (270). Additionally, he also points out the puzzling failure of the "tough FRU (riot squad) units" who were posted at the area where the violence started (269). He explains this failure and the military misconduct by arguing that the FRU and the Royal Malay Regiment were used to handling Chinese left-wing demonstrators and Chinese communists—they were used to inflicting violence on the Chinese to keep them under control, but hesitated to do so against the Malays, especially since some of them were "influential middle-ranking UMO members" (269-70).[19]

A gathered crowd of economically disenfranchised UMNO youths responding to unbearable provocation or a horde of Malay hoodlums participating in a coup d'état; a coup d'état directed by members of UMNO against Tunku Abdul Rahman or a series of seemingly suspicious government actions that were results of demoralization; military bias and looting against the Chinese or racist propaganda that exaggerated the extent of military misconduct—memories of the May 13 Incident remain unsettled and contested in these official and unofficial accounts. By examining the historical studies that seek to unsettle official accounts, I have so far attempted to foreground the contested nature of historical memories of May 13. However, other historical accounts also unsettle the

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[18] Chinese were the main casualties of the May 13 Incident. Out of the 196 deaths officially reported, 143 of them were Chinese (NOC Table 1). Out of the 439 injured, 270 of them were Chinese (NOC Table 2-3). The official death toll was questioned by many commentators and foreign diplomats at the time, who estimated the death toll to be between 800 to 1000 (Vengadesan).

[19] Anthony Reid also claims that even educated Malays tend to argue that the "ultimate weapon the ordinary Malay had against Chinese wealth was violence or the threat of violence" (269).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

official historiography of the May 13 Incident by challenging its framing, enabling alternative interpretations to emerge. In the next section, I will attend to such reframings.

II. (Re)framings of May 13

As discussed in the previous section, the official NOC report produced in 1969 frames the May 13 Incident through a series of Sino-Malay conflicts, a framing with a particular emphasis on the "growing political encroachment of the immigrant races"—especially the Chinese (vii). The report starts with the post-World War II Malayan Union plan that proposed to unify the various Malay States, Penang, and Malacca into a Malayan Union and grant "citizenship privileges" to "everyone . . . regardless of race" (4). According to the NOC report, Malays perceived this granting of citizenship across racial divides as a threat towards their "political identity as Malays" (4), became increasingly conscious of their "adverse economic position" in a "politico-economic world . . . created by the immigrant races" (5), and feared a "rule by the Chinese" whose "loyalty to the country" they doubted (5). Asserting that "Sino-Malay distrust runs like a thread through the nation's recent history" (15), the NOC report then cites a series of Sino-Malay conflicts, including the "MPAJA [Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army] ascendancy" (8), the 1948 communist emergency, the 1957 disturbances during the Penang centenary celebration, the 1959 Sino-Malay conflict in Sungai Pinang, the 1964 Bukit Mertajam disturbances, and the 1967 Sino-Malay clashes in Penang following the devaluation of Malaysia's currency. In its narration of these Sino-Malay conflicts, the NOC report tends to emphasize the Malays' fear and restraint and the violence of the Chinese. For example, the report stresses that during the MPAJA ascendency the

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

"Chinese-dominated" MPAJA that was full of "Malayan Communist Party (MCP) guerrillas" tortured and killed "large numbers of innocent Malays" and thus "imprinted in Malay minds the dangers of Chinese ascendancy" (7-8); in the 1948 communist emergency, the security forces were composed mainly of Malays while many Chinese responded to the "chauvinistically presented" "Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party" (9) and fled to China to avoid joining the security forces (10); during the 1957 Penang centenary celebration, "50 Chinese" chased a group of Malays while the police was dispersing the crowd (16); and the 1964 Bukit Mertajam Sino-Malay clash showed "no indication" of being "instigated or exploited by any political group or subversive elements" but nevertheless the Chinese "secret society agents" "were known to have exploited" the situation to collect "protection money" (20). By focusing on Malay fears of Chinese political and economic encroachment, the NOC report shows little interest in giving voice to the Chinese or considering the motivations behind their political and economic aspirations at that time.[20] By recounting all these Sino-Malay conflicts before its depiction of May 13, the NOC report instead situates the May 13 Incident within a series of Sino-Malay conflicts and characterizes it as a racial conflict—more specifically as yet another example of a Sino-Malay conflict.[21]

The NOC report's framing of the May 13 Incident thus risks perpetuating instead of challenging one of the main causes of the event—namely the racialized politics to

[20] Wang Gungwu, for example, has pointed out that the NOC report "has listed factors which emphasise the Chinese (or non-Malay) challenge and does not discuss the deep fears that most Chinese have of Malay supremacy" (1).

[21] This official framing of the May 13 Incident has influenced many subsequent historians. Many of them adopt this official framing and characterise the May 13 Incident as a racial conflict or as a Sino-Malay conflict. For example, Felix V. Gagliano similarly recounts instances of communal violence before 1969 and characterises the May 13 Incident as "communal riots" (1). Situating his representation of May 13 with chapters discussing Sino-Malay relations from British colonisation to independence, Leon Comber describes the May 13 Incident as "rioting" where "Malays and Chinese indulged in an orgy of killing, looting, and burning," thereby identifying the event as a Sino-Malay conflict (70).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

which it attributes the "eruption of violence on May 13" (vii). Some historians who wrote in the 1970s have resisted this official framing by focusing on alternative issues—most notably the issue of class. For example, Michael Stenson—writing in 1976—challenges official framings of May 13 through a reframing that operates at the intersections of race and class. Tracing the source of Malay anxiety for "race survival" to British colonial economic policies that confined Malays to a traditional "agricultural society," Stenson argues that Malays in the 1930s were united by this anxiety and their effort to forge a "Malay political unity" across the "nine Malay sultanates," an effort facilitated by a "class polarization" that was mitigated by a "peasant indebtedness" that was generally confined to Chinese or Chettiar landlords instead of Malay landlords (45). In contrast to politically united Malays with mitigated class tension, Stenson argues that Chinese and Indian communities in the 1930s were marked by class and political divisions (45-46).[22] However, Stenson contends that Malay unity came under stress when the Alliance party was formed for the pursuit of independence in 1957—the Malay "aristocratic and administrative elite" accommodated and formed a "symbiotic relationship" with Chinese capital (47). This accommodation, according to Stenson, engendered a "common political system" that generated "common political aspirations" that it was "constitutionally unable" to fulfil—the Chinese thus became increasingly frustrated at their lack of political power while the Malays were frustrated by their continuing "economic backwardness" (47). Following Kessler, Stenson argues that, under the Alliance's rule, class antagonisms within Malay society stemmed from the Kelantan countryside with conflicts of interest between the landowning rural landlords

[22] Stenson claims that the Chinese in the 1930s were divided between support for the KMT and the MCP and between the wealthier English-educated group and the poorer Chinese workers (45); Indians were similarly divided between the wealthy English-educated Indian elites and the poor Indian labourers in plantations (46).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

and Malay salariats and the landless peasants (48). These class antagonisms, according to Stenson, were partially obscured by the "effect of racial rivalry" but nevertheless occasioned "oppositionist Malay politics" embodied by the PAS (48). The spread of Malay support for the PAS in West Malaysia in 1969, for Stenson, "arose . . . from the continuance of class polarization accompanied by a marked tarnishing of the UMNO's image as sole defender of the Malay race" (48). With this analysis of intra-Malay class antagonisms in mind, Stenson argues that the "Malay-instigated race riots of May 1969 arose from a form of transferred frustration having its roots in intra-Malay class conflict. Directed at the most immediate . . . object of Malay frustration, urban non-Malays . . . , the youthful rioters were unconsciously warning the . . . too accommodatory UMNO elite which had for so long collaborated with the urban non-Malays while failing to uplift its own racial group" (48). Stenson thus challenges the NOC report's inter-racial framing of the May 13 Incident by reframing the event as riots occasion by intra-Malay class conflict—class conflict between the Malay rural peasants and the landowning UMNO Malay elites. For Stenson, this intra-Malay class antagonism was transferred to the urban non-Malays and occasioned the May 13 Incident. Stenson also challenges the NOC report's claim that the Malay's economic deprivation was conditioned by the "politico-economic world . . . created by the immigrant races" (NOC 5) by attributing the Malay fear of "race survival" to a static economic condition occasioned by British colonial economic policies (Stenson 45).

Writing in 1975, B. N. Cham adopts a similar reframing of the May 13 Incident but also identifies explicitly the agent who transferred the Malay frustration. Similar to Stenson, Cham identifies the Alliance as an accommodation between Malay political elites and Chinese business interests. However, he also traces the "contradictions among

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

the ruling groups" in the Alliance communal formula from the British colonial period up to when the incident occurred (447). Such contradictions, in Cham's account, include those between the Malay elites and the non-Malay elites starting from Malay demands for a "reinforced British pro-Malay policy" against Chinese businessmen's fight for an improved political position in the colonial period (447); the Malay fight for the "birth-rights of the Malays" against the non-Malay demand for "complete democratization" during the 1948 Malayan Union crisis (448); to finally after independence the Malay elites' fight for a "Malaya [that] is for the Malays" against the Chinese demand for their "share of political power" (448). Cham thus points out that the ruling elites in the Alliance perpetrated communal politics before and after the independence of Malaya. He then argues that the "discontented [ruling] elites" in their fight for communal interests engaged in "communal agitation" by fanning the "communal aspirations of the lower classes" (449). However, the lower classes' communal aspirations for social mobility were "unfulfilled" (449-50). These unfulfilled aspirations exacerbated the lower classes' frustrations, frustrations that the elites transferred to the lower classes' "fellow victims along racial lines" and that, in Cham's account, led to the May 13 Incident (450). Cham thus identifies the ruling elites who mobilised their communities through communal agitation as the agent responsible for the transference of Malay frustration—a frustration that arose from unfulfilled aspirations for upward social mobility—and ultimately for the May 13 Incident. While he adopts a similar reframing of the May 13 Incident that operates in the intersection between race and class, Cham differs from Stenson in his explicit identification of the ruling elites as the agents responsible for transferring Malay frustration and ultimately for causing the violent incident itself.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Even though historians writing in the 1970s strove to unsettle the official racialized framing of the May 13 Incident, these scholars shared a historiographic impulse to provide a grand narrative to attempt to finally explain this violent conflict. In contrast, more recent historiographic efforts have sought to write history from the bottom-up by giving voice to the survivors of May 13. For example, the newspaper *Malaysiakini* has been collecting survivors' testimonies since 2019 through in-person interviews conducted by journalists and submissions through their website ("Our May 13 Stories"). Separately, in 2020, Tham Seen Hau, Tang Yuen Ching, Usen Leong, and Por Hong Heong worked together to publish *Rebirth from the Ashes* (在傷口上重生), an oral history of the May 13 Incident. In her introduction to *Rebirth From the Ashes*, Por asserts that instead of supplementing existing official accounts, this Chinese-language oral history project opens up space for the survivors to testify and to reflect on their experiences of May 13 (Tham et al. 19-20). By doing so, this project may reinscribe memories of May 13 and fight against the forgetting of and the dominant discourse about May 13 (20). This oral history project achieves these goals, Por maintains, by focusing on the survivors' testimonies that reflect their multifarious perspectives and understandings of the event (21). For instance, multiple survivors' testimonies seem to challenge the official Sino-Malay framing of May 13 by recounting occasions where Malaysians rescued their fellows across racial divides by sheltering them and confronting mobs bent on killing them (51, 63, 64). Many of the testimonies in this oral history project also echo Kua's challenge to the official characterisation of the May 13 Incident as a spontaneous outbreak of violence by alleging it to be a conspiracy

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

stemming from the government (43, 64).[23] However, some survivors also support the dominant discourse by corroborating some of the claims from the official NOC report—namely claims about May 13 being a spontaneous outbreak and the military's conduct being fair and commendable (51-52).[24] This oral history project thus reflects a multitude of understandings surrounding the May 13 Incident—a multitude that rejects the imposition of an overarching grand narrative on the event.

As I have discussed so far, the 1969 official NOC report frames the May 13 Incident as a racial conflict—more specifically as a Sino-Malay conflict. Subsequent historical accounts produced in the 1970s have attempted to unsettle this official racialized framing of May 13 with reframings that operate at the intersections between race and class. Recent historiographical projects have in turn complicated this tendency to impose a grand framing narrative by producing oral histories intended to give voice to survivors' testimonies—testimonies that reflect multifarious historical understandings that variously unsettle or support dominant discourses.

The cacophony of dissenting voices surrounding the memories of May 13 points to a lack of consensus about the nation's history and the contestation of varied ideologies.[25] Amidst this cacophony, how do Malaysians understand the contested

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[23] Hassan Muthalib—one of the survivors who allege that the May 13 Incident was a result of governmental conspiracy—points to the widespread dissemination of Dr. Mahathir's inflammatory letter among Malay communities as proof (Tham et al. 43).

[24] Although he accepts these claims from the official report, Mr. P rejects its allegation of communist machination in the orchestration of the May 13 Incident (Tham et al. 52). His understanding of May 13 thus still challenges the dominant discourse that the official report seeks to impose.

[25] The dissenting voices that contest and unsettle the official historiography of May 13 also indicate a dissatisfaction with the recommendations of the NOC report. These recommendations include constitutional amendments that entrenched Malay privilege ("special position of the Malays" in Article 153), cemented the Malay language as the national language and the sole official language of Malaysia, upheld the power of the Malay Rulers, and legitimized sedition laws that justified the incarceration of those who challenged these amendments (NOC 86-87). These recommendations have been considered as a key entrenchment of Malay privileges that have been manifested as racially discriminatory policies, or at worst as an institutionalization of Malay supremacy.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

memories of May 13? How do writers—both in Malaysia and in the diaspora—deal with contested memories that have occasioned diverse literary representations? Malaysian writers from different racialized communities have written about the violent conflict in multiple languages and in diverse genres. Notable cultural texts among this multilingual archive are Anglophone texts such as Lloyd Fernando's novel *Green is the Colour,* Chuah Guat Eng's novel *Echoes of Silence,* and Beth Yahp's short story "In 1969"; Sinophone texts such as Li Zishu's novel *The Era of Farewell* (告別的年代), Ding Yun's short story "Wei Xiang" (圍鄉), and Ng Kim Chew's short story "Slow Boat to China" (開往中國的慢船); and Malay texts including Said Zahari's poem "Hidden Hands" (Tangan-tangan yang Tersembunyi), Usman Awang's poem "The Scapegoat" (Gambing Hitam), and Shahnon Ahman's short story "Al." In the subsequent chapters of my thesis, I will examine selected Malaysian texts—including Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* (2001), Preeta Samarasan's novel *Evening is the Whole Day* (2009), and Hanna Alkaf's young adult novel *The Weight of Our Sky* (2019)—that engage with the difficult and contested memories of May 13.

III. Chapter Breakdown

In this introduction to my thesis, I began by arguing for the ongoing significance of the May 13 Incident. I have juxtaposed the official 1969 NOC report with subsequent historical accounts produced by Kua Kia Soong, Anthony Reid, Subky Latiff, and a memoir by Ahmad Mustapha Hassan to focus on the points of contention and the discrepancies among their accounts—points including the extent of communist involvement in the orchestration of the event, the parties responsible for the racialized political climate preceding the 1969 general election, whether May 13 was a

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

premeditated coup d'état or a conspiracy of the government, and the extent of military misconduct. I have also examined how Michael Stenson's and B. N. Cham's reframings in the 1970s of the May 13 Incident—reframings that operated at the intersections of class and race—have challenged official accounts as well as how these accounts have been further complicated in recent attempts to give voice to the multifarious historical understandings of the survivors through oral history projects. My reading of these contested memories of May 13 points to a lack of consensus about the event. This lack of consensus and the unsettled nature of how to understand the event have prompted me to ask: how do the contested memories of May 13 circulate in the cultural sphere in Malaysia and in the Malaysian diaspora? More specifically, how do literary representations of May 13 portray these contested memories? How—if at all—might literary and other cultural texts help to unsettle official historiographical accounts?

In Chapter Two, I will examine Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* (2001) in conjunction with her academic and her other literary writings regarding May 13. Through a close analysis of the shift in the *Joss and Gold* protagonist Li An's articulation of a Malaysian identity, I will contend that this novel represents the May 13 Incident as an epochal event that marks a shift from a founding multicultural national identity to a ethnically divisive and ethnocentric national identity. Paying attention to the presence of a Peace Corps volunteer in Lim's novel, I will complicate and extend this point by examining the transnational elements embedded in this text's representation of the May 13 Incident. With these elements in mind, I will argue that the presence of Chester Brookfield in Lim's novel resituates the incident in a wider Cold War and inter-Asian context.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

In Chapter Three, I will turn to the double narrative structure of Preeta Samarasan's novel *Evening is the Whole Day* (2009), a structure that interweaves a main plot written in the present tense with a narrative about the distant past of the nation written in the past tense. By situating its representation of the May 13 Incident in the middle of the novel, *Evening is the Whole Day* positions the event as a culmination of tensions generated by colonial racial divides and also unsettles its presumed racialized framing with the discourse of class. I will investigate the latter point by focusing on the structural similarity between the narration of the May 13 Incident and the narration of the stories of Shamsuddin and Chellam, a Malay office boy accused of murdering Angel Lim and an Indian servant girl accused of killing her employer Paati. By noting how the narrative structure posits Chellam as Uma's double through a juxtaposition of their fates in both the beginning and the ending of the novel, I will show how such a comparison not only points to the heterogeneity and divides within an ethnic community, but also reveals how migration—as an escape from the ethnocentric hegemony of the nation—is only available for the well-off.

In Chapter Four, I will focus on the tensions and ethical dilemmas of representing the May 13 Incident in a recently published young adult text— Hanna Alkaf's *The Weight of our Sky* (2019). I will first examine how the novel follows the conventions of young adult fiction by charting the growth of its protagonist Melati Ahmad in dialogic relation to the progressive views of interethnic solidarity espoused by the Chongs and the chauvinistic and ethnically divisive views of Pakcik Adnan and Frankie Chong. After discussing such a dialogic construction that unsettles the official Sino-Malay framing of the May 13 Incident, I will attend to how this text navigates the ethical dilemmas of representing historical trauma in a text for young adults. After examining

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Hanna Alkaf's paratextual and narrative strategies of mitigating these dilemmas, I will also consider the intermedial dynamics of cultural memory by attending to Susan Cheng's remediation and adaptation of the novel into a webcomics series at Webtoon.

