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*BAHASA ROJAK* IN MALAYSIAN LITERATURE AS A CRITIQUE ON POSTCOLONIAL  
IDENTITY AND POLITICS

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## ABSTRACT

The intermingling of the variety of cultures and the legacy of colonialism in Malaysia has produced the Malaysian vernacular, *bahasa rojak*. While many Malaysians identify with this speech variation, most Malaysians stigmatize *bahasa rojak* as informal and use it as a measurement of intelligence, professionalism, and nationalism. Two Malaysian authors, Salleh Ben Joned and Jamal Raslan, have challenged these stigmas by producing poems in *bahasa rojak*, they are “Malchin Testament” by Joned and “Words” by Raslan. Their works explore the themes of language purity, linguistic identity, and the institutional enforcement of a national language in both a postcolonial and a contemporary perspective. This thesis investigates the political intentions for using *bahasa rojak* in Malaysian literature and its importance to Malaysian linguistic identity. By doing so, this thesis provides a Malaysian and multilingual perspective on postcolonial poetry and contributes to the scholarship on Malaysian literature, which is an underdeveloped field of study.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

we true malaysians, you no,  
we pree people, you no: pree  
to make english not english  
but our very own, you see

– Salleh Ben Joned, “Malchin Testament”

Most postcolonial societies uphold the concept of two types of English: the “correct” one and the “wrong” one. “Correct” English is the standardized English dictated by the dictionary and bound to the rigid rules of grammar; “wrong” English is accented, colloquial, and heavily influenced by the other languages used in a postcolonial nation. “Wrong” English grew out of the hybridization of the multiple linguistic identities of postcolonial individuals and is commonly affiliated with words such as “broken,” “corrupt,” and as used by Dohra Ahmad in her anthology on vernacular literature, “rotten.” While most postcolonial citizens deem these varieties of English as nothing more than colloquial and conversational language, some postcolonial writers have recognized the central role these languages play in their linguistic identity and their country’s state of independence. Salleh Ben Joned from Malaysia sees it as a marker of his country’s democracy in refashioning the language to suit the local tongue and taking ownership over the language, “to make english not english/but our very own, you see” (257). His poem, “Malchin Testament,” expresses these beliefs, all the while subtly critiquing his country’s method of decolonization that assumes British colonial governance.

To convey his critique of postcolonial Malaysia's politics and linguistics, Joned decided to write this work in *bahasa rojak*, the Malaysian speech variation. His actions go against literary norms in Malaysia and provides a new perspective to the status of *bahasa rojak*. "Malchin Testament" was published in 1987, Joned addresses the issues faced by postcolonial audiences, but many of the issues he raises on the British colonial legacies that are upheld by Malaysian society and institutions remain unresolved in contemporary Malaysia. Joned's modern counterpart, Jamal Raslan, picks up where Joned leaves off in representing modern Malaysian youths who grew up in a linguistically diverse setting that shaped their hybrid identities. Raslan, too, is aware of the significance of *bahasa rojak* in representing his identity and uses it in his spoken word poem, "Words." The Malaysian speech variation adequately delivers his frustration of being criticized by the people of his own race for corrupting the national language and his mother tongue, Malay, with English. Through the recording of "Words" in 2016, Raslan paints the picture of the futile task of maintaining language purity when language itself has evolved over the centuries through contact with other languages.

This thesis will look closely at the bold works of Joned and Raslan to uncover their political intentions in using *bahasa rojak* to illustrate their hybrid linguistic identity and critique Malaysia's progress as a developing postcolonial nation. "Malchin Testament" and "Words" stand out in Malaysian literature because they use a stigmatized and informal oral language to shed light on serious political issues. This is highly unusual in a country that is required by law to produce all official documents and information in Standard Malay or Standard English. Malaysia's journey towards independence involves returning completely to the native roots of the *bumiputra*, directly translated as "prince of the soil" in reference to the nativity of the Malay race. Joned's and Raslan's works point out how this method of decolonization mirrors the British

colonizer's concept of building a society that centers around one culture. Additionally, this research paper will further assess both literary and oral forms of delivery as settings for speech variations, which is a major topic of discussion in postcolonial studies. The ways Joned and Raslan take advantage of their media in order to emphasize their poem's themes will be analyzed.

This thesis is informed by my personal background of being Malaysian Chinese. Like many other Malaysian Chinese, I am trilingual: English as a result of Malaysia's colonial history and its advantages in a globalized world, Mandarin because my great-great-grandparents were immigrant laborers from China, and Malay<sup>1</sup> because it is the national language of Malaysia. Growing up, I had difficulty identifying with only one language as I have no recollection of ever being monolingual. It was not until I took a course in globality and literature that I began to recognize the parallels between my experiences with that of other postcolonial citizens. The materials we read in class, Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands/*La Frontera*: The New Mestiza" (1987) in particular, accurately put into words my linguistic experience within the borderlands of multiple languages. Her experiences on being language shamed for speaking both Spanish and English, of confusing her identity as a result of internalizing the insults to her language, and of identifying most with a hybrid language evoked a sense of nostalgia within me. Aside from being one of my first experiences with a literary work that relates to my linguistic reality in Malaysia, her defiance to standard literature is inspiring and emboldening, igniting a desire inside me to explore and solidify my own linguistic identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, it is important for the reader to note that the word "Malay" will be used to describe both the language and the race of the people throughout the thesis.

This research paper may include biased language because the appointment of Malay as the national language has degraded the other languages in Malaysia to a secondary status; this includes my mother tongue, Mandarin. Instead, I am expected to prioritize the native tongue of the Malay people, and accept their constitutional privileges such as tuition discounts and opportunities to participate in scholarship programs. At times, my frustration over being viewed as a second-class or non-native citizen in a country where three generations of my family have worked hard to make a living comes through in my writing. Although my personal connection to the topic of study may reveal my biases, it also serves as an asset to my analysis of Malaysian postcolonial poetry. My background knowledge and real life experiences with the subject matter provide me with a framework to analyze the texts and come up with additional questions about the politics of identity across multiple languages.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions will be posed to narrow the scope of the analysis and facilitate in the formation of the conclusion. The research questions will be based off of the relationship between *bahasa rojak* and a national linguistic identity in Malaysia.

Although Malaysians are linguistically diverse in speech, it is not reflected in Malaysian literature, with many writers opting to write purely in one language. This monolingual writing is encouraged by the belief that *bahasa rojak* is considered by many as “corrupted” Malay, a word used by Husni Abu Bakar in “Code-Switching in Kuala Lumpur Malay” (2009), and is restricted by regulations that keep it out of Malay literature and other formal publications (100). By being unconventional, inconsistent, and financially insecure, *bahasa rojak* has become an unpopular



language in Malaysian literature. Yet, Raslan and Joned recognize its importance to their personal identities and their political goals. This thesis will analyze the reasons these two writers decided to use *bahasa rojak* in “Malchin Testament” and “Words.”

With the answer from the previous research question, *bahasa rojak*'s relationship to Malaysian identity can be better understood. The broader subject of identity is broached because personal identity is comprised of linguistic identity, especially in Malaysia, where one's social standing, nationality, and education is judged based on one's language proficiency. However, in a nation of multilingual speakers, it is difficult to arrive at a unanimous Malaysian identity as each linguistic identity is made up of varying degrees of a myriad of languages. Joned and Raslan's acknowledgement of a linguistic identity that is flexible and encompassing may be the first step to realizing a solution to this issue.

Joned and Raslan both adopted different methods of delivering their works. Joned uses a written method while Raslan has chosen to deliver his work orally. Each process of delivery impacts the audience differently and alters the audience's experience with *bahasa rojak*. How the audience interprets the work is partly determined by the effectiveness in the delivery method to relay the writer's primary ideas and their tone of voice. In addition to that, the propagation of the works may be affected depending on the advancement of technology and the popularity of the medium of delivery. The two channels of delivery will be assessed to learn how Joned and Raslan uses it to their advantage in the context of their works.

Finally, this research will look at the big picture of postcolonial studies and determine how this analysis of Malaysian vernacular literature contributes to it. Each postcolonial nation has its own unique struggles in redefining their nation, and Malaysia is no exception. By studying Malaysian literature through a postcolonial framework, the postcolonial legacy in

Malaysia that influences its approach to decolonization and the enforcement of a national identity can be compared to that of other postcolonial nations. The unique hybrid identity in Malaysia may serve to inspire other postcolonial nations to accept an inclusive and all-encompassing linguistic identity.

### **Methodology**

To begin this research, a thorough understanding of Malaysia's colonial history, the origins of *bahasa rojak*, and the politics of language in Malaysia will be imparted in the reader. This background information is necessary for the reader to fully understand the analysis of Joned and Raslan's political goals. A.B. Shamsul's "A History of an Identity, an Identity of a History: The Idea and Practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia Reconsidered" (2001) and Nathan John Albury's "Mother Tongues and Linguaging in Malaysia: Critical Linguistics Under Critical Examination" (2017) are two resources that will introduce the reader to the history of linguistic contact between Malay and other languages that occurred through the busy trading ports of Malaysia, the immigration of Chinese and Indian laborers, and British colonization.

Equipped with sufficient background information, a close analysis of the recordings and written works of Joned and Raslan will be performed in order to uncover their primary ideas through their rhetorical devices and linguistic decisions. Furthermore, existing interviews and autobiographies of the writers will also be studied to gain an insight on the author's linguistic identities and political stances. Through this analysis, the research will be able to relate *bahasa rojak* and its importance to Malaysian identity. Individual chapters will be dedicated to the analysis of each literary work.