In the final chapter, I will conclude my thesis by briefly discussing some key recent developments in representing the May 13 Incident. I will argue that cultural texts have become—to borrow from Michael Rothberg—increasingly multidirectional as seen in Lau Kek-Huat's *The Tree Remembers* (2019), an engaging film that probes into racism in Malaysia through a dialogic and productive comparison of colonial discourse, the May 13 Incident, and the ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples in Malaysia. I will also suggest that my thesis project—by striving towards what Viet Thanh Nguyen calls an ethics of just memory—might contribute to alternative imaginations of the nation.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Chapter Two

Joss and Gold: The May 13 Incident in National and Transitional Frameworks

In the aftermath of the May 13 Incident, the third-person narrator of Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* observes that "[s]ome excused the killings as a simple matter of spontaneous outrage against economic oppressors; others thought them calculated murderous revenge, manipulated mob hysteria" (92). By noting the varied characterizations of the violent conflict as either an outcome of spontaneous outrage or calculated revenge, the narrator of Lim's novel points its readers' attention to the contested historical memories of the May 13 Incident. Begun in 1979 and published in 2001 (Leong 267), *Joss and Gold* portrays the debates and racial tensions preceding the deadly conflict through the interactions between the Chinese Malaysian protagonist Li An and her friends from different racialized communities. In this chapter, I will begin by examining how Lim's novel represents the May 13 Incident within a seemingly national framework. Through an analysis of the shift in Li An's articulation of a Malaysian identity, I will examine how *Joss and Gold* represents the May 13 Incident as an epochal event that marks the shift from a multicultural Malaysian identity to an ethnocentric one. I will supplement this analysis with Lim's academic and literary writings, some of which received various accolades including the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and an American Book Award.[26] This apparent national framework, however, is unsettled by various transnational elements in *Joss and Gold*. As depicted in

[26] Lim won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1980 for her poetry collection *Crossing the Peninsula and Other Poems* (Leong 267). She won an American Book Award twice, first with the coedited anthology *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology* in 1990, and then with her autobiography *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands* in 1997 (Lim "Biography & CV").

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Lim's novel, the May 13 Incident and Li An's extramarital affair with the American Peace Corps volunteer Chester Brookfield prompt her and most of the major characters to immigrate to Singapore. A little over a decade later, a restless Chester visits Singapore to reconnect with Li An and their Amerasian daughter Suyin. Focusing on transnational elements that are interwoven into the text, I will foreground how Lim's novel resituates the May 13 Incident in a wider inter-Asian Cold War context. By doing so, I will argue that the novel reveals Malaysia's entanglement in US Cold War militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia.

I. Envisioning Malaysian National Identity

In existing studies of *Joss and Gold*, several critics have focused on the contested models of nationalism that are represented in the novel through the interpersonal relationships between characters from different racialized communities. For example, Mohammad A. Quayum analyzes what he calls the "[c]ontesting views of nation" in the novel by comparing the Malaysian Malay character Abdullah's "homogenising/ centralising vision of nationalism" that upholds "cultural purity" ("Nation" 18-19) to Li An's "new and inclusive" vision of national identity that champions a "mixed Malaysia" (20-21). However, Quayum sidesteps the effects of the May 13 Incident on this contestation of national identities —he merely notes that the polarizing, "exclusivist, [and] monolithic" vision of nationalism espoused by Abdullah leads to the violent conflict (23). Pin-chia Feng takes this reading a step further and argues that the May 13 Incident is represented "indirectly" in this novel through the "corporeal experience" of Li An as she "consummate[s]" her relationship with Chester on the night of May 13 (144). In my reading of the novel, I suggest that critics of *Joss and Gold* have arguably

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

underplayed the significance of May 13 as it is represented in the novel, a significance that may transcend its temporal demarcation. In this section, I will examine the lasting impact of the May 13 Incident in this text by turning to the process of contestation between disparate visions of national identity.

Lim's novel represents this process by first portraying the tensions between an ethnocentric and a multicultural national identity preceding the May 13 Incident. As noted above, these tensions are portrayed through the contrast between the Malaysian Chinese protagonist Li An's and the Malaysian Malay character Abdullah's articulations of Malaysian identity. Li An proposes a multicultural Malaysian identity by asserting that "[e]verything in Malaysia is champor-champor, mixed, rojak. . . . Malaysian means rojak"—referring here to a mixing bowl of salad with "mango and bean curd and peanuts" (34-35). Li An visualizes this mixed Malaysian identity by imagining the marriage of the interracial couple Gina and Paroo. She imagines that Gina—a Chinese girl—will adopt certain elements of Indian culture after marrying the Punjabi Paroo. For example, she pictures Gina wearing a sari and bindhi on her forehead, while remaining the same "loud and brash" Gina (41). Li An also considers their future "light-brown children" to be the "new Malaysians" because they will be "neither Indian [nor] Chinese"—a new generation of Malaysians that are mixed-race (41). In contrast, Abdullah expresses an ethnocentric Malaysian identity by publishing newspaper articles about Malay special rights and how people who challenge these rights "should be imprisoned or sent back to China or India" (63). He also opposes the mixed multicultural Malaysian identity espoused by Li An by arguing that "Malay and Chinese . . . cannot mix" because there are "too many differences" (46). He reiterates his vision

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

of an ethnocentric Malaysian identity by arguing that it is "[b]etter that like stay with like"—or the Chinese "must become like Malay" if they want to mix (46).

In *Joss and Gold*, the debates surrounding the 1969 general election exacerbate the tensions between these disparate visions of national identity. The Malay newspaper that Abdullah works for publishes editorials asserting that the "elections must change nothing . . . unless it was for the benefit of the real people, the [Malay] ra'ayat" (71). The editorials also threaten that the "conflict will be deadly" if "the enemy" "push[es] the people too far" since the Malay "ra'ayat [will] assert their power in whatever way necessary"(71)—an ominous warning that foreshadows the deadly May 13 Incident. Recalling Abdullah's earlier objection to a mixed national identity, Li An responds to these editorials by observing that his articulation of a divisive and ethnocentric national identity not only excludes "the possibility of love" since love breaks down "the purity of a vision of singleness"; it also leads to the hatred displayed in these editorials (71). In her diary entry on the day of the election, Li An observes with dismay the pervasiveness of this growing divisiveness in political debates by stating that "Malay rights, Chinese rights. No one talks about Malaysian rights. I am a Malaysian. I don't exist" (75). The 1969 general election as it is depicted in Lim's novel thus bolstered a divisive and ethnocentric national identity and undermined the unity called for in a mixed and multicultural national identity.

The tensions between these contrasting visions of Malaysian identity culminate in the May 13 Incident—an event that cements the supremacy of the ethnocentric national identity espoused by Abdullah. Responding to Li An's inquiry about the conflict, Abdullah tells her that it is a result of "the Chinese . . . push[ing] us [the Malays] too far" and getting the "trouble" "they ask for" (82). Li An interprets his statement as yet

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

another articulation of a national identity that separates the country into "We/Our country [and] They/No country" (82)—a national identity that ultimately claims Malaysia for Malays and reduces Chinese Malaysians as the Other.[27] Li An rejects his statement as she believes that "[y]ou cannot be born and live in a place all your life without that place belonging to you" (82). However, she does not verbalize her objection to his assertion because she perceives that "after today she and Abdullah would never be able to argue again" (82). The May 13 Incident thus marks a decisive shift into a national identity that reduces minority Malaysians as the Other and suppresses challenges to this way of imagining the nation.

So far, I have suggested that *Joss and Gold* can be read as depicting a contestation between an ethnocentric and a multicultural national identity, a contestation that is exacerbated by the 1969 general election and culminates in the May 13 Incident. However, it is also important to note that the novel represents this violent conflict as continuing to exert significant influence as May 13 cemented the supremacy of an ethnocentric national identity while suppressing challenges to it. Lim's academic and other literary writings also attest to the lasting significance of the May 13 Incident on this contestation of national identity. For example, in "The Breaking of a Dream: May 13th, Malaysia," she characterizes the May 13 Incident as an epochal event that marks the shift to a "race-based-hierarchical [and] Malay-supremacist . . . new normal," a new normal that is "all a couple of generations of Malaysians have experienced" (44). Lim also articulates a similar position in her autobiography *Among the White Moon Faces*, in

[27] For a discussion on the shifting racial formations of Chinese Malaysians in relation to varied politico-historical events preceding and following the May 13 Incident—events including British colonization of Malaya, the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, British counter-insurgency efforts against the Malayan Communist party, the implementation of the New Economic Policy following the May 13 Incident, and contemporary Chinese investment in the Malaysian economy—see Lee.

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which she deems the May 13 Incident a "bloody revolution that changed Malaysia from the ideal of a multicultural egalitarian future . . . to the Malay-dominant race-preferential practice in place today" (136). In her poem "Song of an Old Malayan," Lim similarly condemns an ethnocentric model of national identity that depends on exclusion. In this poem, the persona criticizes ethnocentric nationalists for reducing minorities as the Other to their "history's self" while "sell[ing] [them] . . . down the river / of nationalism," profiting from their exclusion by collecting the "gold flecks" while they "sink silently to the stream's muddy bottom" (*Modern Secrets* 97). In this poem, Lim vividly depicts how this shift into an ethnocentric national identity after the May 13 Incident allows ethnonationalists to reap socio-economic benefits at the expense of Othered minorities.

Joss and Gold also attests to the lasting significance of the May 13 Incident by portraying its lingering aftermath. As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the politico-economic structural changes accompanying a shift into an ethnocentric national identity after May 13 took shape through the New Economic Policy (NEP), a raced-based economic policy that "filters into" subsequent Malaysian "economic polic[ies] and development goals" (Tyson 193). The NEP and its subsequent "race-based economic policies" have occasioned Malaysia's persisting brain drain, as acknowledged in 2013 by Mustapha Mohamed, then the minister of economic affairs (Tyson 179). In Lim's novel, the phenomenon of a brain drain is similarly depicted as one of the lingering repercussions of the May 13 Incident. In a school reunion in 1981 that celebrates the Penang Free School Centennial, Li An informs her classmate Alex Yeo that "[l]ots of Malaysians leave" because "[s]ome of [them] can't succeed in Malaysia" (172). During Ching Ming—the Tomb Sweeping Day—in 1981, Ellen's mother similarly highlights

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

the phenomenon of a brain drain when she exclaims that "[s]o many children now go far away and never return" as Ellen's father attends to the Chan family's grave since their closest relations are "now in Canada" (240). Apart from the "brain drain" of educated Malaysians including Li An and Ellen, the May 13 Incident is also depicted in Lim's novel as leaving a gnawing wound on the psyche of the survivors who remain. For example, Mrs. Yeh—who witnessed her husband Mr. Yeh's death during the May 13 Incident—needs "someone around all the time for company" and has "never been able to be alone since" (231-32). The May 13 Incident is thus represented in Lim's novel as exerting a lasting influence at both politico-economic and psycho-social levels, affecting the lives of characters who emigrate as well as those who remain.

In this section, I have discussed how *Joss and Gold* represents the May 13 Incident as an epochal event that marks the shift to an ethnocentric national identity—a reading that can be readily supplemented by Lim's academic writings, autobiography, and poems. In the next section, I will focus in more detail on the transnational elements in the novel to examine how *Joss and Gold* pushes beyond a national frame to situate the May 13 Incident in a wider Cold War context.

II. American Cold War Militarism: Peace Corps Volunteers, R&R, and the *Bui Doi*

Traversing three different nation-states and depicting an entangled and syncretic mix of cross- cultural relationships among different nationals in these sites, *Joss and Gold* invites critical inquiries into the dynamics between the transnational and the national in Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore. Some critics, however, have tended to overemphasize the national and consequently neglect the complex intersections between

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the transnational and the national. For example, while recognizing the "transnational setting and scope" of the novel (16), Quayum focuses on unravelling its attempt to "dismantle all vertical hierarchies" in the "inextricably entwined" discourses of nation and gender ("Nation" 16-17). Quayum therefore dwells on contesting models of nationalism and sexual politics in Malaysia, the US, and Singapore without attending to the intersections between these sites. Take his discussion of Book I "Crossing" as an example: Quayum contrasts Abdullah's and Samad's "homogenizing" and "monolithic model of nationalism" that espouses "cultural purity" and "isolationism" (19) with Li An's "inclusive" vision of a Malaysian national identity that is gradually forged through a "synergy of cultures" and an "accommodat[ion] . . . to the differences within" via "processual dialogism" (21) and relegates the transnational element— the American Peace Corps volunteer Chester—to a "mouthpiece of Abdullah and Samad" (20). In contrast, other critics who dwell on the significance of the transnational elements within the national have tended to focus on the relationship between Chester and the protagonist Li An and their Amerasian daughter Suyin. Feng, for example, argues that the representations of Chinese Malaysian women in *Joss and Gold* intervene in "Malaysian national history within a transnational framework" (142)—the consequences of the May 13 Incident are represented indirectly through Li An's "bodily experience" with Chester (144) while the resulting Amerasian daughter Suyin embodies this encounter between the First World and the Third World through her material "hybrid body" (145). Similarly dwelling on the cross-cultural relationship between Li An and Chester, Joan Chiung-huei Chang maintains that their shifted power dynamic in Book III—in comparison to Book I— inverts the Madame Butterfly myth by deconstructing the images of the "vulnerable East and the heroic West" (160-61). Feng

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

and Chang thus carefully attend to the transnational within the national—in Malaysia and Singapore—through inquiries into the cross-cultural relationship between Li An and Chester and their Amerasian daughter Suyin. However, their persistent focalization on Li An and Chester risks engendering binary interpretations—the East and the West, the First World and the Third World—that threaten to homogenize both ends of the dichotomy.

To attend to the transnational within the national—more specifically to traces of the American empire operating in various Asian sites in *Joss and Gold*—without homogenizing them or resorting to binarisms, I will draw on the critical insights of other key critics such as Jodi Kim and Chih-ming Wang, along with Kuan-Hsing Chen's insights in *Asia as Method*. Both Kim and Wang regard Asia and America as mutually constitutive and interconnected. Arguing that Asian American critique cannot be contained within the "unsophisticated and exhausted identity politics" of the Asian American "minority subject" in America (7), Kim reconfigures Asian American critique as an "*analytic*, which is decidedly not a reified identity category, for apprehending the specificity of American empire in Asia in the second half of the twentieth century" (10). Kim thus helpfully situates Asian American critique beyond the borders of America and instead highlights the interconnected histories of Asia and America, an interconnection and entanglement occasioned by American militarism in Asia during the Cold War. Wang similarly espouses an understanding of the interconnected histories of Asia and America in his formulation of "Asia/America" that considers both not as "independent political entities, each with its own uncontaminated history, but instead as mutually constitutive conditions" (*Transpacific* 88). Kim's and Wang's insights about the mutually constitutive conditions of Asia and America thus point to the intersections and

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

entanglements of the transnational and the national—a discussion of an Asian nation state will entail a discussion of its transnational entanglement with America due to their mutually constitutive conditions, which are at times fostered by US Cold War militarism in Asia.

To avoid homogenization and binarisms in my understanding of the mutually constitutive histories of Asia and America, I also seek to draw upon Chen's method of "inter-referencing" (223) that dwells on "multiple reference points" (253) in Asia and posits the West as "bits and fragments" that become "internal to the local" (223). Inspired by this inter-referential framework, Wang regards Asia as an "interactive plurality" ("Asian American" 64) and reframes Asian American critique as a "composite site of inter-Asian and transpacific relations" ("Editorial Introduction" 165).[28] Drawing on these insights about the mutually constitutive histories of Asia and America occasioned by US imperialism operating during the Cold War, my reading will foreground Chester's role in Lim's novel as a Peace Corps volunteer and the US Peace Corps' role in this text. Drawing on Chen's inter-referential framework of understanding Asia and Wang's call to pluralize an interactive Asia, I will then focus on inter-Asian entanglements between Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore—entanglements engendered by US militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia during the Cold War. In doing so, I seek to ask: how can we attend to the specificities of American empire in Asia during the Cold War, especially in this case in Malaysia? What are the interconnections

[28] Although she similarly attends to the mutually constitutive conditions of Asia and America, Kim differs from Wang in her configuration of Asian American critique as her configuration is more US-centered. Kim conceptualizes Asian American critique as an "unsettling hermeneutic" that diagnoses the "identity politics . . . of the U.S. nation in the latter half of the twentieth century: the Cold War" (10). In contrast, Wang is conscious of the "politics of location" in "reorienting Asian American studies through Asia" ("Editorial" 165) and thus stresses the "geocultural pluralities" of Asia and "inter-Asia conversations" about Asian America in his reframing of Asian American critique in Asia ("Asian American" 63).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

engendered by US Cold War militarism, especially between the US, Malaysia, and Singapore as shown in Book III of Lim's novel?

Drawing on Kim's reconfiguration of Asian American critique as an analytic, I will now turn to the interconnected histories of Malaysia and America occasioned by American imperialism during the Vietnam War. According to Kim, American Cold War "imperial governmentality" operates predominantly —but not exclusively—through "nonterritorial" and "neoimperial forms of political, economic, military, and cultural domination" including tactics such as "military intervention or occupation, war, treaties, mutual security agreements, . . . economic support or aid, [and] humanitarian aid" (18). In my discussion of Lim's novel, I seek to foreground these various forms of governmentality to attend to the specificities of American empire in Malaysia as it was manifested in the Rest and Recreation programme and the American Peace Corps volunteers.

The US considered its war effort in Vietnam during the Vietnam War as "aid to Malaysia" because the efforts contributed to Malaysia's security (Sodhy 45). Malaysian political leaders concurred as they too subscribed to the domino theory which claimed that Southeast Asian countries would fall like dominoes to communism once South Vietnam fell to the communist North Vietnam forces (45). With this concern for national security in mind, Malaysia—with British support—aided the US war effort in Vietnam during the Cold War by continuing to train South Vietnamese officers in "counter-insurgency and police administration" (Sodhy 45),[29] secretly shipping South Vietnamese

[29] Before Malaya's independence in 1957, Britain involved Malaya in its assistance to the US war effort in Vietnam by training "American, Vietnamese and Australian soldiers to take counter-insurgency courses at the British Jungle Warfare Training School in Malaya" (Sodhy 42). Pre-independence Malaya thus became complicit in the Cold War genealogy of violence due to its colonial subjugation by Britain. Post-independence Malaysia remained complicit in Cold War violence in Vietnam by deciding to continue the training of South Vietnamese soldiers and officers.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

armed forces more "police equipment" and weapons in 1961 since the Malayan communist Emergency ended in 1960 (Wong 268), and sharing the anti-communist strategies employed by British colonial authorities such as the forced resettlement of Chinese villagers in "New Villages" and the use of defoliant chemicals for chemical warfare (Sodhy 43-44)—strategies that were transposed into the Vietnam War context as the 1962 "strategic hamlet programme" and the US's deadly defoliant chemicals Agent Orange (Sodhy 44).[30] In addition, the Malaysian government also allowed US soldiers in Vietnam to visit Malaysia for their Rest and Recreation (R&R) programme (Ang 30), in particular in Kuala Lumpur and Penang (Stubbs 119). In *Joss and Gold*, Ellen criticizes this programme for its perceived detriments to Malaysian society. In a conversation with Chester, she exclaims, "[y]ou Americans are a terrible influence. Marijuana, R and R, Vietnam GIs. Suddenly got prostitutes everywhere. Where Malaysia like this before?" (90) Ellen thus attributes the exacerbating social phenomena of drug abuse and prostitution in Kuala Lumpur—the setting of Book I of the novel where this conversation takes place—to the Vietnam GIs on R&R leave. Through Ellen's criticism, *Joss and Gold* points to Malaysia's quiet support of American militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia during the Cold War—support including much more than just allowing Vietnam GIs to visit Malaysia for R&R[31]—and thus helps

[30] The British sprayed herbicide on Malayan crops in an effort to fight against "communist guerrillas" in the early 1950s, herbicide that was "almost identical to the deadly 'Agent Orange' . . . widely used during the Vietnam War" according to British government records (Sodhy 44). The Americans not only received British advice on conducting "chemical warfare in the jungles of Vietnam" but also British help in the chemical warfare with the "substances invented and perfected at the British Government's Chemical Defence Research Establishment at Porton Down" (44).