In addition, an anthology of Malaysian poetry, titled *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems*, edited by Malachi Edwin Vethamani, will be used to compare the use of *bahasa rojak* in the two works studied to the literary works of other Malaysian writers. Some of the authors in the anthology apply *bahasa rojak* to their works by code switching, while others use the speech variation in conversational contexts, and others still feel the need to include a glossary. This examination will reveal how “Malchin Testament” and “Words” are unconventional, which challenges the common perception of *bahasa rojak*.

Looking at the bigger picture, Jones’s and Raslan’s contribution to the broader postcolonial question of the construction of postcolonial identity can be determined through comparisons with vernacular literatures from postcolonial writers across the globe. Any similarities between the ideas and themes of postcolonial writers such as Louise Bennett, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Gloria Anzaldúa to that of the Malaysian writers, Jones and Raslan, will help draw a connection to common postcolonial themes.

The application of this methodology will ensure the systematic progression of the in-depth analysis to determine Jones and Raslan’s political intentions of using *bahasa rojak* to critique governing bodies in relation to Malaysian linguistic identity. From the analyses of “Malchin Testament” and “Words,” the speech variation as revolt against colonial legacy of singular linguistic identities and standardized languages can be contrasted with the use of the vernacular in other postcolonial literatures.

## Chapter 2

### Historical and Linguistic Background

The origin of *bahasa rojak* is deeply rooted in Malaysia's colonial history and is central to Jones and Raslan's critique of decolonization. To fully appreciate the impact of Jones's and Raslan's experimentation with *bahasa rojak* in "Malchin Testament" and "Words," the reader needs to be familiar with the formation of Malaysia as a multilingual country and the role of *bahasa rojak* in society.

#### Malaysia: The Multi-Racial Postcolonial Nation

Malaysia, known as Malaya before its independence, is made up of two peninsulas nestled in the cluster of South East Asian countries, extending from Thailand and surrounded by Indonesia. The country is a multicultural center comprised primarily of three races – the Malay, Chinese, and Indians. Data retrieved from an infographic published by the official portal of the Department of Statistics Malaysia states that in 2018, 69.1% of the population, that is 20.07 million people, are *Bumiputera* or Malays, while Chinese and Indians make up 23% and 6.9% of the population, respectively (Mahidin). Malaysia has long been a site for cultural contact and as Charles Hirschman noted in his article, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications" (1987), the trading ports in Malaya were some of the earliest places of ethnic and cultural interaction as it is historically a major crossroad for trade routes between China and India. It was not until the 1840s and the 1850s that the boom in

the Malayan economy created a need for large quantities of labor to keep up with trade demands. By then, the British had already colonized Malaysia for over a decade, beginning in 1826 as noted by Cheah Boon Kheng in “Writing Indigenous History in Malaysia: A Survey on Approaches and Problems,” a research article published in 1996 (34). The reluctance of the Malay peasants to work in slave-like conditions in the mines and plantations to produce tin and agricultural products caused the British to encourage the great migration of Chinese, Indians, and Indonesians to Malaya in the form of low-cost labor. While many migrant laborers returned home when their labor contracts ended, a majority of these laborers settled down in Malaya, creating a multicultural society (Hirschman 558-559).

When Malaysia achieved independence in 1957, the Malays dominated the process of decolonization with their ideals and visions. Rather than adapting to the newly developed heterogeneous society, Malays viewed these immigrant laborers as the “other” and implemented divisive measures to maintain their status quo. The distinctness of the Malay identity is the result of the British colonizer’s influence in the early 1800s, as expressed by A.B. Shamsul in “A History of an Identity, an Identity of a History: The Idea and Practice of ‘Malayness’ in Malaysia Reconsidered” (363). Influenced by the Enlightenment, the British managed their colonies with the idea that everything should be scientifically classified. With this goal in mind, they helped the Malays construct an identity that is unique to their history and traditions. Stamford Raffles, a British governor in Malaya, altered the title of a book on the rituals and ceremonies for Malay kings from *Peraturan Segala Raja-Raja* (Rules for Rulers) to *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay History), as well as giving it the English name of *Malay Annals*. By including the words ‘Malay’ and ‘*Melayu*’ in the titles of their official documents, newspapers, and even the land on which they

walked, the British helped the Malays establish a “Malay Nation,” one in which people spoke the same language and shared the same customs (Shamsul 363).

Overtime, the identity of the “Malay Nation” gradually became one of the “Malay Race,” further strengthened by the increase of immigrant laborers in Malaysia. Malays are defined by their lineage to Srivijaya and Melaka as well as their belief in Islam (Shamsul 363). The presence of these “others,” the Chinese and the Indians, continued to solidify the definition of Malay as a race, because they explicitly exhibit what the Malays are not. The Malay nationalism that developed alongside the Chinese and Indian nationalism revolved around culture rather than politics (364). T.N. Harper, author of “New Malays, New Malaysians: Nationalism, Society and History” (1996), observed that colonial knowledge led to the current political state in Malaysia. The politicians of Malaya were guided by Great Britain when they began the process of decolonization. These colonial methods of census and control by a singular culture were unsuitable for the plural society that is Malaya and proved to be a failure in uniting Malaysians of different races (239-240). Not to mention, the British colonizers had always centered their policies in favor of the Malays. The article “Constitutional Change in Malaya’s Plural Society” (1957) by J. Norman Parmer reveals that the British “declared that their responsibilities were only to the Malay people.” Chinese and Indian immigrant laborers were treated as temporary settlers and were not taken into account by British policymakers (145). The creation of the Malay identity and the disregard for the immigrant laborers set the tone for postcolonial Malaysia.

The concept of Malayness became so distinct that when the British attempted to aid Malaya’s independence by enforcing their own idea of postcolonial Malaya, or what they called the “Malayan Union,” it was strongly opposed by Malay Nationalists. Instead, the British were made to draft a federalist order, titled the “Federation of Malaya,” where non-Malays had to

recognize the privileges appointed to Malays, which includes priority over civil servant positions, scholarships, and ownership of land and business licenses (Norman 148). The federation also appointed Malay as the national language of Malaysia at the expense of the native languages of non-Malays (Shamsul 364). This appointment would cause critics such as wan Hao, from the National University of Singapore, to suggest that there are sub-imperialist motives for banning non-Malay languages from official and formal settings throughout the country (3).

When Malaysia achieved its independence in 1957, it included the small island state of Singapore. The island would eventually break off and form its own country in 1965 over conflicting political issues, including that of racial politics. The then Singapore Premier and eventual Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, led a political campaign with the mission of obtaining equal rights for the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia, utilizing the slogan “Malaysian Malaysia.” The serious protests from Malays would commence the separation of Singapore from Malaysia on the grounds of a conflict in interests (Cheah 36-37).

While most postcolonial nations struggled to retrieve and distinguish their identity from that of their colonizers, Malaysia needed to rebuild their national identity to accommodate the changes to the country’s demographics. Yet, the government created a national identity based on the Malay culture, excluding the non-Malays (Albury 11). It is an idealistic and bold move on the Malaysian government’s part in implementing policies with the expectation of the assimilation of non-Malays into the Malay culture. In response to these policies, each racial group in Malaysia has put in effort and have succeeded in maintaining their linguistic identities by creating vernacular schools in which the students are taught primarily in their native language, as well as distributing literature that is written in their mother tongue. Instead of creating a unified environment, the appointment of Malay as the national language has only provided non-Malays

with more incentive to preserve their native languages. This is where a hybrid language such as *bahasa rojak* acts as a unifying factor for Malaysians as it is both inclusive and relatable to most, if not all. This speech variation simultaneously rejects the pure form of the colonizers' language and the chauvinistic national language.

### ***Bahasa Rojak***

The frequent contact between Malaysians of different races naturally produced a common language in which everyone would use to communicate comfortably; this vernacular<sup>2</sup> is *bahasa rojak*. It consists of the act of code-switching among two or more languages that are spoken in the region, with any of the languages being the base language. The variety of languages spoken in Malaysia include English, Malay, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkein, Tamil, and Telugu. This speech variety draws its name from a Malaysian dish, called *rojak*, which is akin to a salad: a mixture of different fruits and vegetables covered in a thick brown sauce (Bakar 99). The metaphor forges the connection between the dish and the language as they are both created through blending different ingredients together. Therefore, *bahasa rojak* has become the common language among the Malaysian people despite their ethnic, racial, and linguistic differences. Although there is a rampant use of this speech variety in the everyday lives of Malaysians, the pure forms of languages still take precedence over the vernacular. In his article "Language Shaming in Malaysia," Tan articulates the societal preference for pure forms of languages: "I speak better Malay therefore I am more authentically Malay/sian than you. I speak

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<sup>2</sup> *Bahasa rojak* aligns with one of the applications of "vernacular" in Jack Richard et al.'s *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. Described as a variety of language, Richard et al. puts it in the context of bilingual and multilingual countries, where the vernacular is used by most of the population but it is not the national language (307).



better English, therefore I am more professional or intelligent than you” (2). Tan’s quote portrays how the ability to speak in the pure forms of languages is a measure of how nationalistic, professional, or smart a person is.