[31] It makes sense that Ellen—an ordinary Malaysian—as she is depicted in the novel can only know of the R&R programme and its ties with the Vietnam War. Many of the Malaysian measures to support the American war effort in Vietnam were carried out surreptitiously—Malaysia started supplying the South Vietnamese government with weapons secretly because this action violated Article 17 of the Geneva Agreement (Wong 268). The Malaysian connection in the use of chemical warfare in Vietnam was only revealed in 1984 when British government records were released under a "thirty-year secrecy rule" (Sodhy 44).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

to illuminate the interconnected histories of Malaysia and America that were engendered by US Cold War militarism.

More conspicuous than these quiet measures of support is the presence in Lim's novel of Chester—an American Peace Corps volunteer. The American Peace Corps' ties with the US Cold War effort remain a contested matter. The 35th US President John F. Kennedy regarded the Peace Corps as a supplement to the Cold War effort that was not prosecuted vigorously enough under the Eisenhower Administration (May 285-86). By sending Americans abroad under the Peace Corps program, President Kennedy claimed that these American missionaries of "freedom" would overcome "Mr. Khrushchev's missionaries" who strove to "undermin[e] that freedom" (Kennedy qtd. in May 286). President Kennedy thus conceived of the Peace Corps as another Cold War measure to fight against the encroachment of the communist Soviet Union. However, R. Sargent Shriver and Harris Wofford—the men appointed by President Kennedy to organize the Peace Corps—conceived it not as a "weapon in the Cold War" but a "genuine experiment in international partnership" (Shriver qtd. in May 287). After Shriver's relentless lobbying in the halls of Congress (May 288), the Peace Corps Act passed the US Congress on 22 September 1961—an Act that set three goals for the Peace Corps: the first goal was to supply host nations' needs for "trained individuals," and the second and third goals were to promote "mutual understanding" between US citizens and the peoples of the host nations ("Peace Corps" 365). The latter goals of the Peace Corps also served the overall "Cold War anticommunist strategy" since they created a "positive image for the United States in the Third World" ("Peace Corps" 364). The Peace Corps' alleged ties with the US Cold War anti-communist strategy have also been bolstered by the criticism of it being "guilty of . . . cultural imperialism" because of its

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

mission to spread American values of democracy and freedom that would inspire Third World countries to "shed their traditions" and change (May 315), presumably according to the model of American values of democracy instead of the USSR's communist ideals.

In Lim's novel, Chester Brookfield is depicted as taking some of the goals of the Peace Corps to heart—he spends "as much time as he [can]" with Malaysians from different ethnic groups to the point that he doesn't "have time for other Westerners" (30) in accordance with the "Peace Corps mentality" (74); he exerts himself in his Malay lessons to the point that he can read Malay better than Li An after six months of lessons (60). However, does he promote mutual understanding between Malaysians and Americans after all his efforts? Or is he guilty of cultural imperialism in spite of his apparently good intentions? Chester certainly appears to learn a lot about Malaysian Malays' political views from his roommates Abdullah and Samad. In a dinner with Li An and Henry, Chester asserts that "Malay is the only real culture in this country [Malaysia]" and the "Chinese aren't really Malaysian" because they "speak Chinese and live among themselves" instead of assimilating into the "original" local Malay culture (33-34). However, his exclusionary views of Chinese Malaysians echo—as recognized by Li An—the ethnocentric "ultra-Malay politicians" who threaten to "kick the Chinese out of" Malaysia (34). Against this homogenizing vision of Malaysian identity, Li An problematizes the idea of the original by pointing out that "Islam came from Saudi Arabia" and that some Malays are recent immigrants from Indonesia whereas some Chinese has been in Malaysia for "five or six generations" (34). She then proposes a *rojak* vision of Malaysian identity that claims that the Malaysian identity is "champor-champor, mixed, rojak" (34), a mixed identity that I discussed above enabling Chinese and Indians to also be Malaysians in Malaysia (35). In contrast, Chester's ethnocentric

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Malaysian identity that echoes the ultra-Malays' views appears inadequate and limited —an inadequate understanding that further points to the danger of Peace Corps volunteers bolstering the dominant logic of ethnonationalists at the expense of the Othered minorities. As he is depicted in Lim's novel, Chester also seems to strengthen what Kim identified as American cultural domination as he claims Li An's *rojak* theory of Malaysian identity as being "almost" American (35). Through the figure of Chester, *Joss and Gold* thus seems to suggest that the American Peace Corps can be a neoimperial force of cultural domination as its volunteers at times become complicit in the cultural domination of the ethnonationalists in their host nations and at times impose an American cultural logic onto local articulations of national identity.

Another perhaps more apparent example of Chester becoming complicit in American neoimperial cultural domination during the Cold War is his interpretation of Gina's and Paroo's suicide. Chester imposes a Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation on the interracial couple's suicide—a psychoanalytic theory that was popularized and entered mainstream American culture after World War II ("Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory" 182)—and declares in Lim's novel that Gina committed suicide because of her "Electra complex" (47), a "universal psychological problem" that makes her want to "marry her father" instead of being with Paroo (47). Chester thus arguably becomes complicit in American cultural domination by foisting a popular American cultural logic of understanding psychological problems onto Gina's suicide instead of considering the "race barriers" (48) that had been erected by Gina's "Confucian" father who would disown her if she marries a "keling-kwei, a Tamil devil" (42) and Paroo's Punjabi mother who "cries every day" and tries to set him up with "college lad[ies]" from India after hearing about his relationship with Gina (25). Chester facilitates this cultural logic

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

by positing an American cultural lens as a presumably universal lens of understanding psychological problems—here by attributing Gina's suicide to Gina's Electra complex, a psychological problem that is supposedly universal according to his Freudian reading—instead of attending to the specificities of the local socio-cultural context.

In short, Chester seems to be unsuccessful in his efforts to achieve the second and third goals of the Peace Corps in Malaysia.[32] Instead of promoting mutual understanding, he becomes complicit in American neoimperial cultural domination through bolstering ethnonationalism at the expense of minorities in Malaysia, his imposition of American cultural logics onto local articulations of national identity, and his universalizing of an American lens in understanding psychological problems. By depicting a Peace Corps volunteer's evident complicity in neoimperial cultural domination, *Joss and Gold* points to the Peace Corps' controversial ties with an American Cold War anti-communist strategy—ties established by the criticism of its involvement in cultural imperialism. By presenting Ellen's criticism of the Rest and Recreation programme, Lim's novel also reveals Malaysia's quiet support of US militarism in Vietnam during the Cold War—support that renders Malaysian and American histories interconnected and implicates Malaysia in US imperial projects.

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[32] Another example where Chester's efforts to promote mutual understanding fall short is manifested when he denies this mutuality altogether. Reflecting back on his Peace Corps term in Malaysia, Chester feels that he has "had enough of difference for a lifetime" (152). Instead of understanding the differences he encounters in Malaysia, he finds these differences "oppressive" and later seeks comfort in books on anthropology that "taught him to study people rather than get mixed up with them" (153). In other words, he relegates the people with perceived differences as the Other and an object of study instead of subjects he should enter into relations with to promote mutual understanding. This denial of mutuality and interconnection becomes more apparent in Chester's criticism of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. After watching it, Chester claims that "Asia was independent of the West . . . [and] did not need America to know itself" and it is because of this taking "too much heed of the other" that the US had "gone wrong in Vietnam" (202). Insofar as Chester's criticism is made after the fact—after the Vietnam War—this denial of interconnections between Asia and America risks deflecting the US's responsibility in causing harm in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Drawing from Chen's and Wang's understanding of Asia as an inter-referential and interactive plurality, I now wish to investigate how the American war effort in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia during the Cold War fostered interconnections between Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore as these sites are depicted in *Joss and Gold*. In Lim's novel, Vietnamese refugees and Amerasians figure and point to such interconnections. However, the Malaysian authorities are depicted in Lim's novel as forcefully denying these interconnections. In a conversation with Chester who comes to Singapore eleven years later in 1981 to reconnect with his daughter Suyin after his vasectomy, Abdullah voices the Malaysian official viewpoint towards Vietnamese refugees whose boats landed mostly on the East coast of peninsular Malaysia. Despite the aforementioned Malaysian governmental support of South Vietnamese and American forces during the Vietnam War, Abdullah—a Malaysian government authority figure who is the "officer-in-charge" when the Vietnamese boat refugees start arriving (189)—considers the refugees as an "American problem" (189). For him, the Vietnamese Amerasians—the "*bui doi*, children of the dust"—are "American dirt [the Americans] leave behind in Asia" (189). Abdullah thus elides and ignores Malaysia's complicity in American militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia while denigrating mixed-race people as "dirt."

Abdullah not only considers the Vietnamese refugees and Amerasians as responsibilities that the US foists on Malaysia; he also considers them as catalysts for the American empire to exert neoimperial control over Malaysia. He claims that these boat refugees arrive like "sand crabs" because the "Americans promise them the golden mountain," promises that the Americans don't fulfill because they want these refugees to "stay in Malaysia" (189). He points to the American media as an agent that exerts

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

neoimperial control as the American "newspaper carry bad stories about [Malaysia]" when it tries "to send [the boat refugees] away" (189). Abdullah here is perhaps referring to the notorious Hai Hong freighter incident. Robert Hopkins Miller—the US ambassador to Malaysia in the late 1970s and 1980s— describes the Hai Hong as a "dilapidated" freighter carrying Vietnamese refugees who subsisted in "conditions of overcrowding, undernourishment, disease, and filth" (182), a freighter of refugees that the Malaysian government decided to "[tow] out to sea" to prevent the refugees from landing (182). For Miller, this decision understandably attracted the "world press's . . . outrage" at Malaysia's "inhuman[ity]" (182). In contrast to Miller's representation of the Malaysian government's inhumanity in a humanitarian crisis, the Malaysian scholar Zakaria Haji Ahmad asserts that the Malaysian government considered the passengers of Hai Hong to be "illegal immigrants" instead of refugees because their "means of escape" in such "large numbers" arguably showed that their escapes were "officially sanctioned and organized" (67). Ahmad also claims that the US had been deliberately slow in resettling the Vietnamese refugees in Malaysia (69), a claim that resonates with Abdullah's allegation in Lim's novel that the US wanted these boat refugees to stay in Malaysia (189). By referencing US media pressure on Malaysia and the impression that the US authorities wanted the boat refugees to remain in Malaysia, *Joss and Gold* stages a power struggle between the US and Malaysia during a moment of humanitarian crisis.

Abdullah also deems the Vietnamese Amerasians—the *bui doi*—as "American dirt" that Americans leave behind after the Vietnam War (189). Amerasians were persecuted in Vietnam because of the proliferation of an anti-American campaign after the Vietnam War (Valverde 146). They faced difficulties in self-definition because in Vietnamese culture "identity and self-definition are derived through patriarchal lineage," while

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

many Amerasians were abandoned by their American fathers (Valverde 146-47). They also suffered from "racial abuse" as others insulted them with racial epithets such as "*con lai* (half-breed), *my lai* (American mix), . . . *my den* (Black American)" (Valverde 127) and "*bui doi* (dust of life)" (Võ 243). In *Joss and Gold*, Li An's Amerasian daughters Suyin suffers from these racial epithets when she is misrecognized as a Vietnamese Amerasian in Singapore. Li An has to transfer her to the American school because the principal of the missionary school calls her a "con lai, a mixed animal" (170). In Cho Kang high school, these racial epithets are hurled at Suyin along with the taunting of her fatherless state—on her first day of class, Suyin hears someone say, "No father, lah, so sinful. Can see got white father, mah!" (192). Seemingly like Vietnamese Amerasians in Vietnamese society, Suyin also faces verbal abuse from Singaporeans because of her mixed heritage and her fatherless state. In the novel, the translation of *con lai* as "mixed animal" also points to the dehumanization of Amerasians. Suyin is further dehumanized when the Chinese language teacher at Cho Kang casts her as Madam White Snake on Chinese drama night and asks her to wriggle mutely on stage, signifying her status as the "[f]emale, snaky, hissing, nonhuman, non-Chinese-speaking freak of Cho Kang secondary school" (207). Through Suyin's misrecognition as a Vietnamese Amerasian, *Joss and Gold* portrays struggles that a mix-raced subject faces in Singapore—yet another patriarchal and patrilineal society. At the end of the novel, however, Suyin redefines and meditates on what it means to be a "mixed breed devil"—she has relations living in "Kuala Lumpur, in Singapore, in America. Here, there, and everywhere"; moreover, she can "find out about her other father" in America once she is eighteen (255). As she is depicted in Lim's novel, Suyin embodies past inter-Asian

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

entanglements and Asia's interconnections with America while also seeking future possibilities of negotiating new inter-Asian and transpacific relationships.

How can we attend to the specificities of the American empire in Asia during the Cold War, especially in this case in Malaysia? What are the interconnections engendered by US Cold War militarism? In this section, I have addressed the first question by examining the at- times discreet Malaysian measures of aiding the American war efforts in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia, the direct criticisms of the Rest and Recreation programme voiced by Lim's characters, and the novel's portrayal of the Peace Corps' ties with American Cold War anti-communist strategies through its depiction of Chester Brookfield. To address the second question, I have shown how in Lim's novel the Malaysian authorities considered Vietnamese refugees and Amerasians as responsibilities of the US and attempted to deny Malaysia's complicity in US Cold War militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia. Through the Amerasian character Suyin, the novel also shows how Amerasians in Singapore face apparently similar problems as their Vietnamese counterparts—both are denigrated because of their mixed-race identities and their presumed fatherless status. However, a hopeful Suyin planning to establish new relations with her American and Malaysian fathers at the end of Lim's novel points to the possibility that characters emerging out of these histories can also act as subjects who seek new inter-Asian and transpacific relationships.

III. Conclusion: Social Classes and the May 13 Incident

In this chapter, I have examined the process of contestation depicted in Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* between an ethnocentric and a multicultural national identity as well as the May 13 Incident's lasting impact on the lives of characters in Malaysia and in the

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Malaysian diaspora. I have examined how the novel represents the May 13 Incident as an epochal event that marks the shift to an ethnocentric national identity. I have then turned to the transnational elements and inter-Asian entanglements represented in the novel to examine how it resituates the May 13 Incident in a wider Cold War context. Doing so reveals Malaysia's entanglement in the US militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia.

To lead to the next chapter, it is helpful to revisit one of the main causes of the May 13 Incident that *Joss and Gold*—echoing the official National Operations Council report—offers: namely the violent conflict being a "spontaneous outrage against economic oppressors" (92). The NOC report presented this analysis by depicting Malaysian Malays as becoming increasingly anxious about their "adverse economic position" in a "politico-economic world . . . created by the immigrant race" (NOC 5); Lim's novel apparently echoes the report by depicting Chinese Malaysians as inadvertently becoming the "economic oppressors" through their "arrogant Chinese overreaching of goals" (91-92). Both the NOC report and *Joss and Gold* thus seem to represent the May 13 Incident as a class conflict as well as a racial conflict. However, while in Lim's novel rich Chinese Malaysians such as Henry's father Mr. Yeh are depicted as victims of the May 13 Incident (83), these upper-class Chinese Malaysians remains privileged as Henry inherits his father's business and becomes a wealthy Chinese businessman (175). In addition, while the novel depicts Malay Malaysians rising to prominent economic and political positions a decade after the May 13 Incident (172), the Malay characters depicted as rising to these prominent positions— Abdullah and Samad—are graduates of the University of Malaya who are before the conflict already part of the Malay elites (44). Lim's autobiography *Among the White Moon Faces* elaborates on this point by

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

observing that those Malays who are "already posted high among the elite . . . had more directly to gain than less well-situated Malays" (136). *Joss and Gold* thereby depicts the May 13 Incident as having a minimal impact on the class structure of Malaysia—the wealthy Chinese Malaysians remain privileged while the Malay elite apparently benefit from the socio-political structural changes after the violent conflict. Yet how did the May 13 Incident influence or impact lower-class Chinese, Indians, and Malays? What sorts of stories may be told about their lives? These questions will be further explored in the next chapter.

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Chapter Three

Evening is the Whole Day: The May 13 Incident and the Discourse of Class

The official National Operations Council report—as introduced in Chapter One—framed the May 13 Incident as a Sino-Malay racial conflict, a framing that has subsequently been adopted by multiple historians. This framing raises further questions: how are Malaysian Indians situated within this supposedly Sino-Malay conflict? How did the conflict affect them?[33] In the previous chapter, I argued that Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* portrays the May 13 Incident as exerting minimal impact on the class structure of Malaysia since it depicts wealthy Chinese Malaysians remaining privileged and the Malay elites prospering because of the socio-political structural changes after the violent conflict. This depiction also raises further questions: how did the May 13 Incident influence lower-class Malaysians, including Malaysian Indians? What kind of stories may be told about their lives?

Featuring a middle-class Malaysian Indian family with working-class Indian and Malay servants, Preeta Samarasan's novel *Evening is the Whole Day* offers opportunities for its readers to attempt to answer these questions. As Samarasan mentions in an essay entitled "The Deepest Wounds" appended to the novel, *Evening is the Whole Day* was begun in 1999 and published in 2008. It focuses narrowly on events surrounding the Rajasekharans from September 1979 to September 1980—events that

[33] Malaysian Indians had influenced—and were influenced by—the May 13 Incident. They were active in both the incumbent Alliance government—the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) was one of the three communalist parties that constituted the Alliance (Comber 58)—and Opposition parties such as Gerakan in 1969 when the May 13 Incident unfolded. Photos and testimonies included in then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman's memoir *May 13: Before and After* show that many Malaysian Indians participated in the Gerakan party's victory procession in Kuala Lumpur (80-81), a procession that heightened racial tensions and led to the May 13 Incident according to the NOC report (29-33). Out of the 196 deaths officially reported after May 13, 13 of them were Indians (NOC Table 1).

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lead to Paati's death, Uma's departure to the US, and Chellam's expulsion from the Rajasekharan household. Divided into ten dated chapters, the novel's main narrative is written in the present tense in a reverse temporal order—moving backward from Chellam's departure in 1980 to her arrival in 1979. Interspersed among these backward-moving dated chapters, five undated chapters are written in the past tense and move forward in time from 1899 to 1978. This forward-moving strand of the narrative serves as the backstory to the main narrative by providing details about the family background of the Rajasekharans and, by extension, historical details about Malaysia—including Raju's grandfather's immigration to colonial Malaya, Raju's father Tata's education and upward social mobility, the advent of Malaysia's independence, Raju's aspirations for full political participation, Raju's marriage with Vasanthi, the May 13 Incident, and Raju's molestation of Uma.[34]

Samarasan's novel situates its narration of the May 13 Incident in the middle of this double narrative structure right before the climax of the main narrative—namely the death of Paati.[35] In doing so, the novel represents the violent conflict as a culmination of

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[34] The forward-moving nature of these undated chapters in Samarasan's novel has inspired critics such as Erwin to emphasize the metaphorical link the novel establishes between the Rajasekharan family history and Malaysian history and argue—following Homi Bhabha and Walter Benjamin—that these chapters constitute a "pedagogical narration" that depicts the nation as "moving forward 'as one'" through the "'homogeneous, empty time' of ineluctable progress," a progression that culminates in the May 13 Incident (199-200). Although I concur with Erwin's observation about the aforementioned metaphorical link, I argue that these undated chapters don't necessarily portray only the progression of the Rajasekharan family and by extension the nation. For example, in the third undated chapter "After Great Expectations" that comes right before the chapter that supposedly depicts the climax of the pedagogical narration the May 13 Incident, the narrator presents not only the disappointment in the marriage between Raju and Vasanthi (91, 96-97) but also racialized political discourse that heightens interracial tensions (99, 106). The portrayal of the disappointment within the Rajasekharan household and the disunity within the nation in this undated chapter thus disrupts the supposedly inevitable progression and the homogeneity of the pedagogical narration.

[35] In an interview entitled "Only the Past Has It" appended to the novel, Samarasan clarifies that this double narrative structure strove to "mimic the way memory work[ed]" and the way we remembered past events (4). She argues that past events were lent with "gravity," "weight and significance" in our memory because of our awareness of their "final consequences" (3). By situating the ending of the main narrative at the very beginning of the novel, Samarasan approximates the workings of memory and poignantly infuses events in the backward moving main narrative of the text.

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tensions generated by colonial racial divides. Focusing on the character Raju and the structural similarity between the narration of May 13 and the narration of the framing of Shamsuddin and Chellam, I will discuss how *Evening is the Whole Day* situates Malaysian Indians within the May 13 Incident to unsettle its presumed racialized framing with the discourse of class. By noting the parallels Samarasan's novel establishes between the servant Chellam and Uma Rajasekharan, I will point out not only the heterogeneity of and class divides within a racialized community, but also how migration—as an escape from the ethnocentric hegemony of the nation—is only available for the privileged. By emphasizing the parallels Samarasan's novel establishes between Chellam and Vasanthi, I will further argue that—in contrast to the transnational mobility of Uma—the upward social mobility Chellam hopes to achieve through marriage is fragile and unstable.

I. Lingering Colonial Legacies

The portrayal of the transition from colonial Malaya to postcolonial Malaysia in the undated chapters of *Evening is the Whole Day* has inspired critics to trace the lingering legacies of colonialism in supposedly postcolonial Malaysia as it is represented in Samarasan's novel. With the metaphorical link between the Rajasekharans and the nation in mind,[36] many of these critics—including Lee Erwin, Carol Leon, and Show Ying Xin—do so by highlighting that the local born Tata buys from a departing British colonizer Mr. McDougall the Rajasekharan family home, a house that is haunted by the

[36] For critics such as Erwin and Poon, this metaphorical link is established when Samarasan's novel depicts Tata switching on the chandelier at precisely the same moment as when the first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman declares the independence of Malaya (Erwin 200; Poon 22). For Leon, it is established when the narrator moves from a description of peninsular Malaysia to a portrayal of the Rajasekharan household (123).

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ghost of Mr. McDougall's illegitimate daughter (Erwin 202; Leon 124; Show 131). Show traces the lingering colonial legacies further into the chronologically ordered backstory by arguing that the "discourse of May 13 in effect colludes with colonialism" (131). She articulates this collusion between the May 13 Incident and colonial discourse by quoting a key passage from Samarasan' novel. In this passage, Malaysians are represented as forgetting their "contempt for the views of the departed British" and hurling their "old master's stereotypes" at each other like "star pupils" during the violent conflict, stereotypes including "*[c]oolie*," "*[v]illage idiot fed on sambal petai,*" and "*[s]lit-eyed pig eater*" (121; emphasis in original). In this section, I will elaborate on these ties between colonialism and the May 13 Incident by first tracing the origins of these colonial racial stereotypes.

Coolie, village idiot, pig eater—these colonial racial stereotypes are depicted as being hurled around during the May 13 Incident in Samarasan's novel, along with the epithet "*[m]oney-minded ancestor worshippers*" (127; emphasis in original). These racial stereotypes were a part of the British colonial "divide-and-rule" strategy as the British colonizers deployed a racial ideology to pit one racial group against the other, to create "social and political distance" between these racialized groups, and to confine them to "specific economic and political activities" (Koh 56). The third-person narrator of Samarasan's novel attests to the efficacy of these confining racial stereotypes by portraying Mr. McDougall and his "fellow [British] settlers"—who have "create[d]" the "people of Malaya" "[l]ike God"—watching their "word take miraculous material form"

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as Malayans "step[ ] up unquestioningly to fill the roles invented for them" (21).[37] In his narration of these racialized roles as they are invented by the British, the narrator also makes several ironic allusions to colonial racial stereotypes.[38] For example, the narrator describes the "Malay peasant sloshing about halfheartedly for a few hours . . . in the rice paddies" (21), recalling with the adverb "halfheartedly" the colonial stereotype of Malays being indolent and dull-witted (Hirschman 344) and the aforementioned epithet "*village idiot*" (121; emphasis in original).[39] Similarly, the narrator's depiction of the Chinese immigrants "sniffing his diligent way to tin and opium" (21) alludes with the adjective "diligent" to the British's "grudging admiration" for the Chinese laborers' industriousness, while with the gerund "sniffing" and its negative animalizing connotation points to the colonial stereotype of the Chinese being "greedy" (Hirschman 346) and by extension conforming to the aforementioned epithet "*[m]oney-minded*

[37] In Samarasan's novel, the British colonizers "create" the "people of Malaya" by bringing "the Chinese and Indians" to Malaya for the "raking in of taxable tin profits and the slaving under the midday sun" (21). This description needs to be qualified with further historical research. During the mid-nineteenth century, when the British still confined their colonial power to the Strait Settlements and hadn't yet taken full control of peninsular Malaya, the Malay rulers of the west coast states of the peninsula expanded tin mining by "bringing in Chinese labour" (Hirschman 336). Malaya thus was already multiracial in character before British colonization. However, when the British took full control of peninsula Malaya in the late nineteenth century, they imported "large numbers" of Chinese and Indian laborers to expand the tin and rubber industries, a number large enough to nearly "outnumber the Malay population" on the west coast (Hirschman 336). The British were thus largely responsible for the multiracial society of peninsular Malaya; however, peninsular Malaya was far from being racially homogeneous prior to their colonial expansion, a point I will return to in the Conclusion.

[38] In an interview, Samarasan clarified that she didn't "think of the narrator as female, necessarily" (Stameshkin). Samarasan instead compared the narrator of her novel to a "gossipy" "Austen narrator" and joked that "[m]aybe [her] narrator [was] a gay man" (Stameshkin). With this interview in mind, I opt to refer to the third-person narrator in *Evening is the Whole Day* with the masculine third-person singular pronoun. The narrator also often narrates the story in ironic tones in Malaysian English, an important feature of Samarasan's text which is outside the scope of this chapter.

[39] These colonial racial stereotypes of Malays being indolent and dull-witted were employed by the British colonizers to justify their control over peninsular Malaya. They supported the British paternalistic judgement that Malays lacked the ability to run their own country and thus needed British administration (Hirschman 344).

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ancestor worshipper" (121; emphasis in original).[40] The narrator also portrays the "indentured Indian" "dig[ging]" ditches for twelves hours" as "happ[ily] as a water buffalo in mud" (21), recalling with the comparison to water buffalo the colonial stereotype of Indian laborers being "docile," "malleable," and "easily manageable" in comparison to the Chinese (Sandhu 56-57)—and with the adjective "indentured" the aforementioned epithet "*coolie*" (121; emphasis in original). By alluding to colonial racial stereotypes that were weaponized during the May 13 Incident while describing the racialized roles invented by the British colonizers, the narrator of *Evening is the Whole Day* not only highlights the racial divides the British fostered with these stereotypes, but also represents the May 13 Incident as a culmination of antagonisms generated by these divides.[41]

Apart from the enduring colonial stereotypes that foreground postcolonial Malaysia's incomplete decolonization, Samarasan's novel also points to another continuity between colonial Malaya and postcolonial Malaysia in its depiction of the May 13 Incident—namely the lingering colonial politico-economic structure. The novel portrays the Malay marchers in the UMNO counter-victory procession "[k]illing and burning and howling the fury [they] have been saving up since men and women of Paati's generation had shown themselves to be nothing but sycophants of the British, fattening themselves on their filthy colonial system" (128). The gerund "fattening"—with its metaphorical association with corpulence and by extension opulence—suggests

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[40] The racial epithet "*[s]lit-eyed pig eater*" that is represented as being used against the Chinese during the May 13 Incident in Samarasan's novel (121) doesn't seem like a colonial stereotype. The phrase "pig eater" instead recalls the "Malay injunction against the eating of pork" due to their Islamic faith—a cultural trait of the Chinese that prompted the Malays to consider the Chinese as "ritually impure" (Wilson 25).

[41] Following Syed Hussein Alatas, Gabriel argues that these colonial stereotypes—instead of being dismantled—were "consolidated by the post-Independence political elite" due to their own "vested interests" (789). Koh has also made a similar argument (57).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

that the British sycophants including the grandmother Paati in Samarasan's novel have gained financially and perhaps socially from the lingering colonial politico-economic structure that oppresses these Malay marchers and exacerbates their fury.[42] The politico-economic structure the Malay marchers identify as a colonial remainder perhaps refers to the Alliance political formula, an "inter-communal accommodation" built on the "understanding that the underlying ethic of British colonial rule—that Malaya was a Malay country—was carried over . . . into the postcolonial situation" while non-Malays "were to be secure in their economic stake" (Leifer 287). In other words, the Alliance political formula was a perpetuation of what Michael Stenson calls the colonial "symbiotic relationship between Chinese capital and Malay political power" in postcolonial Malaysia ("Class and Race" 47). As many scholars have noted, this accommodation between Malay political elites and non-Malay business elites consolidated the interests of the elites instead of fulfilling the aspirations of the lower classes (Cham 449)—the "already entrenched non-Malay commerce" was protected (Stenson, "Class and Race" 47) while the lower-class Malays received "piecemeal" "economic and social amenities" (Kua, *May 13* 26) and "symbolic and sentimental appeal" instead of "concrete material benefits" (Cham 449). As discussed in Chapter One, the frustrations of lower-class Malays were transferred by the ruling elites to urban non-Malays (Cham 450), leading to outbursts of fury during the May 13 Incident.

In Samarasan's novel, the undated chapter entitled "Power Struggles" that represents the May 13 Incident is situated right before the dated chapter "What Aasha

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[42] These Malay marchers' fury against the oppressive economic system also recalls the National Operations Council report's delineation of Malaysian Malays becoming increasingly anxious about their "adverse economic condition" in a "politico-economic world created by the immigrant races" prior to the May 13 Incident (NOC 5). However, the Malay marchers in Samarasan's novel differ from the NOC report's delineation as they explicitly identify the politico-economic structure as a colonial remainder.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Saw" that depicts the aforementioned British sycophant Paati's death in the middle of the text's double narrative structure. Both chapters are arguably the climax of their respective narrative strands—Raju's scuttled political aspirations due to restrictions implemented post-May 13 depicted in the undated backstory sets off the main narrative while Paati's death serves as a culmination of the tensions within the Rajasekharan household portrayed in the reversed main narrative.[43] The juxtaposition of the climaxes of both narrative strands in the center of the double narrative structure suggests a relationship between them—more specifically a parallel between the climaxes.[44] As mentioned above, Malaysia's lingering colonial legacy including colonial racial divides exemplified by racial stereotypes and the colonial politico-economic structure leads to the climax of the back story—namely the May 13 Incident and by extension the resulting restrictive policies that occasion Raju's disappointment. Similarly, Paati the British sycophant's perpetuation of colonialist logic also leads to the climax of the main narrative—her death. Paati's belief in the colonial hierarchical social order informs her belittlement of both Vasanthi and the servant Chellam, leading to their physical abuse of her in her dotage and their neglect when she struggles not to slip and fall in the bathroom (138-39; 148-49).[45] Her ingrained submission to received hierarchies prompts her to ignore the Rajasekharan patriarch Raju's abuse of Uma (303; 306), resulting in

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[43] In an interview, Samarasan said that she thought of the novel as "Appa's [Raju's] story"—the "story of his disenchantment and apathy"—and a "book about what one person's disappointment can do to a family" (Stameshkin).

[44] Erwin argues that this juxtaposition in the center of the novel points to the "colonialist" "logic of exclusion" Paati represents, a logic that persists in post-independence Malaysia (208). While I agree with Erwin's assessment of Paati especially since she is depicted as rejecting her daughter-in-law Vasanthi due to her lower-middle-class background, I will extend this reading by arguing that this juxtaposition between the climaxes of the two strands of the narrative establishes yet another parallel between them.

[45] Paati's belief in the colonial hierarchical social order is clearly articulated when the narrative focalizes on her stream of thoughts that claims that the "order and decency of the old Malaya" where every man is "grateful for his place in life" has been abandoned "when the British left" (139).

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Uma's resentment and rage that flare up while Paati shouts abuse against the family in the bathroom and Uma's subsequent shoving of Paati that causes her fatal fall (153-54; 173-74). By establishing a parallel between the climaxes of the two narrative strands, Samarasan's novel stylistically highlights the lingering legacies of British colonialism.

In this section, I have argued that in *Evening is the Whole Day* lingering colonial legacies including the colonial racial divides illustrated by racial stereotypes and Malaysia's politico-economic structure generate tensions that erupt during the May 13 Incident. The parallel between the climaxes of the novel's two narrative strands also highlights these legacies. In the next section, I will investigate how the novel situates Malaysian Indians and the issue of class in relation to the May 13 Incident.

II. Malaysian Indians and Discourse of Class

As mentioned above, the Sino-Malay framing of the May 13 Incident offered by the official National Operations Council report begs the question: how can Malaysian Indians be situated within this framing? At first glance, *Evening is the Whole Day* seems to corroborate this Sino-Malay framing in its representation of the May 13 Incident. The narrator describes the outbreak of violence as occurring between Chinese and Malay mobs—when the Malay marchers participating in a supposedly "peaceful" counter-victory march pass through "Chinese parts of town" in Kuala Lumpur, they clash with the Chinese residents who soon "summon[ ] reinforcements" and retaliate (127). When the narrative focalizes on Malaysian Indian characters, they are portrayed as being exempted from the violence of May 13 while the Chinese are not. For example, when Ratnam the Indian taxi driver drives a pregnant Vasanthi to the hospital, they are stopped by some of the Malay marchers (131). Instead of inflicting violence on them,

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

the Malay men tell them to go home and "get a midwife" after declaring to the surrounding mobs that they are only "Orang Keling [Indians]" (132). The narrative then focalizes on Ratnam's stream of thoughts that "thank[s] all his inferior gods, they were Orang Keling, mere bloody Indians and nothing more, . . . because look at the Chinese. Look at the Chinese tonight" (132)—thoughts that focus upon the Chinese as the victims of violence. Through both the description of the narrator and the perspectives of the Indians experiencing the horrors of the conflict, Samarasan's novel appears to portray the May 13 Incident as a Sino-Malay conflict. In this section, however, I will argue that *Evening is the Whole Day* not only situates Malaysian Indians within May 13 through the character Raju Rajasekharan, but also unsettles received racialized framings of the event through the unjust convictions of lower-class characters Shamsuddin and Chellam.

Samarasan's novel situates Malaysian Indians within the supposedly Sino-Malay conflict through Raju Rajasekharan's involvement in and transformation after the May 13 Incident. An Oxford-trained lawyer who is confident about his stake in the budding nation (24; 27), Raju participates in nation building in both his public and personal life.[46] Before being summoned back to Ipoh in 1958 due to Tata's death, Raju joins an opposition party in Singapore that "believe[s] in a Malaya for all Malayans" and thus challenges Malay special rights (44).[47] Raju's multicultural and egalitarian political ideals are also partly reflected in his pursuit of Vasanthi for marriage. In defiance of and

[46] In Samarasan's novel, Raju's personal life is vividly represented as intertwined with his public life as his "first five-year plan" including "[m]arriage, children, two cars, servants, [and] a job with prospects" is considered by the narrator as being "as determined, purposeful, and specific as the nation's own" (44).

[47] Judging from the slogan "Malaya for all Malayans" and its location, the opposition party that Raju joins while he is in Singapore probably refers to the People's Action Party (PAP), a party that sought to replace the MCA in the Alliance by calling for a "Malaysian Malaysia" (Cham 450). Here it might be helpful to note that Malaysia was formed in 1963 when the Federation of Malaya—which gained independence in 1957—was federated with Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. It therefore makes sense that in Samarasan's novel PAP in the 1950s advocates for a Malayan Malaya instead of a Malaysian Malaysia.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

partially enticed by his peers' and his mother's disapproval (54), Raju chooses Vasanthi —daughter of a retired bookkeeper with only a middle school education (45-46)—as his bride with the paternalistic hope of educating her and forming her political opinions (93; 99). By thus associating himself with Vasanthi and her lower-middle-class family, Raju believes that he is embodying the spirit of "true socialism" and "taking on the real work of nation-building" (62). Prior to the May 13 Incident, Raju is thus depicted in Samarasan's novel as committed to multicultural and egalitarian ideals in both his personal and public life. In the 1969 election, Raju devotes himself to "[t]he Party['s]" ideal of a "Malaysia for all Malaysians" so much so that he is "hardly home" (107).[48] However, Raju can only abandon his political aspirations after the May 13 Incident since the Malaysian government utilizes the event to cement Malay special rights through the Sedition Act that renders the "questioning" of the New Economic Policy, "Article 153, [and] [the Malays'] master status" seditious (134).[49] With this curtailment in place, Raju "sacrifice[s] the last of his ideals to personal glory" and applies for a "prestigious job . . . in the deputy public prosecutor's office" (135).[50] Raju is thus depicted in Samarasan's novel as being involved in the May 13 Incident due to his political ideals and activities, ideals that he abandons following the event. This

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[48] Considering that Singapore was expelled from Malaysia in 1965, the opposition party that Raju works for—which is named simply "the Party" in Samrasan's novel (Samarasan, *Evening* 110)—cannot continue to be the PAP in 1969. Judging from the similar slogan "Malaysia for all Malaysians" (107), the opposition party Raju works for in 1969 may be the Democratic Action Party (DAP), a party advocating for a "Malaysian Malaysia" which was then the "five-year-old offshoot of Singapore's People's Action Party" (Rudner 3). The narrator of Samarasan's novel obliquely hints at this when he portrays Vasanthi sneering at the DAP election posters plastered all over the train station before telling her daughter Uma that her father's "cronies are all over the station" (115).

[49] In Samarasan's novel, Raju's disappointed political aspirations in his public life are also foreshadowed in his private life—namely in his marriage with Vasanthi. Instead of possessing a "raw proletarian wisdom" for Raju to "draw out and sculpt" (97), Vasanthi is portrayed as lacking intellectual curiosity and only having interest in transforming into a "rich man's wife"—a deficiency that occasions Raju "disenchantment" with his marriage (100).