These judgements contributed to the negative connotations attached to *bahasa rojak* because it represents an unpatriotic and uneducated individual. This negative view is supported by the idea that it is a “corrupted” variation of Malay (Bakar 100). However, its widespread use among Malaysians threatens the status of the Malay language as the national language (Bakar 100). In response, regulatory measures have been taken against *bahasa rojak* to discourage its use, such as banning it from all major news stations. More serious acts to penalize the use of “improper” Malay on advertisements and sign boards have previously been set before the Malaysian Parliament but was never approved (Malaysiakini 1-3). The stigmatization and negative associations of *bahasa rojak* has led to an identity conflict in many Malaysians who possess a hybrid linguistic identity. This thesis will explore the notion that the incorporation of *bahasa rojak* in Malaysian poetry will contribute to refuting the stigmas associated with it, and in doing so encourage Malaysians to adopt a commonly shared identity.

The negative connotation linked to *bahasa rojak* has caused many Malaysians to turn towards English as a neutral medium of exchange (Albury 10). Ironically, utilizing English has its negative implications as well. Su Kim Lee et al.’s research, “The English Language and its Impact on Identities of Multilingual Malaysian Undergraduates” (2010), noted the judgements received by Malaysian postgraduate students who are fluent in English. Some of the subjects were seen as “boastful” and were using their English as a way to “show off” to their peers. Lee elaborates on the adoption of English by Malaysians as “a relic of colonialism, as being elitist, and a betrayal of the Malay cultural identity and the Malay language.” Others still were

considered “too westernized,” especially when their English speaking skills triumphed the eloquence of their mother tongue (Lee 89). Raslan responds to these acts of language shaming in “Words” and expresses the difficulty of many Malaysians in being accepted for a linguistic identity that does not align with their national identity. Jahan Ramazani explains in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2017), that some postcolonial writers have proposed to revert to the use of the native language in efforts to restore their national identity (14). This course of action is difficult to enforce in Malaysia because of the different types of native languages spoken in the country. To adopt one native language would disregard the others and continue to divide the people of Malaysia.

The following chapters will examine Joned’s and Raslan’s experiments with *bahasa rojak* as a linguistic identity that is fluid and adaptable to the personal identities of each Malaysian in place of the national language; as a political tool to draw connections between the British Empire and Malaysia’s postcolonial government in its institutional enforcement of a singular national identity; as well as a language that works in both a literary and oral medium.

### Chapter 3

#### **Malchin Testament: What English? It's Manglishlah!**

Salleh Ben Joned may be a senior member in the Malaysian literary scene, but his works have often been kept out of the limelight due to the large amounts of profanity and blasphemy they contain. Malaysian audiences were introduced to the vulgarity and crass language in his works when he published his debut bilingual poetry collection, *Sajak-sajak Salleh/Poems Sacred and Profane*, in 1987. The National Laureate of Malaysia at the time, Muhammad Haji Salleh, called Joned's poetry "the most traumatic experience of the Malay literary scene" (Ng 1). Salleh's attitude reflects the popular Malay mindset that Malay literature should be written in pure Malay and modeled after Islamic values as well as encourage a religious lifestyle. Salleh himself vowed to return to the traditional Malay literary styles in efforts to reclaim his Malay identity after many years of writing bilingually. Salleh saw Joned's works as a symbol of westernization, an obstacle to restoring the Malay identity after colonization. Salleh's exact words regarding the redefinition of the Malay identity in contemporary Malaysia were: "It is a shame that before we could even define ourselves this great new tsunami of globalisation almost swept us all away" (Yaapar 16). The criticisms made against Joned's works may have been partly fueled by the graphic obscenity in them, but it was also prompted by Joned's controversial political stances such as disagreeing with the country's move to solemnize Malay as the national language. This is an opinion that will turn his fellow Malays against him, further casting his work into the unvisited corners of bookstores (Ng 1-2). Despite these harsh judgements against him, Joned has continued to stand by his work and his beliefs, eventually publishing many other

works along the way, such as *As I Please: Selected Writings 1975-1994* in 1994 and *The Amok of Mat Solo* in 2011 (Goodreads 1).

Malachi Edwin Vethamani explains in the introduction to *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems*, that “Malchin Testament” was originally titled “Malchin Monologue” when it was first published in 1987. Sometime between the late 1900s and early 2000s, the title “Malchin Testament” was adopted. The change does not end there, as the current title of the work, last altered in 2007, is “testament to engmalchin” (xvii). The “engmalchin” and “malchin” described in these titles refer to the hybrid language comprised of English, Malay, and Mandarin created by students from the Anglophone University of Malaya in Singapore in the 1950s (Holden 9). At the time of its conception, neither Singapore nor Malaysia had achieved independence from Great Britain. The students created the language with the purpose of portraying the linguistic realities of Singapore in literature, although recent editorials have said that it was meant to create a nation that is linguistically diverse (9). In hindsight, it foreshadowed the withdrawal of Singapore from Malaysia due to reasons stated in the second chapter, as well as Singapore’s appointment of Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and English as its national languages (U.S. Library of Congress 16-25). Engmalchin’s eventual demise was brought on by its inconsistent form and vague objectives. However, it serves as historical evidence of the diverse linguistic climate and the existence of a hybrid language in Malaysia and Singapore at the time.

The first two titles of the work, “Malchin Monologue” and “Malchin Testament” differ from the most recent title, “testament to engmalchin” in that they both mention “Malchin” and not “engmalchin.” Referring to a version of the “Malchin Testament” that was published in 1999 by the University of Hawai’i Press called *Mānoa*, Jones included an elaborate glossary where he explained that “Malchin” is an “acronym for malay, chinese, and indians, the three major races

of Malaysia, who speak a unique lingua franca called engmalchin” (Jones 111). With this context, the first two titles can be viewed as Malaysians as a whole speaking directly to the British colonizers. The word “Malchin” appears first, effectively presenting the Malaysian people’s role as the agent in the delivery of the messages found in the monologue or testament. By presenting the title this way, Jones is able to highlight the theme of democracy and freedom in his poem, “the ‘cras’ in democracy we stress / so also the do(o)m in freedom,” because Malaysians are creating a one-of-a-kind identity for themselves through the hybridization of the languages spoken in Malaysia. The exclusion of the “eng” in engmalchin further strengthens this theme of democracy as it textually visualizes the departure of the British colonizers from South East Asia.

Aside from that, each title in chronological order reflects the progress of Malaysians in rebuilding their confidence in the country’s democracy. The word “monologue” in the first title indicates Malaysians presenting a solo performance without expecting a response, as though it is a piece that voices their concerns to each other with no hope to be heard or without any opportunity to inspire change. This hopelessness reflects a young postcolonial society that is used to being disregarded by European colonial powers. The second title, “Malchin Testament,” is bolder and acts as a confirmation of the many types of cultures and races that are important to the Malaysian identity. Jones seeks independence for the Malaysian identity, one that is distant and singular from the postcolonial identity. The third title finds Jones altering the work as the confirmation towards the use of the hybrid language. While his previous titles focused on the validation of the Malaysian identity, the last title is a request for the legitimization of the hybrid language. At the time of the third change to the title, the Malaysian identity has been centered around the Malay race, a move heavily objected to by Jones. This could be the reason Jones

turned away from the acceptance of a Malaysian identity, and focused his efforts on the recognition of the hybrid language.

Throughout the years, “Malchin Testament” has evolved in its title and presentation. The version of this poem in *Mānoa* also had words bolded to indicate what a speaker would stress the syllable if the poem were to be performed. The glossary in the *Mānoa* version explains more *rojak* words such as *engmalchin*, *lah*, and *mat saleh*; Jones even goes so far as to provide personal commentary in this section: “(god knows why saleh/salleh [a word of arabic origin meaning pure or pious] has been so ‘slanged,’ but i strongly object to such cultural abuse of my sacred name!)” (111). The constant updates and the differences in each version of the poem depicts Jones’s efforts in portraying a literature that is based off of an oral language, that is *bahasa rojak*. Oral presentations of literature, such as spoken word poetry, changes with every performance depending on factors such as the type of audience and the context in which the work is presented. *Mānoa* is published by the University of Hawai’i, which means they have a broader range of audiences consisting mostly of non-Malaysians. Bearing his audiences in mind, Jones was careful to include a more extensive glossary to increase the accessibility of his work. As compared to Vethamani’s anthology of Malaysian poems, published and sold in Malaysia, Jones expects most of his readers will be Malaysians, therefore little to no clarification is needed.

In “Malchin Testament,” Jones uses a form of *bahasa rojak* that uses English as the base language. Dubbed “Manglish” among locals, it is officially recognized as “Malaysian English” alongside other World Englishes (Vethamani xvii). Much like the Jamaican creole used by Louise Bennett, *bahasa rojak* is most often used orally as most of its distinctions and characteristics are based on its phonetics. In relation to the aforementioned *engmalchin*, the

difficulties and inconsistencies in transferring an oral language into a written one is one of the reasons writing in *bahasa rojak* is uncommon. In his piece, Joned translates this oral language into literature by writing phonetically. Many postcolonial nations struggle to legitimize the vernacular because it cannot be used in formal literature. In Malaysia, the efforts to boost the status of *bahasa rojak* have been overshadowed by the fear that the national language, Malay, is being sideswiped by English. As a result, maintaining the status of Malay has been the focus of Malaysian policy makers, pushing *bahasa rojak* out of the limelight. Joned has achieved significant progress in legitimizing *bahasa rojak* by transferring the language onto paper. However, some words are up for interpretation because of the multitude of ways they can be pronounced. For instance, when I first read through “Malchin Testament” (Appendix A), I thought the “deh” in stanza 2 and 5 meant “the.” After rereading the poem multiple times with a complete understanding of the context, it dawned on me that the poem could still make sense if “deh” was read as “their.” It is unclear how Joned wants his work to be read, but the message he wants to deliver is not drastically altered. This discrepancy in meaning depicts the complications of transcribing an oral language, which many adversaries use as justification to favor the standardized forms of language. Using a non-standardized form of language is not necessarily a disadvantage to Joned; instead he is able to invite the reader to take hold of the work and interpret it based on their background and past experiences. By giving his readers flexibility in understanding the poem, the poem is able to suit the reader’s linguistic background. It makes the reader feel validated and relatable, even creating a personal experience for the reader as opposed to the restrictive rigidity of a standardized language.

In addition, the numerous ways the literature can be interpreted raises self-awareness within the reader of the diversity in *bahasa rojak*. An individual’s variation of *bahasa rojak* is

dependent on factors such as their ethnicity, dominant language, and education to name a few. When applied to different literary works, each person comes away with a different perspective even though the same language is used. The influence of a person's background on their language reinforces Gloria Anzaldúa's view that "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity-I am my language" (445). Each person's story is told through the language they speak and *bahasa rojak* effectively encapsulates the complexity of a Malaysian's cultural heritage in relation to their nationality. Through a Malaysian's speech, one can hear the remnants of the country's colonial history, the settlement of immigrant laborers, and the bond between the different racial groups that exist in Malaysia.

Echoing many postcolonial writers, Joned uses the colonizer's language, English, and their literature against them. He code switches, uses slang, and alters the language phonetically and grammatically to highlight the ways Malaysians have made the language theirs. He code switches the English words "oppressed" and "stressed" with the Malay word "*tekan*," causing the language to become impure as it has been combined with vocabulary from another language. The use of Malaysian slang throughout the poem continues to reclaim the language. For example, the slang "*lah*," often used to denote exclamation and emotion in speech, populates the first six stanzas. In the second stanza, the colloquial term used to refer to white Caucasians, "*mat saleh*," is more evidence of the use of informal language in the poem. Joned wrote "Malchin Testament" with the intention of staying true to Manglish, emphasizing the changes and stresses in the phonetics. As exhibited, he writes "ebri ting" instead of "everything" and "akshen" instead of "action." In the version published in *Mānoa*, Joned bolds the parts of the words that requires more emphasis, "our **english** not **punny**, you no," (110). Grammatically, Joned integrates Malay grammar into English by removing collective nouns such as "are" and "is" in these lines: "our



stresses not wrong” and “our english not strong” (257). These alterations to the English language have helped Malaysians reclaim the language that was mandated by the colonizers.

Code switching is not as prominent in “Malchin Testament,” as compared to some of Joned’s other works, such as “The Salacious Rhymes of a Self-Taut Prodigal or Si Tegang’s Home Coming,” where code switching littered the stanzas randomly and is well integrated into the poem, which enabled it to flow rhythmically (263-267). Compared to the “Malchin Testament,” the code switching in “The Salacious Rhymes” poem was used with less political intent. In another poem, “Whence Does Love Come?” the few instances of code switching sounded conversational from the persona, as if its use was unconscious and organic (268-269). However, in “Malchin Testament,” Joned decides to only code switch with one word at strategic moments in order to reiterate his primary theme of oppression through language. The word he code switches is *tekan*, which conveys the meaning of press or oppress. The deliberate code-switching of this word is a critique towards the colonizer’s oppression of language. Although the word describes oppression, its use in “Malchin Testament” actually defies the colonizers who have attempted to strip Joned of his identity by taking away his mother tongue. Therefore, code-switching allows him to reclaim his identity because he uses Malay words to express the same meanings.

Joned even made the point of providing the definition for *tekan* at the end of the poem to underscore his main critique. The explanation of the word at the end of the poem is out of place, as seen by comparing it with Joned’s other works mentioned above. These works code switched with different words and yet none of the works contain a glossary like “Malchin Testament” does. This way, Joned’s work is able to reach English speaking audiences and is able to participate in international political debate while maintaining his linguistic identity. Furthermore,

Joned's definition of *tekan* is "Malay for stress or oppress" (259), both words indicating the poem's emphasis on oppression. The official Malay database of dictionaries, the *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu*, describes *tekan* as the action of putting down a signature or one's life ("tekan") as well as the act of pressing down on something with force ("menekan"). In the Malay context, *tekan* encompasses many meanings; in English, Joned had to use two specific words to explain not only the meaning of the word, but also the severity and connotations tied to it. The discrepancy between definitions is the method used by Joned to distinguish the word from its dictated meaning in order for him to redefine the term for himself. The underlying statement behind his actions is to reconstruct his linguistic identity, defying the one imposed on him by the government. Unlike Muhammad Haji Salleh, who decided that he would rebuild the Malay postcolonial identity by ceasing to write in English and retaining traditional Malay values, Joned rebuilds his identity through a contemporary lens (Yaapar 16). He realizes that English has become an important and integral part of Malaysian culture and identity, which is why he incorporates it into a new hybrid identity.

The style used in "Malchin Testament" exhibits the similarities between Malay and European literary works. It can be said that poems and *puisi*, that is Malay poems, reflect on each other and represent the results of cultures that have been permanently impacted by colonization. As Ramazani states in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, the form of a work of literature can exhibit the historical timeline of its creation as well as its writer (16). From "Malchin Testament," the similarity to the British literary style shows how Malaysia's colonial influence has altered its literary forms. Both forms of poetry uses four lines in a stanza and an a, b, a, b rhyming scheme, as seen in stanza 2 and 3 with "places" and "races," "pree" and "see."

As opposed to the *pantun*, a traditional Malay oral poetic form, the *puisi* has more Western influence and is considered a modern Malay literary form.

The poetic form in “Malchin Testament” is extremely uniform and standardized. The contrast between the consistency of the poetic form and the randomness of *bahasa rojak* makes a bold statement as to how this Malaysian speech variation, just like the Malaysian people, cannot be held back by the shackles of European powers. Looking through a postcolonial lens, this poetic form could be a critique on how Malaysians have adopted a very submissive attitude as a result of their postcolonial history. Through this form, Joned expresses his desire for Malaysians to think freely and break away from the linguistic regulations enforced on them.

As mentioned above, this poem is a satire that aims to mock the colonizers who have tried to push their language on Malaysians through educational institutions and the government. The rigidity and the standard poetic format of “Malchin Testament” makes a statement that even though the poem fits into the colonizer’s literary structures, the postcolonial writer is able to reclaim English literature by incorporating their own cultural and linguistic characteristics into the work. While Joned assumes the voice of all Malaysians, he also speaks for the overall postcolonial community. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson mention in “Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference” (1997), “the postcolonial world is an interconnected space” (43). It brings together the collective postcolonial experience, because many postcolonial nations experience the same issues of rebuilding and reclaiming their national identity after independence.

Irony is a popular literary tool for postcolonial writers to express their opinion on postcolonial governance and approaches to decolonization, as written by Alexander Adkins in their dissertation, *Postcolonial Satire in Cynical Times* published in 2016 (2). The double

meaning represented by irony in postcolonial literature both celebrates and depreciates a nation's independence from British colonial powers. For Joned, the code switching between the Malay word "*tekan*" and the English word "stress" both mocks the superiority of English while being cynical about postcolonial Malaysia's politics. The first time the word *tekan* is used is in stanza 4:

we *tekan* words like our leaders  
*tekan* ebri word, ebri ting  
 that should be properly *tekaned*  
 por the real good op the nation. (259)

The double meaning can be seen in Joned's reference to "our leaders." In context, he is referring to Malaysian leaders, but when it stands alone, the leaders could represent the British colonizers. The ambiguity achieved in this word coupled with the dual meaning of the word *tekan* as defined by Joned introduces a cynical tone to the rest of the stanza. In the first two lines of the stanza, words are the object of the verb *tekan*, leading the reader to apply the definition of stress or emphasis to make sense of the two lines. When Joned adds "ebri ting" as the second object to *tekan*, the interpretation of the word begins to change. The addition of this broad category shifts the meaning of *tekan* from the stresses in pronunciation to the oppression of "ebri ting/ that should be properly *tekaned*." The vagueness of the object allows for a variety of interpretations. Joned could be speaking of the oppression of non-Malay Malaysians and their languages, which is presumed to be necessary to uphold the status of the Malays. This interpretation presents the parallel between the British colonizers' oppression on all Malaysians during colonization and the chauvinistic attitudes of the Malays. This irony frames Malaysia's independence not as a

freedom from oppressive powers, but as a transfer of power from the British to the Malays (Adkins 2).

It is through irony that Joned is able to participate in a political debate in a less confrontational environment in “Malchin Testament.” This is a concept introduced by Janet Neigh in her 2017 article “Orality, Creoles, and Postcolonial Poetry in Performance” (172). The critique on the comparable governments of postcolonial Malaysia and colonial Malaysia continue throughout the poem. Malaysian leaders are said to *tekan* the education system, careers, freedom, and “everything that matters” (Joned 258-259). Joned’s irony points out how Malaysians have continued to be subservient to their governing bodies even though the country has been freed from colonization. This is a common theme among postcolonial countries; the citizens continue to be complacent and passive politically, not fully exercising their rights and their freedom of speech in a democratic country. This is exemplified by the fact that the same political party, *Barisan Nasional* (BN), has been governing Malaysia for 61 years since the country’s independence. That finally changed in May 2018, when the opposition party won the elections (Hirkié 1). The shift in political ideals and actions can be seen with the rise of the younger generation who grew up not in the postcolonial era, as most of their parents did, but in the era of political freedom. Watching the rise of political movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo from their televisions and on the Internet, the youth of Malaysia are more aware than ever of their role in inciting change in their country. Simply put, the themes and ideas found in “Malchin Testament” of calling on Malaysians to take control of their realities is relevant to the current political climate in contemporary Malaysia.