[50] In Samarasan's novel, Raju himself is aware that this seemingly prestigious position is only an "illusion of power" in comparison to his previous political aspirations (135).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

abandonment of ideals leads to a stark transformation in Raju. After the May 13 Incident, the once idealistic Raju gives his servant Chellam's wages to her father Muniandy to avoid a scene (255). While doing so, he inwardly condemns Muniandy for his obsequiousness, thinking that it is the poor "*themselves who perpetuate all the bloody problems . . . because all they know is begging*" (257; emphasis in original).[51] Instead of working towards an egalitarian society, Raju now thinks that "*it's better to close [his] eyes and pretend they [the poor] don't exist*" because the "*more time [he] spend[s] with them the more [he] start[s] to see them as animals*" (257; emphasis in original). From being a socialist who fights for an egalitarian society to becoming a disenchanted cynic who prefers to ignore the supposedly animalistic poor, Raju's transformation after the May 13 Incident further attests to the influence of this event on Malaysian Indians who are subsequently denied equal participation in nation building after the event. Samarasan's novel thus situates Malaysian Indians within the May 13 Incident by portraying not only their political activities in the 1969 general election but also the effects the subsequent entrenchment of Malay special rights had on them.

Apart from depicting Malaysian Indians' political marginalization through Raju's dashed aspirations, *Evening is the Whole Day* also traces their socioeconomic marginalization. Prior to the May 13 Incident, the discourse of Malay supremacy threatens to marginalize the Malaysian Indian characters. For example, Mat Din—Raju's Malay driver—deems his employer a "glorified foreigner" and is willing to join

[51] Raju is perhaps emboldened by the Rajasekharans' working-class beginnings when he is making this criticism—his unnamed paternal grandfather is a dock worker who has migrated from the "east coast of India" (17) and yet his family has risen to a middle-class preeminence. However, historically speaking, dock workers enjoyed better mobility and hence access to better opportunities and education in comparison to estate workers like Muniandy—before the 1930s, estate workers were isolated in the rubber estate with few "significant contacts outside the workplace" and their children only had access to Tamil estate schools (Stenson, *Class* 25) that were staffed with unqualified teachers teaching in "Tamil, Malayalam, or Telugu" instead of English schools providing an education in English that could lead to better-paying jobs (Sandhu 260).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

other chauvinistic Malays—"other Mat Dins"—with similar views in their armed struggles against the "interlopers" and the "outsiders" who have "usurped" the "Malay Land" when he hears about the news of conflict on May 13, 1969 (116; 126-27). After the May 13 Incident, the resulting socioeconomic structural changes exemplified by the New Economic Policy cement the marginalization of Malaysian Indians as the narrator portrays a patronizing government official explaining that the "redistribution of wealth" under the policy will redirect "[t]hirty percent of national wealth for the Malays," a redistribution that will overlook the Indians' economic concerns since "they hardly know how to make a real fuss" (134). This socioeconomic marginalization becomes even more pronounced decades later as Raju sharply observes in 1980 that "the Malays get all the government jobs, the Chinese have their businesses, and the stupid . . . Indians are left empty-handed to slog in the factories and ditches and rubber estates" (211). Raju also articulates this socioeconomic marginalization of Malaysian Indians when he points out their lack of representation on national media. According to him, "Indian faces" only appears on television whenever the government wants to sell the "[l]ocal color" to an international audience in tourism advertisements such as the "Visit Malaysia Year 1980" advertisement (230). The facile multiculturalism this advertisement promotes is also figuratively highlighted by the "life-size cardboard ladies" from different races at the airport, cardboard figures that are meant to advertise Malaysia's "legendary Racial Harmony" to the tourists but "have no back parts whatsoever" (330). *Evening is the Whole Day* thus situates Malaysian Indians in relation to the May 13 Incident by vividly depicting their socioeconomic marginalization following the violent conflict, marginalization that is in these instances encased in a facile multiculturalism.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

By situating Malaysian Indians in relation to the May 13 Incident in these ways, Samarasan's novel may seem at times to perpetuate the official racialized framing of the event offered by the NOC report discussed in Chapter One. However, *Evening is the Whole Day* unsettles this received framing of May 13 through the unjust convictions of lower-class characters Shamsuddin and Chellam. To do so, the novel first establishes structural similarities between the narration of May 13 and the framing of both Shamsuddin and Chellam, similarities that allow these narratives to comment on one another.[52] The narrator points to the entanglement of rumor and fact during the May 13 Incident by depicting how the personified "Rumor and Fact burst forth into the noonday Kuala Lumpur heat . . . and began a salacious tango in the streets" on May 13, 1969 (120). Their dance attracts widespread public attention that allows the stories they have "spun together" to "pour[ ] like lava through the city" and exacerbate inter-racial tension to the point of violence (121). This circulation of rumors that obscure facts and exacerbates tension also occurs in the framing of Chellam, the Indian servant girl of the Rajasekharans. The widely circulated rumor about her sexual liaison with Balu Rajasekharan and consequent pregnancy damages her credibility and silences any potential protest she might have against the false accusation of murdering Paati uttered by Aasha Rajasekharan (158-59; 163-64; 172; 206).[53] Both the rumor and the false accusation are articulated and circulated by her middle-class Indian employers (158-59; 246) and her apparent powerlessness against them shows that she is marginalized in

[52] Both Show and Erwin have observed the structural similarities between the framing of Chellam and Shamsuddin (Show 133; Erwin 209). By establishing these similarities, Erwin argues that the novel exhibits a "persistent concern with class," a discourse "mystified by discourses of 'race'" (209). Show similarly contends that these similarities show that "class struggle" is "submerged in the name of racial politics" (133). I seek to extend their analysis to investigate how these similarities challenge the official racialized framing of the May 13 Incident.

[53] Pillai and Shangeetha argue that the circulation of this rumor is expedited by the stereotype of the promiscuous Indian servant woman, a colonial racialized and gendered stereotype about the female estate laborers frequently employed in postcolonial Malaysia (324-25).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

terms of gender, class, and race. By thus pointing to fissures within the Malaysian Indian community occasioned by class, Samarasan's novel challenges official racialized framings of the May 13 Incident that elide the heterogeneity within each community.

Evening is the Whole Day similarly depicts the role the personified Fact and Rumor play in the framing of Shamsuddin bin Yusof, a working-class Malay office worker who is falsely accused of raping and murdering Angela Lim, a ten-year-old Chinese school girl (73; 79). When Shamsuddin's identity card is filched on the bus, the bystanders ignore "Fact's grimaces and Rumor's goading" because "they've cultivated the patriotic skills of selective blindness, deafness, and muteness" following the May 13 Incident (243). Despite the fact that Angela Lim has been murdered by her paternal uncle (247), Shamsuddin is unjustly convicted because "the jury and the judge are on someone's secret payroll" and have "agreed on Shamsuddin's guilt . . . before the trial began" (169). The novel thus shows Shamsuddin to be deeply vulnerable on socioeconomic grounds despite being "a Malay, a Bumiputera, a prince made of Malaysia's own fertile earth" (222) who is supposed to benefit from the politico-economic structural changes after the May 13 Incident. By doing so, the novel unsettles the official racialized framing of May 13 with the discourse of class inequality that stretches across racial boundaries.

In this section, I have argued that *Evening is the Whole Day* situates Malaysian Indians within the May 13 Incident through the political involvement of Raju Rajasekharan in the 1969 election and his stark transformation following the event. Samarasan's novel also further situates Malaysian Indians in relation to this violent conflict by depicting their socioeconomic marginalization after 1969, a marginalization which is obfuscated by a facile form of multiculturalism. By establishing structural

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similarities between the narration of the May 13 Incident and the unjust convictions of Chellam and Shamsuddin, the novel also unsettles racialized framings of May 13 with depictions of class inequality that operate within and across racial boundaries. In the following section, I will elaborate on the novel's articulations of heterogeneity by turning to various forms of mobility within the Malaysian Indian community.

III. Forms of Mobility

Some critics have noted the aforementioned heterogeneity within the Malaysian Indian community laid bare by the Rajasekharans' mistreatment of their servant Chellam. For example, Dashini Jeyathurai argues that the Rajasekharans' repeated use of the epithet "rubber estate girl" reveals their "desire to distance middle-class Indians" such as themselves from the working-class Indian "bodies that represent the economic space that is the estate" (312). In their efforts to distance themselves from the lower-class Indians, Jeyathurai contends, the Rajasekharans inhabit "the gaze of the colonial administrator" by employing "colonial vocabulary" to criticize Chellam's hygiene (313). Shanthini Pillai and R. K. Shangeetha similarly assert that the Rajasekharans posit Chellam as the "objectified other of [their] middle-class Indian narrative" in order to disavow their own working-class origins (323-24). In this section, I will extend their focus on Chellam's status by examining how Samarasan's novel highlights this status through establishing a parallel between her and Uma Rajasekharan.

Evening is the Whole Day posits Chellam as the double of Uma Rajasekharan through both its structure and narration. Samarasan's novel begins and ends with the arrival and departure of Uma and Chellam. In the first chapter "The Ignominious Departure of Chellamservant Daughter-of-Muniandy," Chellam's departure is

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

juxtaposed with Uma's and the differences in their departures foreground the heterogeneity within the Malaysian Indian community engendered by class. While Uma boards an "enormous and white" airplane "bound for New York America USA" with a full suitcase that takes "a month to pack" to pursue her studies in medicine at Columbia University, Chellam drags her "mostly empty suitcase" with broken wheels to travel by foot and bus back to her "red-earth village" where she will commit suicide a year later after suffering physical abuse from her father Muniandy (3-4). In the last two chapters of the novel—"The Golden Descent of Chellam, the Bringer of Succor" and "The Glorious Ascent of Uma the Oldest-Eldest"—Chellam's arrival at the Rajasekharan household is juxtaposed with Uma's departure. As the once cheerful Uma falls silent and withdrawn after being molested by Raju, Vasanthi hires Chellam to take care of Paati and be the young children's "*New Oldest Sister*" (321; emphasis in original). After her arrival, Chellam "slip[s] her leaf-narrow feet" into "Uma's vacated shoes" and teaches the children Suresh and Aasha about superstitions and tells them ghost stories (249-50).[54] However, even in her role as Uma's double, her working-class origin is not forgotten. The children "hiss" the slur invented by them—"Chellamservant"—whenever they perceive her actions as overstepping class boundaries, "making like a real oldest-eldest when she [is] just a servant girl" (251).

A significant difference between Uma and Chellam is their varying degree of access to mobility. In Samarasan's novel, privileged middle-class Indian subjects such as Uma can escape the ethnocentric hegemony of the nation through an education abroad. Erwin identifies this form of mobility as "a cosmopolitan mobility" which is "itself a response

[54] When Chellam too has lost hope after Anand's bleak prophecy of her future, Samarasan's novel portrays her as an "echo of Uma"—a "diluted version" of Uma who shares her "ruinous silence" (220). From her initial hope to a final "ruinous silence" (220; 320), Chellam's trajectory in the Rajasekharan household again doubles Uma's.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

to discourses of 'race'" (211). Erwin here is perhaps referring to the New Economic Policy—a policy introduced soon after the May 13 Incident which was "couched under the philosophy of affirmative action" for Malaysian Malays and hence introduced limited quotas for public university placements for non-Malay Malaysians (Koh 132). The limited quotas, compounded by limited university admission spots, led to a significant increase of Malaysian students pursuing degrees overseas—in the 1980s, 41.7 percent of Malaysian students were enrolled in programs overseas (Koh 132-33). However, Uma's cosmopolitan mobility—achieved through education—is unavailable for Chellam as she lacks access to education. Instead of acquiring an education, Chellam spends her childhood dragging her drunk father from the "toddy shop," prostituting herself out of necessity to "lorry driver[s] or . . . bottle-shop [men]" to earn "two ringgit" each time, and later working as a servant to middle-class Indian families in a "slavery far less white" (3).

Instead of Uma's cosmopolitan mobility, Chellam—who is "not so naïve after seventeen years of hard knocks" (321)—nevertheless dreams of other forms of upward social mobility. Chellam initially plans to save up her wages—she "purchases a pocket-sized notebook" to keep her account (324)—in order to get "her eyes checked at the government hospital" and buy a pair of spectacles (213). For Chellam, this pair of spectacles are a "symbol of greater things," a form of self-improvement that might lead to marriage in the future (213). She thus yearns for marriage as a form of upward social mobility, a mobility that will presumably lift her away from a life of servitude and a dotage in a dismal "government old folks' home" (213). Samarasan's novel comments on this form of upward social mobility by establishing yet another parallel between Chellam and Vasanthi. Similar to Chellam who dresses gaudily in accordance to her

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

"rubber-estate tastes" and plasters the walls of her small "room under the stairs" with Indian leading men in Tamil romantic films (249-50; 252), a young prospectless lower-middle-class Vasanthi who "*dress[es] like a rubber-estate worker*" too "choke[s] [her doubt about her future] to death with lurid love scenes from Indian films" (50; 147; emphasis in original). A young Vasanthi also dreams of marriage as she observes her then next-door neighbor Raju Rajasekharan closely and studies his habits (51-52). In contrast to Chellam, Vasanthi's dream comes into fruition as she catches Raju's eyes and later enters into a marriage with him.

Vasanthi's marriage to Raju seems to grant her the upward social mobility she desires. She achieves her "transformation into rich man's wife [*sic*]" (100) by acquiring a "servant-addressing voice" (102), absorbing the upper-class "women's rules and rituals" (99) and throwing lavish tea parties—a transformation so successful that she becomes convinced that "*all that matters is money*" instead of history for these upper-class women when she perceives their jealousy (102; emphasis in original). However, Vasanthi's position in the Rajasekharan household remains precarious in spite of this successful performance of class. Her mother-in-law Paati excludes her based on the "immutable truths" of her "origins" as the "clerk's daughter from next door" (100-01) and teaches her daughter Uma that she is "not people like [them]" because she is "not as educated, not as classy, [and] not as wise" (109). As a result, Vasanthi feels like an "interloper" in the Rajasekharan household and "crie[s] like a small child in the night when no one [is] supposed to be listening" (100; 112). By thus portraying Vasanthi's hardship in transcending class boundaries, Samarasan's novel portrays marriage as a flawed channel of upward social mobility. Even after Vasanthi has achieved some semblance of upward social mobility through marriage, she doesn't appear to be more

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

empathetic towards the lower-class Indians. Her "public charity" is another necessary part of her performance of the "Society Wifehood"—namely the part of the benevolent upper-class women—and doesn't necessarily take the real needs of the recipients into account (258-59). She also construes Raju's decision to give all of Chellam's wages to her father Muniandy as part of the Rajasekharans' "noblesse oblige" towards a poor Indian family instead of as an exploitation of Chellam, who is working without pay (236-37).

In this section, I have discussed how *Evening is the Whole Day* posits Chellam as Uma's double, a doubling that highlights the heterogeneity of the Malaysian Indian community engendered by class. This doubling also reveals that Uma's cosmopolitan mobility—as an escape from the ethnocentric hegemony of the nation instituted after the May 13 Incident—is only available for the privileged. Through a parallel with Vasanthi, Samarasan's novel reveals that the upward social mobility Chellam desires to achieve through marriage is flawed and fails to solve the structural inequalities within the Malaysian Indian community, and perhaps by extension in postcolonial Malaysia as a whole.

IV. Conclusion: Narrowing the Focus

In this chapter, I have traced key colonial legacies depicted in *Evening is the Whole Day* including the colonial racial divides and politico-economic structures that led to the May 13 Incident. I have examined how Samarasan's novel not only situates Malaysian Indians within the May 13 Incident by portraying their political and socioeconomic marginalization, but also challenges official racialized framings of the event through the issue of class inequality within and across racial boundaries. I have then turned to the

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various forms of mobility represented in Samarasan's novel which further foreground the heterogeneity of the Malaysian Indian community.

As I have so far discussed in this thesis, Lim's *Joss and Gold* and Samarasan's *Evening is the Whole Day* foreground the lingering legacies of the May 13 Incident. Through the transnational elements and inter-Asian entanglements that are interwoven in Lim's text, *Joss and Gold* resituates the May 13 Incident in a wider Cold War context. With a narrative that spans a little over a decade, Lim's novel also traces the lasting influence of May 13 at both politico-economic and psycho-social levels. Similarly dwelling on the larger significance of May 13, Samarasan's novel situates the violent conflict within a narrative that spans from 1899 to 1980. This extended time span allows this novel to not only trace the colonial legacies that have engendered racial divides, but also to articulate the resulting political and socioeconomic marginalization of Malaysian Indians that have occasioned various forms of (im)mobility and structural inequality a decade after the event. Yet what will happen when a text focuses more microscopically on the May 13 Incident itself? What kinds of stories may be told about Malaysians who are mired in the horrors of the violent conflict? These questions will be further explored in the next chapter.

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Chapter Four

The Weight of Our Sky: The May 13 Incident in a Young Adult Novel and a Webcomics Series

Featuring an adolescent protagonist who struggles to reunite with her mother in the midst of the May 13 Incident, Hanna Alkaf's young adult novel *The Weight of Our Sky* offers opportunities for its readers to focus microscopically on the conflict itself.[55] Published in 2019, this text is narrated by a 16-year-old protagonist named Melati Ahmad, a Malaysian Malay schoolgirl with obsessive-compulsive disorder who is trapped in a cinema when the violent conflict erupts. Auntie Bee saves her from the murderous mobs and offers her shelter at her Malaysian Chinese family's household. In the Chong household, Melati faces the hostility of a racially chauvinistic Frankie but receives supports from the rest of the Chongs. She befriends Vincent Chong and with his help navigates the violence-stricken capital city Kuala Lumpur in search of her mother Salmah. When the Chong family home is raided and looted by a Malay mob, Melati sets off to find her mother on her own and they are ultimately saved by Vincent and Frankie when they are caught between opposing Chinese and Malay mobs.

Through its focalization on Melati's immediate experiences of the May 13 Incident, *The Weight of Our Sky* depicts the horrors and humanity occurring during this traumatic event. Focusing on the humanity and inhumanity that Melati has encountered, I will examine how this novel strives towards—to borrow from the critical work of Viet

[55] As mentioned on her personal website, Hanna Alkaf's name follows the Malay naming custom ("A Note on Names"). Her name thus consists of her given name (Hanna) and her father's given name (the patronymic Alkaf). Citing her last name (Alkaf) following the Anglophone academic tradition may therefore cause confusion as it refers to her father rather than her. Heeding this custom and her reminder, I will refer to her by her full Malay name throughout this chapter to respect her wishes and her Malay lineage.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Thanh Nguyen—a complex ethics of just memory. Bearing in mind Nguyen's reminder that aesthetics are bound with ethics especially in the case of victimization (198), I will discuss how the genre of young adult fiction both limits and enables the representation of the May 13 Incident. I will argue that the protagonist Melati grows and constructs her adolescent self by rejecting the dominant ethnocentric ideology and internalizing an alternative ideology that promotes interracial solidarity. Heeding Astrid Erll's assertion that cultural memory must travel in order to remain vibrant and impactful ("Travelling" 12), I will also analyze how the cultural memory of May 13 embodied by *The Weight of Our Sky* circulates between different places of production, media, and platforms. In particular, I will examine its remediation into a webcomics series to attend to not only how its vertical format and serialized release influence its representation of the May 13 Incident but also how it represents traumatic spectacles. I will conclude by questioning the proverb that gives the novel its title, a proverb that exhorts Malaysians to hold up the weight of the sky together while respecting the rules of the land.