Furthermore, the tone and words of the poem suggests that the narrator is trying to sublimate the view of Manglish in the eyes of the British colonizers who view other variations of

English as inferior. The narrator claims that, in fact, Malaysians are exercising their freedom and rights to personalize the English language and use it as a representation of their nationalism. It is ironic how in the face of independence, Malaysians still have to validate themselves in the eyes of the Western world. Many critics state that vernaculars are an impure variation of the standard and that the pure form of the language is superior. Once again in the postcolonial era, while many countries are taking pride in the use of their mother tongues and native languages, English still holds a precedence over them. In Malaysia, globalization has picked up where colonization has left off. It is now more advantageous to know English to market oneself in the global market and open doors to many diverse opportunities. This resurgence in the use of English has degraded the status of Malay, further pushing *bahasa rojak* aside.

In “Malchin Testament,” Joned makes the distinction between *bahasa rojak* and Standard English. He does this by creating an “us” and “them” scenario, which is a common way of opposing the colonizer (Akhil et al. 14). It is also a way to unify Malaysians by turning them against a common enemy, the British colonizers. Simultaneously, Joned is dismissing the differences and conflicts among Malaysians and labeling them, regardless of race and ethnicity, as one. Creating a national identity is important to postcolonial Malaysia because of the special privileges that are legally granted to the Malays that causes racial tension among Malaysians. The performance of this poetry would have highlighted the use of “we” in the poem as a direct address to a Malaysian audience that is divided by their linguistic identities.

To many authors, one of the most important aspects of creating and communicating a piece of literary work is for the hopes that it will reach their intended audience. Joned’s piece addresses the Malaysian audience by using the first person pronouns “we,” “us,” and “our.” The use of these pronouns appeals to the nationalism and unity of Malaysians who can relate to the

experiences and thoughts he expresses in the poem. Even though this poem was first published in 1987, thirty years after Malaysia's independence, Joned portrays a nation of people who are still experiencing the legacy of colonization. However, the contents of the poem are meaningless if there are no channels for the poem to reach the audience. The effectiveness of Joned as an agent to trigger political or linguistic change is affected by his controversial reputation, the small audience to Malaysia's postcolonial literature, and the enforcement of Malaysia's censorship laws. These factors work to keep Joned's literature out of the spotlight, diminishing his readers and reducing the scholarship written about him. While this may be the case for Joned's work for many decades, Andrew Ng Hock Soon, an associate professor of literature in Monash University, reports that there has recently been an awakened interest in controversial Malaysian literature that touches on topics such as political corruption, the privileges of the majority race, and conservative Islamic culture. This interest is evidenced by the publication of Joned's collection of new poems, *Adam's Dream*, and the republication of *Poems Sacred and Profane* in 2007 (2). Ng speculates that the resurgence in popularity of Joned's work foreshadowed the political shift in Malaysia in 2008, showing a rise in the Malaysian public's desire to confront the country's controversies and improve the quality of life for all Malaysians (2). Without Malaysian writers like Joned to pave the way, 21<sup>st</sup> century Malaysian poets such as Jamal Raslan may not have garnered such popular interest in their works today.

## Chapter 4

### Words: Emancipation from Language

A pioneer in the Malaysian spoken word scene, Jamal Raslan is the modern counterpart to Joned and a relatable figure to young Malaysians who grew up in an independent Malaysia. These young Malaysians have contemporary views about language and race, as colonization is a distant memory found in their textbooks and their grandparents' stories. For these young Malaysians, the postcolonial mindset and the superiority of the Malay race are upheld as a form of tradition and nationalism, not personal experience. Conflicted by the linguistic environment they grew up in and the one instituted by the government, young Malaysians are often forced to pick a side in a game they want no part in. Raslan accurately conveys the struggles of identifying with a hybrid linguistic identity that is faced by many English speaking Malays through his spoken word poetry. Interweaving Malay and English in his speech and thinking, Raslan dabbled in both Standard English and Standard Malay poetry to find his distinctive "writing voice" (*TEDxKL* 1). An interview conducted by *The Daily Seni*'s Maira Zamri revealed that it was not until *YouTube* exposed him to a variety of slam poetry recordings and *Def Poetry*, that he found his English poetic writing voice (4-9). Raslan realized then that the voice he was looking for was in him all along, in the mixture of English and Malay, or *bahasa rojak*. Raslan had always considered *bahasa rojak* to be colloquialism, but its accurate representation of his hybrid identity and the flexible structure of spoken word led him to recognize its role as his voice (Kyra 21). For Raslan, "it's about representation, relevance and resonance," and that is what he aims to portray in his poetry (10).



The main source for this thesis, uploaded by the *YouTube* account EasyBusyTV, is the video of Raslan performing “Words” at a local mentorship program for young adults called “Say It Like You Mean It,” which focuses on creative fields such as music, comedy, and poetry. It is approximately 4 minutes and 20 seconds long, and is written in free verse. In the poem, he speaks of the relationship between words and languages and how they should be seen as separate from each other. His primary argument stems from his frustration of being judged by other Malays for his preference to speak in English, which is not his mother tongue. His poem calls for reevaluation and reflection on one’s own linguistic identity. For Raslan, this work is part of a bigger design to answer the question of “How does one be a Malay Muslim in Malaysia?” (Zamri 22).

As seen in the translated transcript for “Words” in Appendix B, Raslan’s spoken word makes use of the second-person pronoun, “you,” which gives it a harsh and accusatory tone. Unlike the unity depicted by the collective “we” and “them” used in “Malchin Testament,” the “you” and “I” pronouns here illustrate an individual persona, a divide within the collective whole. Raslan highlights the fact that each individual’s linguistic identity and experience differ, causing fissure lines to appear when an entire race is generalized. At the beginning of the poem, Raslan gives the “you” persona an identity by describing their judgements on him as seen in this stanza:

You say, I am not *Melayu*, like you,

I am *Melayu Baru*,

poyo elitis *Malay* like a certain Mahathir. (Appendix B)

The last two lines of this stanza are translated as “I am the New Malay/a Cocky elitist Malay like a certain Mahathir.” The concept of the *Melayu Baru* or “New Malay” was coined by Mahathir

Mohamed<sup>3</sup>, Malaysia's 4th prime minister who was in power from 1981 to 2003, to describe the Malays who have let go of their traditional and backward thinking that involves the “ethnic binary of us and them,” mainly between Malays and non-Malays (Yao 201). By calling Raslan a *Melayu Baru*, the audience can assume that the “you” in this passage are traditional Malays, or *Melayu Lama*. Yao Souchou states in the article “After ‘The Malay Dilemma’: The Modern Malay Subject and Cultural Logics of ‘National Cosmopolitanism’ in Malaysia” (2003), that these traditional Malays believe in upholding the three pillars of the Malay culture; they are the Malay language, the loyalty to their sultans, and the practice of Islam (204). From the *Melayu Lama*'s perspective, Raslan fails to stay true to his Malayness by using English, a sign of betrayal to his own racial identity. Aside from this difference in mindsets, the *Melayu Baru* are held at a higher standard, as using English deems the speaker as highly educated, which further fuels the contempt felt by the *Melayu Lama*.

The use of the “you” pronoun fills the poem with emotion and frustration, weaving Raslan's personal narrative into his political one. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett, a well-versed poet and critic, wrote the article “Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity” (2005) to discuss the popular use of the first-person voice to leave an emotional impact on audiences (53). As previously mentioned, the “you” used in this poem is directed towards traditional and nationalist Malays, who have admonished Raslan for straying from his mother tongue. In turn, Raslan uses the second-person pronoun to make an impact on his audiences with the most “authenticity and sincerity” in his feelings (Somers-Willett 53). This way, Raslan makes his audiences feel implicated by his personal feelings of being language-shamed and draws attention

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Melayu Baru* was coined by Dr Mahathir in his book *The Malay Dilemma*, published in 1970, 11 years before he became Malaysia's prime minister. The book shows his support for pro-*bumiputera* policies, that is the privileges granted to Malay Malaysians (Yao 208).

to the consequences of attaching a pre-conceived identity to a language. He makes it clear that he wants the *Melayu Lama* to be aware of their own hypocrisy in suggesting that his use of English is a betrayal to his Malay identity when the Malay language itself borrows phonetically from English. His involvement of the audience is clearly exhibited in this stanza:

And now you want to call me a traitor for standing here speaking in English,  
 When you were the ones who allowed your souls,  
 Our souls,  
 to be diluted. (Appendix B)

Not only does he use the “you” pronoun to make the statement confrontational, but he also uses the collective pronoun “our,” which serves to involve himself in the situation and mark himself as a direct victim of “their” actions. At the same time, he is riling up the frustration and discontent of Malaysians with hybrid identities who have faced the same realities as he had. He lets these Malaysians know that he shares their feelings and would like to bring them to light. The tone of the poem is evident in the straightforward manner of its contents, but its irony is conveyed through Raslan’s performance and causes the arousal of different types of emotions in his audience.

In contrast to Joned’s subtle messages and hidden jabs, Raslan approaches the argument in a direct and confrontational manner; a more accurate term for Raslan’s tone in “Words” would be sarcasm. Joned had created a façade in his poem that humored the reader and pointed fingers at a common enemy; it was his use of semantic doubleness that reflected colonial characteristics onto a modern postcolonial nation. With Raslan, his criticism of Malaysian society is more obvious and direct. In one instance, after Raslan refutes the harsh judgements passed on him for speaking English, he says, “And that is just probably too many words for you to understand.”

The execution of this line at the end of Raslan's counter argument drives home the insult that the *Melayu Lama* will never understand his viewpoint because they have a low proficiency in English. Raslan also points out the advantages of being proficient in English, subtly suggesting that the traditionalists are jealous of his advanced level of English. Other times in the poem, Raslan ditches the ambiguity altogether and states his unfiltered thoughts, as is portrayed in the line: "But let me tell you this/you're wrong." The sarcasm is attained through Raslan's delivery of the poem—with a smirk and a tone of arrogance. He even includes a light chuckle in the next stanza when he attempts to diffuse the tension by reassuring "you" that he has no intentions of provoking them with his words. The sarcasm is used as a call to action; Raslan wants to aggravate nationalists enough that they begin to reevaluate their roles in reinforcing the societal expectations placed on them to speak Standard Malay.

Spoken word poetry puts the audience in an active role, with many poets incorporating their audience's response into their performance. This special connection between the audience and the poet is one of the reasons Raslan is drawn to performance poetry. Raslan elaborates on the relationship between a spoken word poet and their audience in an interview with Ista Kyra of *Eksentrika*, a content website devoted to exhibiting local Malaysian creative talents: "There is a live connection between the poet and the audience. This connection can become a bond if the poet reads or performs a poem that resonates with the audience" (13). In this interview, Raslan sees the spoken word setting as an opportunity to provide his audience with a more active role in the creative process. Unlike with written poetry, spoken word performances do not allow breathing space for their audiences; the audience cannot step away or disconnect from the speaker. This setting bolsters Raslan's theme of encouraging his audiences to be less passive in the face of governmental regulations on linguistic identity.

Depending on where Raslan's work is performed, he may get a varied reaction from his listeners. However, more often than not, he performs at poetry readings, to Malaysians who read and write poetry in English. In the video posted by EasyBusyTV, Raslan performs to an audience who fully understand his *Bahasa Rojak* and his Malaysian references. Among creatives who mainly use English as their medium, Raslan's poetry was met with applause and hoots from the audience. The presentation of his poetry to like-minded people is a step towards inspiring young creatives of their potential to play an active role in the spoken word scene in Malaysia. When asked about his thoughts on the local spoken word scene in Malaysia, Raslan stated that one did not exist — yet (Zamri 14). Typical of many Asian countries that favor science and technology over liberal arts, Malaysian poetry takes a back seat in Malaysian society, with many schools failing to organize literature classes for their students. By performing at a mentorship event, Raslan is inviting Malaysian youths to consider the different languages they can use for their personal and artistic expression. His desire to reach a young audience reveals his intentions to cultivate a new generation of Malaysians to create artwork that realistically represents their identities.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian novelist, had described in her TED talk, titled "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009), that her exposure to American and British books led her to have a single story about books – "I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify." Raslan, too, had a single story about spoken word poetry. For many years, he was uncomfortable with producing poetry in English because he believed that one needed a specific English voice to produce works of this genre. His discovery of the different stories found in dub poetry encouraged him to mix English and Malay to create a voice he can call his own (Kyra 21).

In turn, he wants to teach young Malaysians to find their own voice and be brave enough to use it. The exposure to the different ways these Malaysians can produce art will also change society's mindset of possessing a singular linguistic identity.

Raslan's preference for spoken word poetry is a critique towards a print culture that reinforces the concept that words belong to their languages. In her book *Translingual Poetics* (2018), Sarah Dowling speaks at length about the various ways translingual poems in the form of texts reveal the unequal social power of each language they utilize (13). In most translingual texts, including Joned's and Raslan's in *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems*, the "foreign" language is often italicized to maintain the ethnic authenticity of the words (16). Along the same thread, a poet cannot include a glossary in a performance, which further reduces the foreign aspect of code switching and compels audiences to pick up on context cues and fill in the blanks on their own. This difference in typography emphasizes the viewpoint of the second language as the "other" or even secondary to the primary language used in the work. Raslan prefers the spoken word medium over print because it removes words from their language hierarchies and compares them as equals to each other. With a spoken word performance, the audience does not receive any indication of the use of ethnic words in the literature either from typography or the inclusion of a glossary, which breaks the audience's expectations to the use of multiple languages in the poem.

The main theme of Raslan's poem is how words are able to express themselves without being tied down to a language. He dares the audience to view words as separate from language and to look at their real value, rather than the language they come from. By doing so, the audience is able to separate the connotations and stigmas attached to words through their association with a particular language. Philip Holden, a professor of literary studies at the

National University of Singapore, describes language without emotional and cultural identity as “the bare bones of language” (5). His metaphor is ideal in comparing words as the support structure that is identical in function across all languages, while cultural connotations are the flesh that envelops these words. The removal of a word’s identity also challenges language chauvinism and language purity. To illustrate, the act of code switching would not be seen as using two languages to communicate, but as an efficient and effective manner to communicate based on the word’s technical meaning regardless of its origins. Code switching takes words from different languages, and capitalizes on the communicative capabilities of the words. Raslan uses code switching to demonstrate how he is able to deliver his message regardless of what language the words come from. He continues to stress the theme of words versus language by naming the title of his work, “Words.” This single word title completely encompasses his main theme while exhibiting the values that can be conveyed by a single word. Raslan makes the statement that his words do not necessarily tie him down to a singular identity, because it represents more than his cultural and ethnic history.

At the beginning of the video, Raslan states that he will “perform a piece, that I have often used to introduce myself,” indicating that the piece effectively portrays his hybrid identity through its use of *bahasa rojak*. While the speech variation represents the fluidity of his linguistic identity, Raslan describes his inability to be accepted entirely by either linguistic communities. The ease in which English rolls off his tongue labels him as a *Melayu Baru*, one who has strayed from Malay traditions. Thus, excluding Raslan from the Malay speaking community. Standard English still takes precedence within the English speaking community in Malaysia, preventing *bahasa rojak* from being taken seriously. Existing in the grey area between two languages and not being able to completely accept either identity is what Anzaldúa explains

in her work; she writes, “I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate” (445). Anzaldúa speaks about how degrading it is to not be able to identify with her hybrid identity because it makes her feel rejected by society for being herself. She also hints at constantly having to accommodate for others through explaining or changing words from another language even though this way of communicating is the most natural for her. In the interview with Zamri, Raslan repeats the exact same sentiments of how he felt when he found his voice in spoken word poetry: “I felt like I was validated...I found a place, a third space” (17). Raslan mentions “a third space” as a place where he is comfortable being himself, further emphasizing *bahasa rojak* as neither belonging to any languages, but itself a unique language on its own. By conveying the same ideas in “Words,” Raslan echoes the sentiments of the Malaysians who identify most with a hybrid language but are required to tirelessly fit themselves into existing categories. Both these writers portray the borderland as its own unique identity that borrows from many other languages and is not dominated by any one of the languages it is made up of.

In the poem, Raslan proclaims that “you” is using a language, Malay, that is not “pure” as it borrows lexically from many other languages such as Arabic and English. He questions the *Melayu Lama*’s pride and fierce protection of the national language, when it in itself is not absolutely free of outside influences. All languages have evolved from or been influenced by other languages as a result of contact with other cultures. Raslan disputes the idea that a language can remain free from outside influences and he demonstrates how safeguarding a language has already failed before the advent of code switching. He uses this point to stress the inaccurate judgements passed onto hybrid linguistic identities as the traditionalists are being hypocritical in doing so. Likewise, Raslan is challenging the negative view on *bahasa rojak* or the act of code



switching as a whole, which will bring hybrid speakers closer to accepting their identities. This argument also addresses identity issues in other postcolonial nations that have a negative view of vernacular speakers, similar to Joned's role as a voice for Malaysians as well as the collective postcolonial people. This similarity goes to show that the language concerns that existed during Joned's youth still exists in contemporary Malaysia.

Raslan brings up the phrase "*bahasa jiwa bangsa*" in his performance, which translates to "language is the soul of the people" (Ng 67). Contextually, the "language" here refers to *Bahasa Melayu*<sup>4</sup> or Malay, the national language of Malaysia. According to the *Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu*, the primary definition of *bangsa* is race, while its secondary definition is nationality ("bangsa"). The two definitions were used strategically to blur the lines between race and nationality, provoking Malays to equate their race and culture with the nation. The original use of this phrase was to encourage the use of Malay as the common tongue, not only for Malays, but also Malaysians of other races. In reference to the impurity of Malay and the lexical borrowings of the language, Raslan accuses the *Melayu Lama* who made the connection between languages and souls, to have "allowed your souls/our souls/to be diluted." With this stanza, Raslan states that if the *Melayu Lama* wanted to point fingers at anybody for corrupting the Malay language, it should be at themselves.