I. An Ethics of Just Memory

Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* and Samarasan's novel *Evening is the Whole Day*—to follow the distinctions delineated by Aleida Assmann—mark the transformation of personal and social private memories of the May 13 Incident into cultural memories.[56] The cultural memories represented by these novels, however, arguably operate under an ethics of remembering one's own. This ethics, according to Nguyen, distinguishes between "the near and the dear and the far and the feared"—namely, between one's own

[56] Lim personally lived through the May 13 Incident and also wrote about her experience in her autobiography *Among the White Moon Faces*. Samarasan inherited memories of May 13 from her father and also read Anthony Reid's article while writing her novel ("The Deepest Wounds" 14)

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

and others (9). Under this ethics, we remember those on our side as round characters that demand empathy (28) whereas the others suffer a "disremembering" wherein they are either subjected to a "strategic" and "even malicious" forgetting (40) or rendered as flat characters (28) whose full complexities as "subjects" are forgotten (69). In other words, to remember one's own is, as Nguyen puts it, also to remember "our humanity and the inhumanity of others" while forgetting "our inhumanity and the humanity of others" (96).

The dominant historical memories of the May 13 Incident often evince such an ethics of remembering one's own. For example, the official National Operations Council report—as discussed in Chapter One—disremembered Chinese Malaysians as the Other by focusing on their inhumanity as the instigators of the violent conflict whose politico-economic encroachment exacerbated Malay anxieties and interracial tensions instead of considering the motivations behind their politico-economic aspirations. In different ways, Lim's novel and Samarasan's novel also represent cultural memories of May 13 that follow an ethics of remembering one's own. Lim's novel follows this ethics by depicting the inhumanity of the Malay characters and the victimization of the Chinese characters—the Malay characters in *Joss and Gold* are uniformly portrayed as ethnocentric nationalists who endorse the violence while Chinese Malaysians are portrayed as the apparent sole victims of May 13.[57] At first glance, Samarasan's novel by contrast seems to practice an ethics of just memory as it

[57] For example, in *Joss and Gold* the major Malay character Abdullah—while appearing at times sympathetic towards Li An—nevertheless publishes articles in newspaper about Malay special rights (45), articles arguing that those who challenge these rights should be imprisoned or sent back to India or China (63). He also endorses the violence by comparing May 13 to the "French Revolution and American Revolution," arguing that "[s]ome people must suffer" "for majority good [*sic*]" (87). The novel also focuses upon the victimization of Chinese Malaysians. For example, only Li An's father-in-law Mr. Yeh's death is portrayed in the novel (83-85)—there are no mentions of victims of May 13 from other racialized communities. However, out of the 196 deaths officially reported, 25 of them were Malays, 13 of them were Indians, and 15 of them were too decomposed to be identified (NOC table 1), indicating that Chinese Malaysians were not the sole victims of the May 13 Incident.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

situates Malaysian Indians—the "ever-new others" (Nguyen 69) neglected by the persistent Sino-Malay framing of May 13—within the event by depicting their prior political activities and their subsequent socioeconomic marginalization. In its depiction of the violent conflict, however, *Evening is the Whole Day* practices a similar ethics as Lim's novel by portraying Malay aggression and Chinese victimization—Malay Malaysians are depicted as premeditating the violent conflict while Chinese Malaysians are cast as the victims.[58]

In contrast to these texts, *The Weight of Our Sky* strives towards an ethics of just memory in its representation of the May 13 Incident. According to Nguyen, just memory is a complex ethics of memory that strives to remember one's own and others (12) and form an "ethical relationship to forgetting" in order to "work through the past" (17). It is also an "ethics of recognition" that urges us to remember "the humanity and inhumanity" of ourselves and others (97), thereby granting both the "same flawed subjectivity" (73). As we shall see, *The Weight of Our Sky* recognizes the humanity within all Malaysians by portraying them lending a helping hand towards others across racial divides during the May 13 Incident.[59] For example, the Chongs—a Chinese Malaysian family—shelter and feed their neighbors regardless of their races when their homes are looted and torched by the raging mobs (79). A Malay trishaw driver similarly

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[58] The omniscient narrator of *Evening is the Whole Day* characterizes the May 13 Incident as premeditated violence arranged by Malay Malaysians by portraying them "quietly-quietly sharpening their parangs" (124), planning to attend the "peaceful demonstration" on 13 May 1969 with "rag strips and tins of kerosene" and "knives and machetes" (126) to "[f]inish . . . the Chinamen in this country" (124). Despite showing Chinese Malaysians as capable of defending themselves instead of suffering passively (17), the narrator ultimately casts them in the role of the victims while stressing Indian marginalization in the event.

[59] As discussed in Chapter One, the oral history record *Rebirth from the Ashes* (在傷口上重生) features testimonies from survivors that attest to occasions where Malaysians rescued and sheltered their fellow citizens across racial divides (Tham et al. 51, 63-64). Hanna Alkaf's young adult novel echoes these survivor testimonies—unsurprisingly considering that she conducted interviews with survivors during her writing process (Hanna Alkaf, "Author's Note" ix).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

shelters people in a drain regardless of their races (48), including Auntie Bee and Melati who have fled from the Malay mob bent on "burning down Petaling Street" in Kuala Lumpur (45). Two Indian women—Mala and her mother—also shelter an injured Malay man Roslan in their home (127) until a multiracial group of Red Cross volunteers disguise him as an Indian woman to drive him home safely through "Chinese areas" (128). While Malaysians of all races are portrayed as capable of showing kindness towards others across racial divides, the novel nevertheless exhibits another characteristic of just memory by recognizing their varying inhumanity, depicting the atrocious acts committed by both Malay and Chinese Malaysians. For instance, the text starts its narration of violent conflicts by portraying a group of Chinese gang members rounding up moviegoers at the Rex cinema, dividing them into Malays and non-Malays, and killing all the Malay moviegoers (36). It also depicts a mob of Malay youths wearing red strips marching through streets (44), burning and looting Chinese shophouses, and killing an Indian driver who tries to help others to escape (47-48).

Another example that encapsulates this young adult novel's practice of just memory is its portrayal of the military. As delineated in Chapter One, historians have argued that the military— which was composed mainly of Malay service members—showed biases against the Chinese by ignoring Malay rioters' actions and shooting indiscriminately into Chinese shophouses (Kua 53; 64) whereas the official 1969 NOC report claims that military misconduct was "relatively minor" (67). To recognize the inhumanity of the Malay-dominant military, *The Weight of Our Sky* represents these allegations against them through the experience of multiple characters—Frankie claims that the Malay soldiers stood by instead of stopping the Malay mob which burned down the Chong family house (185-86) while Melati Ahmad's mother Salmah recounts incidents where

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

soldiers shot into "Chinese-owned buildings randomly" and injured the Chinese schoolboy Ethan (246). The novel also, however, recognizes the humanity of some members of the military. It portrays Mat—a Malay soldier—comforting the heavily pregnant woman Azizah before driving her to the hospital (177-78). Moments prior to his act of kindness, however, he leads a squad which has "casually" shot at Vincent and Melati as they rode by on a motorcycle (165) and ignores Vincent when he tries to seek help for Azizah "[b]ecause [he's] Chinese" (171). This juxtaposition of his inhumanity and his humanity typifies the novel's recognition of—to borrow again from Nguyen—how "the inhuman inhabits the human" (19).

The Weight of Our Sky also strives towards an ethics of just memory in its depiction of the potential causes of the May 13 Incident. It dramatizes these possible causes in a conversation between the Chongs and Melati, a dialogic representation that allows it to incorporate diverging Malay and Chinese perspectives and memories. During the conversation, the patriarch Uncle Chong delineates both the government's and the Malays' perspectives. He acknowledges the government's claim of communist involvement, but stresses instead Malay resentment towards the Chinese "for taking over the urban areas" for their enrichment while they are mired in poverty back in their villages (72). Apart from registering this Malay anxiety over economic dispossession, Uncle Chong also describes the ideology of "ketuanan Melayu—Malay supremacy" that "[s]ome Malays" embrace (72), an ideology that considers the Chinese as immigrants that are "welcomed . . . into the country" but "take from [the Malays]—jobs, land, money" (73). In response, Frankie voices the viewpoints that are at times racially chauvinistic—a viewpoint that attributes Malay poverty to their laziness, for example (72)—but at times claim Malaysia for all Malaysians by evoking the memories of

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Malaysians of all races cooperating to gain independence from the British (73-74). While this effort of representing both Chinese and Malay memories of the causes of May 13 may be flawed, their inclusion is needed for an ethical and just memory.[60] Hanna Alkaf's novel does not forcefully reconcile these contesting memories, thereby recalling Nguyen's reminder that an ethics of just memory does not mandate that "competing memories can be reconciled," but that both remembering one's own and others are needed for a just memory (18).[61]

From a binary and limiting portrayal of Malaysians as either victims or aggressors to a complex depiction of Malaysians as capable of showing kindness and inflicting violence, *The Weight of Our Sky* registers a shift in literary discourses of May 13. However, for Nguyen, an understanding of an ethics of just memory should also attend to the "life cycle of memories" and their production and circulation in the industry of memory (12-13)—concerns I will address later in this chapter. In the following section, heeding Nguyen's assertion that aesthetics are tied to ethics especially in the case of victimization (198), I will first examine how the genre of young adult fiction may influence the representation of May 13.

II. Genre Matters: Representing the May 13 Incident in a Young Adult Novel

What is a young adult novel? Few theorists have attempted to theorize this genre. A decade ago, Karen Coats explained this lack of theorization by pointing out that young

[60] This effort to remember both the Chinese and Malay memories of the causes of May 13 is unfinished because the Malays are spoken for during the conversation—Uncle Chong speaks for the Malays while Melati remains silent, busy recalling her father's death in a previous riot in Penang and worrying for her mother (72-73). The effort could also be considered incomplete insofar as the Malaysian Indians' memories of May 13 are neglected.

[61] Show similarly argues against both a straightforward "reconciliation model" and a "positive, progressive future" in narratives about the May 13 Incident ("Narrating" 228). She does so by drawing from Raymond Williams to trace the structure of feeling of distrust prevalent during the May 13 Incident as represented in *The Weight of Our Sky* ("Narrating" 227-28).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

adult literature is far too often considered as a "gateway drug" that lures young readers into trying more serious literature instead of as a "destination literature" that deserves to be studied for its own merits (316-17). Coats also argues that young adult texts share an ever-shifting "intertextuality that responds to the market" (318) and to a "constantly shifting cultural dialogue," a quality that complicates its theorization and definition (320). Mike Cadden similarly observes the "culturally and structurally protean" character of young adult literature and argues that this indeterminacy keeps it "relevant and alive" (303). Despite its dynamic and indeterminate nature, Robyn McCallum and Roberta Seelinger Trites both have striven to theorize and define young adult fiction. In spite of their disparate theoretical approaches, McCallum and Trites are both preoccupied with the tensions between emergent adolescent subjectivity and social and ideological institutions in young adult literature. In a theorization of burgeoning adolescent subjectivity, McCallum argues against both a liberal humanist conception of a universal and essentialist subject with individual agency and "mechanistic social theories" of subjectivity in which individuals are passively determined by dominant social and ideological paradigms (5-6). Drawing upon Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, McCallum argues that adolescent subjectivity is constructed in dialogic relation with various socio-cultural and ideological forces as well as with others leading to the emergence of intersubjectivity (7-8). Arguing that young adult literature is a romantic literature reformed by postmodernism, Trites draws from Foucault to assert that young adult novels depict adolescents' growth in the context of power (*Disturbing* 15-16)—the adolescent characters must learn to negotiate their place in the power structure in relation to various institutions of power (8) that are determined by discourse and institutions including government politics, schools, religion, and identity politics (22).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

At first glance, McCallum and Trites seem to share a similar theoretical ground as they both appear to posit that—as shown in young adult literature—adolescent subjectivity is constructed in dialogic relation to sociocultural and ideological institutions. Coats observes this similarity when she notes that "both McCallum and Trites look to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism as key to the study . . . of [young adult] literature" (318). However, McCallum and Trites have different understandings of the relation between adolescent subjectivity and various institutions of power. McCallum's understanding of dialogic relation refers to a relation that is "neither oppositional . . . nor dialectical" (12-13). Between two positions that are neither irreconcilable nor synthesized (McCallum 12-13), such relations remain in tension and in a continuing dialogue. In contrast, Trites implies that young adult fiction upholds the status quo as she argues that it "teaches adolescents how to exist within . . . institutions" (*Disturbing* 19), accept "one's cultural habitat" (18), and "reconcile[ ] themselves to the power entailed in the social institutions with which they must interact to survive" (20). Trites thus proposes a conciliatory and assimilatory relation between emergent adolescent subjectivity and social institutions in young adult literature whereas McCallum argues for a dialogic relation that keeps them in sustained and continuous interaction. With these diverging understandings of the relation between adolescent subjectivity and social institutions in mind, I seek to ask: what are the diverse ideological and social institutions that are represented in *The Weight of Our Sky*? How does the adolescent protagonist Melati Ahmad construct her subjectivity in relation to them? What kinds of relations govern this process of construction?

In *The Weight of Our Sky*, Melati Ahmad is exposed to both the dominant ethnocentric ideology and an alternative ideology that champions interracial solidarity.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Among the institutions of power in young adult fiction identified by Trites, a divisive ethnocentric ideology is pervasive in social institutions such as schools, identity politics, and government politics. For example, Pakcik Adnan—a teacher at an all-boys school in Kuala Lumpur—espouses an ethnocentric Malay nationalist ideology by declaring that the Chinese Malaysians who marched on 12 May 1969 to celebrate their political gain in the 1969 general election "need to remember this is Tanah Melayu, the land of the Malays" (19). Uncle Chong also registers this ethnocentric ideology when he notes that the Malaysian government since independence has been divided between those who advocate for "ketuanan Melayu—Malay supremacy" and those who "push for a Malaysian Malaysia" (72). Melati Ahmad is familiar with this ideology that claims Malaysia for the Malays and relegates Othered minorities to an immigrant and outsider status as she "grew up with them [and] heard them so often they were reduced to nothing more than background noise. *Taking away our opportunities. Heathens. Chinese pigs. Go back to where you came from. Malaysia for the Malays*" (emphasis in original; 89). This ethnocentric ideology saturates social institutions of power and becomes a dominant presence in the subject formation of the adolescent protagonist in Hanna Alkaf's text.

However, among these institutions of power, an alternative ideology that champions interracial solidarity still persists in *The Weight of Our Sky*. Melati recalls Malaysian history lessons imbued with this ideology from her history teacher Puan Aminah. In these school lessons, Puan Aminah emphasizes the "obvious Hindu influences in the ruling kingdoms of ancient Kedah, [and] the marriage of the sultan of Malacca to the Chinese princess Hang Li Po"—historical details that point to the hybridity in the cultural and historical make-up of Malaysia that stems from the distant historical past—

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

to argue that Malaysia belongs to Malaysians of all races, that there "is space for [them] all" (74). In the midst of the May 13 Incident, Melati recalls Puan Aminah's history lessons when she encounters and stays with the Chongs—a Chinese Malaysian family who practices this ideology and thereby instils its importance in Melati's mind.[62] When she is trapped in the middle of opposing Chinese and Malay mobs, Melati recalls Auntie Bee's account about the Chongs' experience living in Kampung Baru and her lesson of unity and solidarity. She recites Auntie Bee's lesson to the opposing mobs: "Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung. . . . It means where we plant our feet is where we must hold up the sky. We live and die by the rules of the land we live in. But this country belongs to all of us! We make our own sky, and we can hold it up—together" (264). While various institutions of power familiarize her with the dominant ethnocentric ideology, Melati's encounter with the Chongs in the midst of the May 13 Incident enables her to recall and internalize an ideology that claims Malaysia for Malaysians of all races and affirms their belongingness in the country.

What remains is the question: what kind of relations govern Melati's process of constructing her subjectivity? Rejecting the dominant ethnocentric ideology supported by Malay nationalists such as Pakcik Adnan, Melati Ahmad constructs her adolescent subjectivity in an assimilatory relation with the alternative ideology championed by Puan Aminah and the Chongs. This assimilatory process of identity formation seems to affirm Trites's theorization of young adult literature instead of McCallum's argument for

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[62] In the spirit of just memory (Nguyen 12), however, *The Weight of Our Sky* also features the black sheep of the Chong family, Frankie, who espouses a racially chauvinistic ideology that mirrors the aforementioned ethnocentric ideology. Like the Chinese victory marchers who yelled racially derogatory remarks "in Chinese, saying that [the Malays] should go back to the jungle . . . [and] should go and die" (20), Frankie is hostile towards Melati upon their first meeting (68), urges his brother Vincent who volunteers for the Red Cross to send his "supplies only to . . . the Chinese" because he "should be helping [his] people" (112), and ultimately runs off to join the Chinese mob and contributes to the violent conflicts of May 13 (266). However, Frankie has a change of heart after hearing Melati repeat the lesson of solidarity that she learns from his mother Auntie Bee when she is trapped between the opposing Chinese and Malay mobs—and he decides to save her from the mobs (265).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

a dialogic process. However, Trites's assimilatory construction upholds the dominant power structure—as it depicts the adolescent protagonist trying to "reconcile[ ] themselves to the power entailed in . . . social institutions" (*Disturbing* 20)—whereas Melati Ahmad assimilates herself into an alternative ideology that challenges the established power structures of Malaysia as they continue to discriminate and "differentiate[ ] between racial groups" (Hanna Alkaf, "Author's Note" viii). Bearing in mind Trites's observation of a metaphorical parallel in young adult fiction between the adolescent protagonist's "need to grow and the society's need to improve itself" (*Twain* 144), I argue that *The Weight of Our Sky* reimagines the traumatic historical past of the May 13 Incident in order to offer the future possibility of an alternative ideology that challenges and reshapes the extant power structure. I will investigate in the next section how cultural memory as it is represented in Hanna Alkaf's text travels and circulates between different media, platforms, and loci of production.

III. Traveling Memories: Multiple Remediations of the Young Adult Novel

In an author note prepended to *The Weight of Our Sky*, Hanna Alkaf thanks her readers directly because without their "willingness to listen" the "memories and voices of those who lived through [the May 13 Incident] [will] begin to fade" (viii). This expression of gratitude points to memories' reliance on their circulation among audiences in order to remain vibrant. Her novel contributes to this circulation by remediating the survivors' personal memories into cultural memories, since she wrote this novel mostly based on her first-person interviews with survivors of May 13 (ix). Her acknowledgement of the importance of audience and circulation also echoes Erll's assertion that "*all* cultural memory *must* 'travel', be kept in motion, in order to 'stay alive', to have an impact on individual minds and social formations" ("Travelling" 12; emphasis in original). Erll

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

elaborates this point by arguing that memories travel through different "carriers, media, contents, practices, and forms" ("Travelling" 12). In this section, I will examine how the contents—namely the narrative—of *The Weight of Our Sky* that embody cultural memories of May 13 have traveled through a process of remediation—a "transcription of information from one medium to the next" (Erll, "Travelling" 12)—as it has been adapted from a young adult novel into an eponymous webcomics series.

However, even before this remediation, travel and movement have characterized the production, circulation, and reception of this novel. Written by a Malaysia-based author who spent six years studying and working near Chicago (Hanna Alkaf "About"), *The Weight of Our Sky* was published in 2019 by Salaam Reads, an imprint of the New York publishing company Simon & Schuster. In the acknowledgements, Hanna Alkaf also highlights the contribution of her US-based agent Victoria Marine and editor Zareen Jaffery as their feedback and questions shaped the final outcome (*The Weight* 275). The production of *The Weight of Our Sky* thus depended on this dynamic movement of ideas in a transnational network that produces cultural memories of the May 13 Incident. The reception of this text has also traveled in a transnational network—the accolades and attention it received overseas boosted its reception in the domestic scene.[63] After *The Weight of Our Sky* won a US-based Freeman Award for Young Adult/High School Literature in 2019 (Hanna Alkaf "About"), it received increased attention back in Malaysia. Hanna Alkaf was interviewed by multiple major anglophone Malaysian newspapers about the novel and was invited to speak at literary festivals.[64] A Malay translation of the English original—entitled *Di Situ Langit Dijunjung*—was published

[63] As Malachi Edwin Vethamani—a Malaysian Indian professor specializing in anglophone Malaysian Literature —explains, "the way it usually works is that a Malaysian gets recognised overseas and then the Malaysian local scene claims them. Accolades after the fact. Success has to happen somewhere else" (qtd. in Mayberry).

[64] Hanna Alkaf was interviewed by *The Star, Malay Mail, Rojak Daily,* and *Juice.* She was invited to speak about *The Weight of Our Sky* at the 2019 George Town Literary Festival in Penang.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

later that year by Buku Fixi, a Malaysian independent publishing company founded in 2011.[65] This remediation between languages also occurs within the young adult novel as the first-person narrator-cum-protagonist Melati consistently translates any Malay words she brings up.[66] To circulate between different linguistic communities, the cultural memories of May 13 need to travel between languages as well. Travel and movement between—to borrow again from Nguyen—different industries of memories (such as between the publishing industries in the US and Malaysia) and different languages thus characterize the production, circulation, and reception of the novel and work to reinvigorate cultural memories of the May 13 Incident in Malaysia and beyond.

One major movement of *The Weight of Our Sky* is its remediation from a young adult novel into a webcomics series. Similar to the novel, the eponymous webcomics series was produced through a transnational movement of ideas and efforts. It was the result of a US-Malaysia collaboration—with a team that consists of US-based Webtoon producer Susan Cheng and scriptwriter Alya Rehman and Malaysia-based illustrator Nisrina A. N. and colorists Nurel and Toadfrogs (Toh; Hanna Alkaf et al. "Behind the Scenes"). It was published in a serialized format on Webtoon, a webcomics publishing portal launched by Naver Corporation in South Korea that expanded into a transnational publishing platform with offices in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, and the US.[67] The adapted eponymous webcomics *The Weight of Our Sky* was published under the historical genre, a relatively unpopular genre on Webtoon. At the time of writing, only

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[65] I gathered information about the Malay translation of *The Weight of Our Sky* (https://fixi.com.my/produk/disitulangitdijunjung) and the publishing company Fixi from the company's website (https://fixi.com.my/info/perihal-kami).

[66] For example, Melati immediately translates the Malay proverb from Auntie Bee's lesson as she tells the mobs, "Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung. . . . It means where we plant our feet is where we must hold up the sky" (264).

[67] I gathered information about the Naver company from its website; see https://webtoonscorp.com/en/.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

nine titles were published under this genre, and most of them are crossover titles with genres such as romance, fantasy, and action. As part of this niche genre, *The Weight of Our Sky* has enjoyed moderate success as of August 2021, boasting 1.1 million likes—ranking fourth among the nine titles.[68] Despite its moderate renown, the webcomics series has helped accomplish Hanna Alkaf's goal of "reach[ing] so many more people" and prompt another movement (Toh)—some readers of the webcomics may be motivated to go back to the young adult novel to re-experience the story.[69] *The Weight of the Sky* and the cultural memories of the May 13 Incident it represents thereby travel back and forth between different platforms (including print and online publishing) and different media (namely a young adult novel and a webcomics series).

After thus tracing some of the movements of cultural memories of May 13 between different platforms and media, we are left with additional questions: how does this travel influence the content of *The Weight of Our Sky*? How does its remediation into a visual medium affect the representation of the May 13 Incident? Erll argues that when memory travels, elements may become "lost" or "unfulfilled" as this movement is "always contingent on specific possibilities and restrictions" ("Travelling" 14). Bearing this point in mind, I will analyze how the affordances of comics as a visual medium enable or restrict different representations of the May 13 Incident. I will attend to the added visual layer by focusing on the webcomics' visual representation of race. To pinpoint elements that may be lost or gained during remediation, I will also compare and contrast the young adult novel and the webcomics series. I will focus on the effects

[68] This information is from the Webtoon website; see https://www.webtoons.com/en/genre.

[69] On websites such as Goodreads, readers have expressed their enthusiasm to re-experience the narrative in a different media; see https://www.goodreads.com/questions/1734126-i-found-out-about-this-book-on-webtoon-and.

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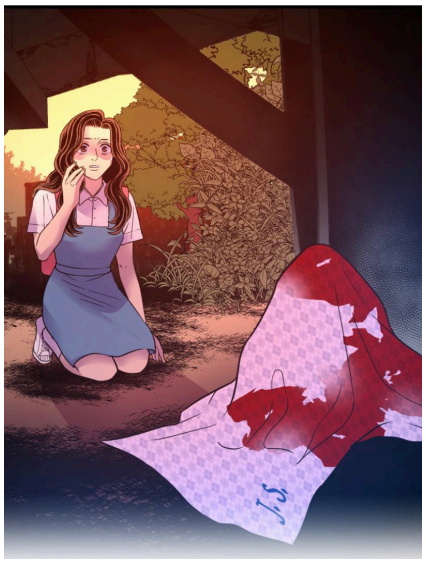

Figure 1

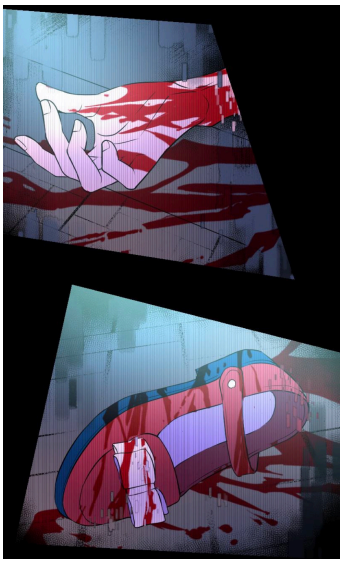

Figure 2

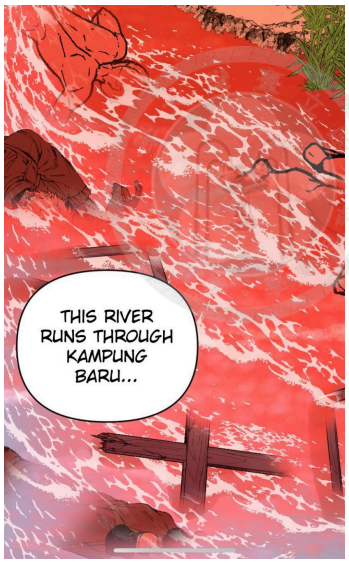

Figure 3

of several omissions and additions on the potential rhetorical power of the webcomics, the impact of serialization and the webcomics' vertical format on its content, and its ethics of representing traumatic spectacles.

The visual style of *The Weight of Our Sky* in webcomics form resembles the visual style of *shōjo* manga (Japanese girls' comics), especially with its consistent use of "[b]ig doe-eyes" and montage panels that express Melati's "interiority" including her feelings and memories (Prough 97-98). However, unlike *shōjo* manga that mostly portray supporting characters with "Asian faces" (Berndt 269), *The Weight of Our Sky* depicts most of its characters with doe-like eyes—deracializing mangaesque visual cues that are "mostly signifiers without Caucasian signifieds" (Berndt 271-72).[70] With high nose bridges and mangaesque doe-like eyes, characters in the webcomics series resemble the deracialized protagonists in *shōjo* manga, manga that is, as one scholar put it, mostly "racially . . . and culturally unembedded" and "odorless" (MacWilliams 16). While characters in the webcomics version of *The Weight of Our Sky* are portrayed with

[70] Apart from the Chinese gangsters who kill all the Malay moviegoers at the Rex Cinema (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 4) and the Malay mobs looting and burning shops lining Petaling Street (ep. 6), the webcomics version of *The Weight of Our Sky* portrays most of its characters with big doe-like eyes. The Chinese gangsters and Malay mobsters instead are depicted as having narrow and sharp eyes (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 4; ep. 6). Their depictions are also comparable to the visual convention of *shōjo* manga, which employs Asian faces to indicate character flaws (Berndt 269).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

seemingly deracialized faces, the webcomics series manifests their raciality through their divergent material cultures, specifically their traditional clothing. The webcomics depicts Malay men such as Pakcik Adnan wearing *Baju Melayu* completed with their headwear *songkok* and *tengkolok*; Malay women such as Mak Siti wearing *Baju Kurung* while donning their headscarf *Tudung*; Chinese women such as Auntie Bee wearing *cheongsam*; Sikh men such as Jagdev wearing turbans; and Indian women such as Mala wearing sarees with bindis on their foreheads.[71] In contrast, the Malay protagonist Melati Ahmad wears mostly her school uniform in the webcomics. This racially neutral clothing—along with her doe-like eyes and pale skin tone—makes Melati Ahmad appear racially ambiguous or even deracialized like the protagonists of *shōjo* manga. Melati's deracialized and general visual representation, however, shows the webcomics' utilization of what Scott McCloud calls the "masking effect" of comics (45). McCloud argues that the less realistic and specific a visual representation is, the more universal it becomes (46) and thereby increases viewer identification by allowing more readers to "mask" themselves in a character (42). Melati's mangaesque doe-like eyes may also increase empathy as manga artists employ this visual strategy to closely depict characters' affective states (Prough 97) and prompt empathy (Berndt 267). The webcomics' appropriation of *shōjo* manga's conventions, however, also shapes readers' expectations as some of them have read *The Weight of Our Sky* as a love story between Vincent and Melati despite Hanna Alkaf's insistence that "Melati's focus is on the one true love of her young life: her mother" (Ameera Rosli).

[71] The webcomics also destabilizes visual markers of race and gender by depicting the Malay man Roslan being disguised as an Indian woman for his safety (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 24).

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

In the process of remediation, the affordances of the visual medium of comics thus enable the webcomics version of *The Weight of Our Sky* to engage readers' identification and empathy through the appropriation of manga's visual conventions. Apart from this added visual layer, the webcomics series remains a faithful adaptation of the original young adult novel.[72] Most of the dialogues, monologues, and narrations are adapted almost verbatim from the novel except for a few notable additions and omissions. One notable addition is Auntie Bee's flashback in which Auntie Bee tells a young Frankie who has fought back after being bullied by his Malay classmates that "violence only creates more violence" (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 16). This addition highlighting the Chongs' commitment to peace and interracial solidarity is perhaps redundant because these messages have already been expressed forcefully and clearly by Uncle Chong when he rejects Frankie's suggestion that they seek protection from the triad by asserting his belief in his Malay friends' dedication to peace (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 14)—both actions that are portrayed in the young adult novel. This addition in the process of remediation thus in my assessment contributes little to the affective and rhetorical force of the webcomics series. Apart from this addition, there is one glaring omission that weakens the rhetorical power of the webcomics series. In the novel, after listening to Uncle Chong's analysis of the ethnocentric Malay nationalist ideology (*The Weight* 72-73), Melati recalls Puan Aminah's history lessons that stress Chinese and Indian Malaysians' long historical presence in Malaysia that has been entangled with local Malay history (74)—a long historical presence that unsettles the imposition of an

[72] This is perhaps because Hanna Alkaf continues to be the main author of the webcomics (Hanna Alkaf et al. "Behind the Scenes") while the scriptwriter Alya Rehman—according to her official Twitter account @AlyaDoodles—is a self-described "Spanish-Desi-American Muslim" whose sociocultural background and lack of familiarity with the Malaysian context might have inhibited her from making substantial changes and edits in the process of adaptation; see https://twitter.com/AlyaDoodles/status/1292876800775696384.

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outsider and immigrant status. These historical lessons thus serve as a counterpoint to the ethnocentric ideology delineated by Uncle Chong. However, in the webcomics series, Melati's recalling of Puan Aminah's history lessons is omitted—the series instead emphasizes the pursuit of self-interest as the main cause of May 13 (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 11). While in the novel Uncle Chong does acknowledge the pursuit of self-interest as one of the main causes (*The Weight* 74), the omission of Puan Aminah's history lesson in the process of remediation arguably weakens the rhetorical power of the webcomics series as no counterargument to the ethnocentric ideology is offered at this crucial moment of the narrative. When cultural memories of May 13 travel from a young adult novel to a webcomics form, the elements that are omitted and lost thus arguably weaken the rhetorical power of the story.

In this process of remediation, the serialized and vertical format of the webcomics series also influences the representation of the adapted content. In contrast to Hilary Chute's argument that print comics pack its panels as it is "about the fullness of what can be crammed into the frame to display" (16), the serialized release of the webcomics series *The Weight of Our Sky* allows the team of creators to include extra panels featuring characters' reactions to the unfolding events.[73] These extra panels featuring reactions that are added in the process of remediation can be said to emphasize the emotional impact of the depicted events—but they can also end up being redundant and repetitive since these reactions can be portrayed in the same panel where actions occurred. Similar to the serialized format, the vertical format characterizing webcomics that are released on Webtoon also simultaneously enables and restricts possibilities in

[73] For example, when a curfew is announced, Uncle Chong carries a box of tools into the dining room to be used for self-defence (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 12). The series then features three panels, each depicting respectively Melati's, Vincent's, and Frankie's initial reactions to seeing these weapons (ep. 12)—reactions that are not described in the young adult novel.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

the representation of the May 13 Incident. In contrast to print comics that allows its readers the freedom of "self-direction" through the numerous panels displayed in a page (Brenner 258), the vertical format of webcomics limits this freedom as readers can only read the panels and text by scrolling through the webpage from top to bottom. However, this vertical scrolling format also offers another possibility of producing motion. According to Chute, print comics capture both "stillness and movement" through its "frame-gutter architecture" (21) as gutter both implies duration and provides readers with a space to "project causality" (16) and to participate imaginatively in producing motion (22). However, the vertical format of webcomics produces motion by featuring long, continuous panels and incorporating readers' action of scrolling through the webpage. For example, when Melati discovers that the violent conflict of the May 13 Incident has erupted, she runs back into the Rex cinema to warn her friend (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 4). The webcomics then features a long continuous panel featuring Melati at various stages of running with the accompanying caption: "one...two...three" (ep. 4). Similar to a flip book featuring images that animate as readers flip through the pages, the vertical format of webcomics enables the incorporation of long continuous panels that produce animated motion as readers scroll through the webpage.

In the process of remediation, the webcomics series also exhibits a different ethics of representing trauma in comparison to the young adult novel. Chute argues that print comics push against the "conceptions of the unrepresentable and the unimaginable" prevalent in the discourse about trauma by engaging with the "difficulty of spectacle" of trauma—they "risk representation" (17). However, perhaps out of a desire to avoid traumatizing its predominantly female young adult readers (C. Reid 9), the webcomics series doesn't risk representation, instead employing strategies such as metonymic

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

displacement to lessen the horror of the spectacle. For example, instead of portraying Jagdev Singh's death at the hands of the Malay mob, the webcomics depict his blood-stained, crumpled handkerchief lying on the ground (ep. 29; see Figure 1). While this instance of metonymic displacement is included in the original young adult novel, the webcomics series nevertheless consistently avoids depicting maimed corpses that are mentioned in the novel. For example, while the novel mentions "limp, lifeless bodies, more than [Melati] can count" crowding the streets of Kuala Lumpur (*The Weight* 122-23), the webcomics again employs the strategy of metonymic displacement by depicting bloody hands, a blood-stained shoe, and strewn textbooks (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 22; see Figure 2). While in the novel Melati describes seeing "six bodies" in a river, including a schoolgirl wearing a "turquoise pinafore" (147), the webcomics series portrays only a red-colored river with some vague lines that resemble human bodies (Hanna Alkaf et al. ep. 27; see Figure 3).

What happens when cultural memories of the May 13 Incident travel from a young adult novel to a webcomics series in a process of remediation? In this section, I have attempted to answer this question by delineating various forms of transnational movement that have enabled the production, circulation, and reception of *The Weight of Our Sky* both as a young adult novel and as a webcomics series. I have then focused on the effects of this remediation on the contents of the webcomics series. I have contended that the webcomics series appropriates visual conventions of *shōjo* manga to promote readers' identification and empathy. However, the webcomics feature additions and omissions that in my view either contribute little or weaken the rhetorical power of the narrative in comparison to the novel. I have focused on the enabling and restricting

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

effects of the serialized and vertical format of the webcomics—the serialized release allows for more reaction panels that might either emphasize the emotional weight of the event or end up being redundant whereas the vertical format restricts readers' freedom of self-direction while enabling another possibility of producing motion through acts of scrolling. Finally, I have asserted that the webcomics series mitigates the horrors of May 13 through metonymic displacement instead of engaging with the difficulty of representing the spectacle of trauma.

IV. Conclusion: Who Sets the Rules of the Land?

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which the cultural memories of the May 13 Incident are represented in *The Weight of Our Sky* and the effects of travel on these cultural memories as this young adult novel has been remediated into a webcomics series. Following Nguyen, I have argued that in comparison to earlier cultural texts depicting May 13, *The Weight of Our Sky* strives towards an ethics of just memory by not only remembering one's own and others but also recognizing the inhumanity and the humanity of all Malaysians. Drawing upon theorizations of young adult novels, I have contended that the protagonist Melati Ahmad constructs her subjectivity in the midst of May 13 by rejecting the dominant ethnocentric ideology and assimilating herself into an alternative ideology that champions interracial solidarity, an assimilation that contrasts with Trites's theorization of young adult novels. I have then focused on the various forms of travel that have enabled the production, circulation, and reception of both the young adult novel and the webcomics series. I have argued that in the process of remediation, the webcomics series seeks to increase readers' identification through an appropriation of manga's visual conventions, weakens the rhetorical power of the

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

narrative through several additions and omissions, conforms to a serialized and vertical format that is both enabling and restricting, and avoids directly representing the spectacles of trauma.

In both the novel and the webcomics series, the central message is "di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung"—a Malay proverb that means "where we plant our feet is where we must hold up the sky" (Hanna Alkaf, *The Weight* 264). This proverb asserts that Malaysia belongs to Malaysians of all races and they must bear the responsibility together. This message, however, is qualified by the idea that Malaysians must follow "the rules of the land" (264). In the novel, Auntie Bee explains this qualification as following "what the people there do, their customs, their ways" as the Chongs pay protection money to the Malay gangster Alang while living in Kampung Baru (90), endure Malay neighbors' hostility such as their spit on the Chongs' door (90), and ignore their snide comments about them being outsiders and immigrants who are stealing jobs (89)—tribulations to which she resigns herself with words like "No choice. What to do? That was our sky" (90). A proverb that appears to assert the belongingness of Malaysians of all races has thus ironically become a balm that soothes and resigns Auntie Bee to an ethnocentric ideology that denies her and her family that belongingness. The Chongs are not an immigrant family—their family has been in Malaysia for multiple generations (69). So who is empowered to set the "rules of the land"? Who are the "people there"? How many generations does it take for the Chong family to be considered part of the "people there" who can help shape the "rules of the land" as well?