Raslan builds on this idea in the lines "...the national language/that the national constitution nationally imposed the nation on what the national should nationally be conversing with." Here, he points out how national languages and identities are social constructs enforced by governing institutions. The repetition of the word "national" reveals Raslan's cynicism at the Malaysian government's desire to impose a national identity that the entire nation would be

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<sup>4</sup> The word "*Bahasa*" means language in Malay, which explains its appearance in *bahasa rojak* and *Bahasa Melayu*.

required to adhere to. Raslan reacts in a sarcastic tone at this idea, implying that language and identity are outside of institutional power because the appointment of a national language will not stop him from choosing which languages he is most comfortable speaking in and which he identifies with the most. In the subsequent lines, “I mean/Do I really have to kiss and *junjung* the keris?” Raslan questions how strictly he needs to follow the mandated Malay culture in order to prove his ethnic identity. To “*junjung* the keris” means to hold up the keris, a double-edged dagger that is only found in the Malay archipelago and is a symbol of the Malay culture, as a sign of respect and honor to the Malay culture (Wan 1). Raslan cautions his audience not to take cultural traditions too literally. Moreover, he critiques the control that governing institutions seek to hold over the linguistic identity of their people and how this identity cannot be influenced by an external governing body. This idea can be compared with Joned’s “Malchin Testament,” where his irony underlines the similarities between Malaysia’s restrictive government and the British rulers before them. Raslan speaks in a contemporary context of Malaysians disassociating from a government that is modeled after these same colonial powers of imposing a national identity that is not true to the melting pot of languages that makes up Malaysia.

In Raslan’s next stanza, he talks about the education levels of the Malaysians he is addressing and makes the inference that they are unable to distinguish the national identity from their personal identity. He references the Malaysian education system that is known for “spoon feeding” its students, where they memorize the answers and “regurgitate” it during exams. This education system has failed to impart students with the motivation or eagerness to learn, conveyed by Raslan in this line, “It’s the system that did not educate you/to educate yourself.” This is further emphasized when he brings up the JPA scholarship, a program that sponsors Malaysian students to study abroad, and how it can be easily obtained by familiarizing oneself

with its application process: “Government and corporation sponsorships over here and overseas/so you may very well one day grow to be a minister/because you have already memorized the official JPA song.” Malaysians have built a system where they can achieve success if they continued to follow the regulations and steps laid out for them, and the continued enforcement of this system prevents Malaysians from abandoning colonial mindsets. This part of Raslan’s poem reflects Joned’s thoughts on how Malaysians “love to follow our leaders/in ebriting that matters” (258). Educating through recitation is not uncommon in postcolonial nations as Janet Neigh reveals in her book, *Recalling Recitation in the Americas* (2017). First established in the late eighteenth century in Britain, rote learning spread across the British Empire when British colonizers set up educational institutions throughout their colonies. The use of rote learning in the British Empire is strategic to assimilating the local youth to British culture and language (3-4).

Many Malaysians’ passive attitude in regards to their future and their government portrays the remnants of colonial control. It has been indoctrinated in Malaysians, causing them to accept their fate and the government’s words verbatim. Throughout the work, Raslan implores his young audience to reflect on themselves in order to make them come to their senses and look outside what they have been taught. It reveals how Malaysians measure success by how well one has followed the guidelines given to them by the government. Raslan recognizes how important self-reflection is for Malaysians who have lived their lives blindly following the orders of their leaders, willfully ignorant of the conflicts outside of their safe bubble. He boldly calls out the nationalist Malays by pointing out the hypocrisy in their judgement, and turning the tables on them by asking “What about you, huh?” near the end of the poem.

Clearly, Raslan's ideas in "Words" build off of Jones's themes in "Malchin Testament."

The following chapter will compare these two works and how their work contributes to the field of postcolonial vernacular literature.

## Chapter 5

### Through the Malaysian Lens

For many postcolonial nations, achieving “independence” from their colonizers is not much more than a label. It is merely a milestone to show off to neighboring colonial nations of a country’s progress. The United Nations (UN) claims that they started the wave of decolonization in 1945 and calls it “the world body’s first great success” (1). The word “success” would be far from what many postcolonial citizens would describe as the current political and economic state of their countries. As most nations would soon discover, decolonization is not a one-size-fits-all solution, especially when the facilitators of decolonization are themselves colonizers. In the end, many postcolonial countries become plagued with corrupt and oppressive governments that do little in regulating financial and social inequality as well as granting their citizens the right to freely express their views.

Joned and Raslan address some of these postcolonial concerns in the context of Malaysia through their literary works. Although written at different time periods, with Joned publishing “Malchin Testament” 30 years after Malaysia’s independence in 1957 and Raslan performing “Words” for the first time in the early 2000s, they both touch on governing bodies that are modeled after the British colonizer’s method of governance. This is exhibited mainly through the enforcement of Malay as the sole national language of Malaysia, which not only degrades the mother tongues of non-Malay citizens, but confines Malaysians to a singular language identity. The imitation of colonialism by the local government results in a negative view of institutions as repressive and is clearly identified when Joned uses *tekan* in “Malchin Testament” to point out

the parallels between colonial and postcolonial Malaysia. For Raslan, his repetition of “the national” linguistic regulations implemented by the government reveals his critique on the many aspects of life that are dictated by the political institutions in Malaysia: from the language we speak, to our career choices, to our education. Raslan showcases educational institutions as the most crucial platforms to propagate this political agenda. He says: “It’s not your fault, no it’s not/It’s the education system’s/It’s the system that educated you/Not yourself/It’s the system that did not educate you/To educate yourself.” The education system molds students to think in a narrow and specific manner, measuring their success through their ability to conform to the syllabus. The lines directly after this quote, “So you wouldn’t have known/Because you wouldn’t have known how/And now, you, are a part of that system,” ominously hints at the never ending cycle that maintains standardization and narrow mindedness in Malaysia and other postcolonial societies. Educational institutions produce students who subsequently turn into the adults that place pressures of conformity and standardization onto the younger generation. This line effectively showcases the important role education plays in ridding individuals of their freedom to construct their own identity. Raslan has personally struggled with understanding his identity throughout his youth, especially growing up as a “third culture child,” which is the reason he finds it so important to speak for and to Malaysian youths about this issue (“Word is Alive | Jamal Raslan | TEDxUMSKK”). As acknowledged in chapter 4, Raslan performed this piece at a mentoring program for Malaysian youths because he wants them to break away from the rigid expectations surrounding personal identity in Malaysia.

The anti-institutional mentality or the scepticism of authority figures is a common theme in postcolonial literature as brought to light by Dohra Ahmad in her anthology, *Rotten English*. As part of the introduction, Ahmad claims that “perhaps more than any single other

characteristic, this literature is anti-institutional by nature” (26). Standard English itself is seen as an institutional power, and by publishing an anthology on vernacular literature, Ahmad takes on an anti-institutional stance. Ahmad references the works of Peter Carey, John Kasaipwalova, and Frances Molloy that cast the police and religious institutions in a dim light. These writers saw institutions as a repressive force on their vernaculars and in turn, their personal identity and cultural history. For these writers, using the vernacular is a way to rebel against Standard English and to assert the untamable nature of the vernacular. This is where “Malchin Testament” contributes to the broader postcolonial dialogue. Joned uses Manglish to restore the Malaysian identity, as he wrote: “our way of talking the lingo/is our way of being unik oso/it’s our great opportunity/to practice our democracy.” Joned explains that Malaysians have differentiated Manglish from Standard English in order to distance themselves from the linguistic identity that the British colonizers had pushed onto them. The last line in this quote represents Manglish as an indicator of independence and freedom from British colonization, but it also holds the subtle irony of going against Standard Malay as well.

Most of the writers in Ahmad’s anthology approach education with the same hostility because it reconstructs linguistic identity at the expense of cultural and historical significance (27). In education, the use of standardized language becomes affiliated with being seen as intelligent, relating to Raslan’s opinions on language shaming as a result of the use of language as a measure of brilliance and success. “Words” adds to the discussion through the aforementioned ideas that identity should not be standardized through education and Raslan works to encourage Malaysian youths to pursue their own unique personal identity. Raslan indicates that by disregarding institutional norms, an individual can disrupt the cycle of language judgement that is passed on from one generation to the next through educational institutions.

It can be seen that many vernacular writers, including Joned and Raslan, touch on the point about institutions that are modeled after colonial powers because it leads to other major postcolonial issues. In a repressive authoritarian framework, the citizens of these nations adapt to these higher powers, maintaining the passivity of colonized persons for generations to come. This is partly a result of being accustomed to the leadership of the British colonizers; postcolonial citizens are used to obeying their governments without protest. The last line in “Malchin Testament,” “It’s our great opportunity/to practice our democracy” (259), uses irony to emphasize the lack of self-awareness in the citizens of postcolonial Malaysia. Earlier in the poem, Joned questions the framework in which independence is defined: “we love to follow our leaders/in ebr ting that matters/prom what careers to pursue/to what ting to consider true” (258): Are choices influenced by political propaganda considered a trait of an independent country? Does a life dictated by politicians still provide freedom to its people? The people of postcolonial nations must first define for themselves what it means to be an independent country in order to fully make use of their rights as free persons. Joned exercises *his* freedom by choosing to use *bahasa rojak* in “Malchin Testament,” rather than the imposed Standard Malay or Standard English. Through the use of *bahasa rojak*, Joned defined for himself that independence involves the ability to use any language without any judgements. Likewise, “Words” underlines the system put in place by governing bodies to create the illusion of comfort in a life orchestrated by them. He uses the example of a government sponsored scholarship that often results in the recipient obtaining a job with the government in the line, “So you may very well one day grow to be a minister/Because you have already memorized the official *JPA* song.” The word “memorized” emphasizes the unquestioning stance of the Malaysian people and the colonial legacy of rote learning. This example clearly illustrates the safe bubble that is made up of a



financially secure job, which can eventually turn into a politically influential position. The ignorance and reluctance to break away from the system keeps postcolonial citizens in a never ending cycle of passive mentality.