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Who is empowered to set the rules of the land? Or more specifically: who is empowered to shape the rules of the land and its memories? In this thesis, I have examined selected Malaysian and Malaysian diasporic texts—including Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Joss and Gold* (2001), Preeta Samarasan's *Evening is the Whole Day* (2009), and Hanna Alkaf's *The Weight of Our Sky* (2019)—that strive to represent and reshape memories of the May 13 Incident. These texts, I have suggested, variedly supplement or challenge the historical memories of the violent conflict by resituating the event in wider Cold War and inter-Asian contexts, unsettling its official racialized framing by depicting the issue of class inequality within and across racial boundaries, and attempting to develop an ethics of just memory. Before discussing these texts, I analyzed in Chapter One the contested historical memories of the May 13 Incident by juxtaposing the official 1969 National Operations Council report with historical accounts produced by Anthony Reid, Kua Kia Soong, Subky Latiff, and a memoir by Ahmad Mustapha Hassan. In my juxtaposition, I focused on the points of contention among these accounts. I also examined how official racialized framings of May 13 were challenged by Michael Stenson's and B.N. Cham's reframings that operated at the intersection of class and race. These reframings have been further complicated by recent oral history projects that strive to give voice to the multifarious historical understandings of survivors. My reading of these contested historical memories points to a lack of consensus about May 13. The unsettled and contested nature of these memories further prompted my interest

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

in their circulation in various cultural texts set in Malaysia and in the Malaysian diaspora.

In Chapter Two, I foregrounded the ways *Joss and Gold* represents the May 13 Incident in a seemingly national framework that transnational elements at times appear to unsettle. I suggested that Lim's novel emphasizes the significance of May 13 for postcolonial Malaysia by portraying it as an epochal event that marks a shift to an ethnocentric national identity. Contending that critics have arguably downplayed the lasting significance of this conflict, I then drew attention to the resulting phenomenon of a brain drain and the gnawing psychological wounds of the survivors that persist decades later as represented in this novel. Lim's other writings—including her academic essays, memoir, and poems—also attest to the lasting significance of the May 13 Incident. Arguing that critics risk engendering homogenizing and binary interpretations through their focalization on the relationship between Li An and Chester Brookfield, I attended to the transnational elements in Lim's novel, especially to traces of the American empire operating in various Asian sites. Doing so enabled me to trace the inter-Asian entanglements between Vietnam and Malaysia fostered by US Cold War militarism in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia. These interconnections include the Malaysian measures of aiding US war efforts by providing weapons and sharing anti-communist strategies, critiques of Malaysia's participation in the Rest and Recreation program, and the novel's portrayal of the Peace Corps' ties with the US Cold War anti-communist strategy. I then argued that through the Amerasian character Suyin, the novel points to the possibility that characters emerging out of these histories can act as subjects who seek new inter-Asian and transpacific relationships.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

In Chapter Three, I turned to *Evening is the Whole Day* and the narrative strategies that facilitate its reworking of the official Sino-Malay framing of the May 13 Incident, a racialized framing that this text unsettles with the discourse of class. Samarasan's novel features a double narrative structure that interweaves a main plot written in a reverse temporal order about the disintegration of the Rajasekharan family with a forward-moving chronological narrative that details the family history of the Rajasekharans and, by extension, historical details about colonial Malaya and postcolonial Malaysia. By juxtaposing the representation of May 13 with the climax of another narrative strand in the middle of this double narrative structure, the novel draws a parallel between them and highlights the lingering legacies of British colonialism, legacies that include the colonial racial divides and Malaysia's politico-economic structures. Rather than conforming to the persistent Sino-Malay framing of the May 13 Incident, the novel situates Malaysian Indians in relation to the conflict by depicting their political activities in the 1969 general election, the effects the subsequent entrenchment of Malay special rights had on them, and their subsequent socioeconomic marginalization masked by a facile multiculturalism. By establishing structural similarities between the narration of May 13 with the unjust convictions of the lower-class characters Shamsuddin and Chellam, the novel further unsettles this racialized framing with the discourse of class inequality that operates within and across racial boundaries. The novel also foregrounds this heterogeneity within the Malaysian Indian community by contrasting Chellam's and Uma's mobility, highlighting how Uma's cosmopolitan mobility—as an escape from the ethnocentric hegemony of the nation instituted after the May 13 Incident—is only available for the privileged.

In Chapter Four, I attended to the cultural memories of the May 13 Incident that are represented in *The Weight of Our Sky* and the effects of travel on these memories as this

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

young adult novel has been remediated into a webcomics series. Following Viet Thanh Nguyen, I contended that in comparison to earlier literary texts that arguably operate under an ethics of remembering one's own, Hanna Alkaf's novel strives towards an ethics of just memory by recognizing the humanity and inhumanity of Malaysians across racial divides. Heeding Nguyen's reminder of the ties between ethics and aesthetics, I then turned to the genre of young adult fiction to examine how it influences the representation of violent conflict. After delineating different relations critics draw between the adolescent protagonist and socio-ideological institutions, I argued that the protagonist Melati Ahmad constructs her subjectivity in the midst of May 13 by rejecting the dominant ethnocentric ideology and assimilating herself into an alternative ideology that champions interracial solidarity, an assimilation that contrasts with some existing critical theorizations. Bearing in mind Astrid Erll's assertion that cultural memories must travel in order to remain vibrant and impactful, I then focused on the circulation and remediation of the young adult novel. After drawing attention to various transnational movements that facilitated the production, circulation, and reception of both the novel and the webcomics, I examined the effects of this remediation on the contents of the webcomics series. I argued that in the process of remediation, the rhetorical power of the narrative is arguably weakened by several additions and omissions; the affordances of the medium, meanwhile, allow the webcomics series to prompt readers' empathy through appropriating the visual conventions of *shōjo* manga. During this process, the webcomics series also exhibits a different ethics of representing trauma by avoiding direct portrayals of traumatic spectacles through strategies of metonymic displacement.

Through my aforementioned analyses of selected texts representing the May 13 Incident, I have attended to their diverse engagements with the contested memories of

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

the violent conflict and the circulation of these memories in Malaysia and the Malaysian diaspora. In particular, I have foregrounded textual attempts to situate the May 13 Incident in transnational frameworks that coexist with and at times unsettle national frameworks, to challenge persistent racialized framings of the event with discourses of class inequality that cut across racial boundaries, and to strives towards an ethical and just memory of May 13 while keeping memories of this event vibrant and in motion. By focusing on Anglophone Malaysian and Malaysian diasporic texts, I sought to complicate the idea of the "foreign" in a department of foreign languages and literatures in Taiwan by challenging a conception of foreignness that is often geared towards Western and Euro-American texts and cultures (Wang, "Knowledge" 179-80). Moreover, by focusing on interconnections between the US, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, my discussion of *Joss and Gold* has sought to contribute to the field of Asian American studies. I did so by following ongoing reconfigurations of Asian American critique as a way to understand traces of American empire operating in Asia instead of being solely an identity category confined to the United States and by positing Malaysia as a viable site for Asian American studies due to its entanglements with US Cold War militarism. In my discussion of *Evening is the Whole Day*, I sought to contribute to postcolonial studies by delving into the lingering legacies of British colonialism which generated tensions that culminated in the May 13 Incident. Finally, in my discussion of *The Weight of Our Sky*—one of the latest cultural texts representing the May 13 Incident—I attempted to contribute to the field of memory studies by examining how memories of May 13 travel from a young adult novel to a webcomics series.

A recent cultural text similarly strives towards—to return to Nguyen—an ethics of just memory. Released in 2019, Lau Kek-Huat's documentary film *The Tree Remembers* (還有一些樹) follows this ethics by recognizing the inhumanity and humanity of

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Malaysians including those in the Malaysian military. In this film, multiple survivors testify that the military forces were trigger-happy during the May 13 Incident, especially towards the Chinese. An anonymous survivor speaking with a modulated voice testifies that Malay soldiers shot into Chinese-owned houses whenever they saw a light inside and shot his brother when he tried to put out a fire started by the mob (1:05:30-1:05:54). Historian Hassan A. Muthalib recalls witnessing soldiers shooting groups of Chinese Malaysians without warning while ignoring opposing Malay Malaysians who were standing at the other side of the road (1:03:32-1:04:52). In contrast, survivors such as Lian-Chin Tay recognize the humanity of the military by recalling being rescued from his burning home by the Federal Reserve Unit (39:19-39:52). Lau's film also foregrounds the inhumanity of civilians in Malaysia. Hassan A. Muthalib speaks about Chinese Malaysians being burned alive in their terrace houses by the Malay mob (1:03:40-1:03:49) and an anonymous survivor recalls witnessing a Malay mob slashing Chinese bystanders on the streets (56:30-56:40) while another anonymous survivor recalls an incident where Chinese Malaysians burnt down a photo studio for not providing shelter to the Chinese fleeing from the mob (57:59-58:20). The documentary, however, also depicts Malaysians' humanity by featuring Mohd. Zubir Ahmad's testimony about volunteering at a hospital and helping victims without discriminating against them on grounds of race (1:01:53-1:03:20).

Apart from following an ethics of just memory, *The Tree Remembers* also extends the work of the aforementioned oral history project *Rebirth from the Ashes* (在傷口上重生) by featuring multiple testimonies from survivors, testimonies that are often juxtaposed with archival photos and footage. While the oral history project translates survivors' testimonies into Mandarin Chinese in a printed book, Lau's documentary preserves some of the linguistic heterogeneity of Malaysia by featuring survivors

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

testifying in the language of their choice while providing subtitles in Chinese, English, and Malay. The affordances of film enable the documentary to avoid another layer of mediation—layers of translation instead are displayed as subtitles on screen. Videoing survivors in the act of testifying instead of transcribing their testimonies into text, according to James E. Young, preserves the "essential provisionality" of the act itself by recording the "pauses and hesitations," the "sense of incoherency of experiences," and "behavioral and nonverbal signs" of the survivors (161-62).[74] In Lau's documentary, nonverbal signs in Mohd. Zubir Ahmad's testimony augment the film's final message of solidarity. With tears in his eyes and a catch in his voice, Mohd. Zubir Ahmad resumes his earlier testimony on the racial harmony that supposedly existed before the May 13 Incident by recounting his subsequent efforts to promote understanding between Malay and Chinese Malaysians (41:51-42:39; 1:16:47-1:18:11). Replete with these nonverbal signals that attest to his sincere wish for inter-racial solidarity, Mohd. Zubir Ahmad's testimony is situated at the end of a string of testimonies from May 13 survivors and thereby echoes the end of the documentary where a similar message of solidarity is highlighted.

The documentary form also affords another layering of oral testimonies with archival photos and footage, often producing a palimpsest of histories and commentaries laden with irony. For example, the director-cum-editor Lau evokes and ridicules British colonial discourse near the beginning of *The Tree Remembers*.[75]

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[74] By focusing on Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* and the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony, Young develops this interpretation of the nonverbal signs in video testimonies and argues that these texts "retain the process of construction" of testimonies and brings us "metahistorical knowledge" (165).

[75] In Lau's documentary film, the source of this inserted sequence of British colonial discourse is not identified. Through personal communication with Lau on 30 August 2021, I learned that he wrote and recorded the voice-over himself. He employs a similar strategy to ironize colonial ethnography. Near the beginning of the documentary film, he inserts a sequence imitating the 1956 film *Timeless Temiar* to critique its constructed and exoticizing depiction of the Temiar people. For this film, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Y4DJ4O5RKM.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Figure 4 **Figure 5**

Featuring a narrator speaking in British English over a retro soundscape full of crackles and white noises, the sequence ironizes British colonial discourse about Malaya by juxtaposing the voice-over with old black-and-white news footage. In one instance, the narrator delineates a British colonial racial hierarchy and asserts that racialized minorities should "stay in their places in the hierarchy" (14:32) while the camera pans vertically from the top of a statue of a British commander down to an Indian man sitting on the ground next to the statue, dealing cards (14:27-14:37; see Figure 4 and Figure 5). This ironic juxtaposition, along with subsequent accounts of the purported "place" of Chinese and Indian "immigrants" in the hierarchy (14:38-14:57), highlights and critiques British colonial subjugation of racialized minorities. Another example of ironic juxtaposition is manifested in the sequence featuring the narrator's account of the British colonial divide-and-rule policy presented alongside black-and-white footage of a British lady feeding monkeys on a street (15:12; see Figure 6), thereby implicitly

Figure 6

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

comparing the colonizer-colonized relationship to the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals.

Apart from taking advantage of the documentary form, *The Tree Remembers* reveals another significant development in representations of the May 13 Incident—the contested memories of the violent conflict have become increasingly multidirectional. According to Michael Rothberg, multidirectional memory emphasizes memory's dependence on "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (3). It attends to the "dynamic transfers" occurring between "diverse places and times" (11) and operates under a comparative thinking that focuses on the "mutual constitution and ongoing transformation" instead of the "equation" between "objects of comparison" (18). *The Tree Remembers* attests to the multidirectionality of memory by drawing comparisons between the May 13 Incident and the ongoing oppression of Orang Asli—Indigenous peoples in peninsular Malaysia (Endicott 1)—while stitching both to the legacies of British colonialism. The point of connection the documentary establishes between these diverse memories is the aforementioned "rules of the land"—namely Malay special rights. Through the testimonies of Orang Asli novelist Mahat Akiya and village head Itam Bin Amam, Lau's film depicts how these special rights discriminate against and impact the lives of other racialized minorities, including the Orang Asli (23:48-24:28; 28:21-28:33). The narrator identifies these special rights—traced back to divide-and-rule policies that granted the Malays these rights to sustain British colonial rule while confining other racialized peoples to the lower rungs of the colonial racial hierarchy (13:30-15:21)—as one of the points of contention generating tensions that culminated in the May 13 Incident (36:06-36:49). The documentary also offers another connection between the oppression of Orang Asli and British colonial discourse by portraying both as hinging on Orang Asli's supposedly primitive and uncivilized nature.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

In the tone of a colonial administrator, another narrator—speaking in British English instead of Mandarin Chinese—identifies the British colonial government as the savior and liberator of the Orang Asli, who have been "exploited by the Malays and Chinese for centuries" due to their "primitive and uncivilized nature"—a nature that makes them "an excellent subject for anthropological studies" (15:27-16:20). According to Mahat Akiya, Malaysian leaders such as former Prime Minister Mahathir similarly justify the Malays "tak[ing] the lands from [Orang Asli]" due to Orang Asli's supposedly "uncivilized" nature and alleged lack of culture (24:28-24:56). Tracking memory's multidirectional and transversal flows between these diverse histories, *The Tree Remembers* invites "acts of empathy and solidarity" (Rothberg 19) by drawing viewers' attention to the continuing violations of Orang Asli's rights through logging (26:26-33:34) and the mining of an ancestral cave full of paintings (1:18:31-1:20:44).[76] Due to memory's multidirectionality, the ongoing emergence of contested memories of May 13 in the cultural sphere thus facilitates additional articulations of stories of oppression and survival.[77] After a series of testimonies from survivors of May 13, the documentary ends on a message of solidarity by invoking Orang Asli's memories of the "second world" where peoples were "all descended from the same parents" (1:23:16-1:24:16).

Hanna Alkaf wrote *The Weight of Our Sky* while living in Kuala Lumpur. Her positioning in Malaysia may perhaps have informed her young adult novel's emphasis

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[76] For more on contemporary Orang Asli's fight against logging, see Radu. To understand other Orang Asli concerns, see the website of the Center for Orang Asli Concerns (https://www.coac.org.my).

[77] Similar to *The Tree Remembers*, Amir Muhammad's documentary film *The Big Durian* attests at an earlier moment to memory's multidirectionality. It evokes memories of the May 13 Incident to explain Malaysians' nervous reactions to the 1987 Private Adam Incident—an incident in which a private ran amok in the Chow Kit area of Kuala Lumpur with an M16. In *The Big Durian,* the narrator also utilizes memories of May 13 to trace the origins of Malaysia's racial politics, politics that exacerbated racial tensions and culminated in the 1987 Operation Lalang—a mass arrest of human rights activists and politicians ostensibly under the banner of preventing racial riots. Due to memory's multidirectionality, memories of the May 13 Incident thus facilitate articulations of stories of further human rights violations and violent conflicts in Malaysia.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

on unity and the belongingness of Malaysians of all races to the country. In contrast, Lau directed and edited *The Tree Remembers* with funding from Taiwan's National Culture and Arts Foundation after he settled in Taiwan (1:26:06-1:27:44). He thus joins the ranks of other diasporic cultural workers that I have discussed in this thesis such as Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Preeta Samarasan. In a blogpost published on his personal Facebook page, Lau has stated that the relative freedom and democracy in Taiwan allowed him to continue his creative ventures.[78] His position in the Malaysian diaspora therefore enabled him to evade some of the constraints imposed by the nation and articulate memories of May 13 that are not officially sanctioned. Writing *Evening is the Whole Day* as a student in an MFA program at the University of Michigan (Raymer), Samarasan similarly wrote about Malaysia and the May 13 Incident in the diaspora. She argues that her distance from Malaysia "gives [her] a way of seeing" and speaking about Malaysia that would otherwise be impossible to acquire and allows her to escape the "despair" occasioned by the "institutionalized racism" in her country of birth ("Malaysian Writer"). Lim similarly has spoken of her diasporic and "deterritorialized" literary imagination that allows her to write about Malaysia while living in the US (Quayum "Shirley"). Diaspora has enabled these cultural workers to not only attempt to escape the constraints imposed by the nation but also perhaps gain new ways of seeing and imagining the nation and the world.

As an overseas Chinese student from Malaysia writing about the May 13 Incident in Taiwan, I have in this thesis attempted to also develop new ways of seeing the nation and its contested pasts and possible futures, ways of seeing that reflect my awareness of and attempt to go beyond some of the sedimented forms of racialization and socialization I was subjected to in Malaysia. As a result, I have structured my thesis

[78] For this blogpost, see https://www.facebook.com/lau.huat.56/posts/10158260478171964.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

project in an attempt to follow an ethics that resembles what Nguyen calls an ethics of just memory. I have examined texts representing the May 13 Incident that have been authored by Malaysians from different racialized communities, with different temporal proximities to the traumatic event, and with different physical distances from Malaysia. However, Nguyen also reminds us that "total memory" is impossible (8) since "forgetting is inevitable" (17). By turning to stories of the historical and ongoing oppression of Orang Asli—stories that are articulated in Lau's film in conjunction with the contested memories of the May 13 Incident—I have tried to attend to the emerging memories of what Nguyen calls the "ever-new others" (69). It is my hope that by doing so, my thesis can contribute in some small way to alternative imaginations of the nation that are more multidirectional, inclusive, and just.

doi:10.6342/NTU202104582

Appendix: List of Abbreviations

BHC	British High Commission
BN	Barisan Nasional (The National Front)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
FRU	Federal Reserve Unit
Gerakan	Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement Party)
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
KMT	Kuomingtang (The Chinese Nationalist Party)
LPM	Labour Party of Malaya
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army
NOC	National Operation Council
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Party)
Perkasa	Mighty Native Organisation
PH	Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation

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