However, the oppressive governance in Malaysia failed to pacify every citizen as Joned and Raslan prove with their works. These two writers have found a space to voice their opinions on the method of decolonization in Malaysia. The “Malchin Testament” acknowledges some of the ways Malaysians have voiced their distaste with the government when Joned writes, “in patriot, it’s riot *lah* like the rest.” The addition of “like the rest” at the end of this line is akin to a comparison of Joned himself with other Malaysians. He differentiates himself from other protesters because unlike “the rest,” Joned decided to use a more passive and professional way to make his opinions known. Regardless, Joned acknowledges that this oppressive government has failed in controlling all of its citizens and has managed to ignite a fierce opposition in some of its people. Raslan, too, distinguishes the two types of Malays in “Words.” There are the ones like him, “a *Melayu*/Who will not use moderation as an excuse/And will instead put his Malay and Malayness to better use,” and there are the Malays who are caught in the bubble of Malay nationalist ideology. Raslan is aware of the privileges granted to him as a Malay and does not intend to take advantage of it. Instead, he states that he will use his status quo as a platform to have his voice heard.

Quoting Ahmad from *Rotten English*, “vernacular undermines doctrine as nothing else could” (26). The oppressiveness of institutional decrees to impose the standardized language has inspired a desire to reclaim linguistic identity among postcolonial writers. Louise Bennett blatantly advocates this in her poem “Colonization in Reverse” (38). Bennett expresses the irony of colonization failing to maintain language purity and instead evolving into a hybrid form

through her use of the Jamaican English creole. For her, colonization could be transformed into a weapon to defy itself. Joned, too, expresses the same view in “Malchin Testament” in the lines “To make english not english/But our very own you see.” Just as Bennett had, Joned acknowledges and uses the vernacular in opposition of Standard English as well as Standard Malay. Similarly, Raslan’s use of code switching in “Words” resists the oppressive national language in order to create an identity that is not tied to institutional or national governance. Although Joned and Raslan share the same ideas as Bennett, they differ in that these Malaysian writers are using *bahasa rojak* against the national language and their own native tongue, Malay.

In efforts to construct a suitable linguistic identity that is free from colonial influence, some postcolonial writers have attempted to turn their backs entirely on English in favor of their native language, just as Muhammad Haji Salleh of Malaysia and Obi Wali of Nigeria had done (Ahmad 423). Other linguistic communities, of the likes of Joned and Raslan, have embraced vernacular English as a part of their postcolonial identity. For many postcolonial nations, it is impossible to separate the deep-rooted linguistic influence of the colonizers as English was a central part of education, with many local politicians and government officials having been educated in English schools or in England themselves. What more, with the advent of globalization, English now holds an important role for postcolonial nations to participate in the global economy. In his TED talk, Raslan sums up this conflicting view of English in relation to his journey to understanding his personal identity: “my life is a contradiction/the bastard son of postcolonial pride and globalization/I am a child of exotic tongues who lost his motherland in translation” (“Word is Alive | Jamal Raslan | TEDxUMSKK”). Analyzing this quote alongside “Words,” Raslan’s work represents the dilemma of the modern youths of postcolonial nations

who are caught between postcolonial and globalization ideals. Nonetheless, Joned and Raslan find a solution to their respective issues in *bahasa rojak* and their hybrid identity.

When comparing the works of Joned and Raslan, it is interesting to note the different medium of deliveries used by the authors. Nevertheless, both methods effectively add to the symbolization of their primary theme. The decision for Joned to include or exclude the glossary, to italicize to indicate foreignness while stressing the importance of the words, or to bold as a demonstration of phonetic emphasis, all hold significance to his overall theme. He even fails to capitalize the first letters of proper nouns such as “english” to remove the hierarchical power of the word. The act of writing with the vernacular itself disrupts literary norms and places *bahasa rojak* in a position to be legitimized and taken seriously. On the other hand, Raslan chose to deliver his work through spoken word in order to retain the vernacular in its original form and portray his work in his own voice, ensuring that the audience receives the full impact of his emotions. With the advancement of technology in the 21st century, Raslan is able to reach a wide audience as a spoken word poet through the invention of media sharing applications such as *YouTube* and *SoundCloud*.

This analysis clarifies the contribution of “Malchin Testament” and “Words” to the overall discussion of postcolonial poetry and proposes answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the thesis. These works demonstrate the use of *bahasa rojak* as a weapon against British colonial legacies and the reclamation of linguistic identity. At the same time, the writers viewed *bahasa rojak* as a departure from the enforcement of Standard Malay. They draw attention to the parallels between the British colonizers and Malaysian lawmakers who want all Malaysians to adopt a singular identity that omits the multicultural reality of Malaysian society. “Malchin Testament” further develops this idea and raises doubts about the actual freedom

Malaysians have achieved as a postcolonial country when the people are not free to construct their own personal identity. Jones and Raslan agree that *bahasa rojak* is a language that effectively represents the melting pot of cultures that exist in Malaysia while providing Malaysians with the flexibility to customize it. This idea is represented by their works, where they encourage an anti-institutional mind set and the embracement of a hybrid linguistic identity. Aside from that, the methods of delivery for “Malchin Testament” and “Words” were both effective in reinforcing the writer’s arguments of removing language hierarchy and taking pride in *bahasa rojak*. Looking at postcolonial poetry through the Malaysian lens highlights a situation where the oppressive viewpoint is cast onto the postcolonial country’s independent government. The example of Malaysia presents the idea that the standardization of the native language is stifling to a postcolonial citizen’s linguistic identity, adding to the different perspectives of postcolonial nations.

## Appendix A

### Original Transcript for “Malchin Testament”

Transcribed by Karen Hor, based on “Malchin Testament” by Salleh Ben Joned in *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems*

Our english not punny, you no,

our twang, our stresses not wrong  
only the complen: say this  
say that *lah*, our english is not strong

Stress put in all the wrong places  
we say ‘cool’ eeben when it’s hot *lah*  
we hate the mat *saleh* races  
but hijack *deh* lingo *lah!*

We true Malaysians, you no,  
we pree people, you no: pree  
to make english not english  
but our very own, you see

We *tekan* words like our leaders  
stress ebri word, ebri ting  
that should be properly *tekaned*  
for the real good op the nation.

Just as we make english ideas  
not english anymore, but pree  
op all that brit liberty shit  
that should stay in *deh* dictionary

We do not talk like those lawyers  
with their cambridge education  
talk this law *lah*, that law *lah*  
pull of colonial twang and *akshen*

We *tekan* words our own always  
we *tekan* the ‘du’ in education  
cause we pree to do what we like  
with word meanings and *dikshen*

We always prefer to differ  
(not differ-that’s so damn english!)  
our revered leaders taught us that  
donno know why you tink it so ticklish

We love to pollow our leaders  
in ebri thing that matters  
prom what careers to pursue  
to what ting to consider true

We do that oso in private matters  
*tekan* the ‘ni’ in fornication  
cause not like our pormer masters  
some ting we don *tekan* like *deh* do

The ‘cras’ in democracy we stress  
so oso the do(o)m in freedom  
in patriot, it’s ‘riot’ like the rest  
and never the ‘bore’ in boredom

What more, we really give full blast  
to the ‘id’ in idealism  
so how dare you say we misplace  
our stresses, our nationalism

We always have them about us  
ebritime talk English *lah*  
our way of talking the lingo  
is our way of being unique oso

It’s our great opportunity  
to practice our own democracy

## Appendix B

### Translated Transcript for “Words”

Transcribed and translated by Karen Hor, based on “Words” by Jamal Raslan and uploaded to *YouTube* by EasyBusyTV

<p>You say, I am not Malay like you I am the new Malay Cocky elitist Malay Like a certain <i>Mahathir</i>, I speak too much English Supposedly a white man that is British</p> <p>And I use too many adjectives and verbs Ones you have never even read before Or even heard And that I have a way With words</p> <p>You say I have a way with words</p> <p>See what I think is that words Have a way of making themselves heard Of telling people what they are, What they really mean, What their direction is.</p> <p>So if you want to come up to me And tell me that I have a way with words</p> <p>Be prepared Because I’m going to say I heard you But I’m not hurt with your words</p> <p>Because I’m not the one that Don’t know who I am, What I live for, And what I want to do with my life</p> <p>‘Cause you see I know who I am, What I live for, And I know what I want to do with my life</p> <p>And that is just probably too many words</p>	<p>for you to understand You just couldn’t comprehend Why a Malay, like me, like you Can seem so in hand Speaking with a tongue that he wasn’t even born with Freely and fluently expressing in a way that he was not even supposed to be seen with Or heard with Or think with As if he’s forgotten the national language that the national constitution nationally imposed the nation on what the national should nationally be conversing with</p> <p>I mean, Do I really have to kiss and uphold the <i>keris</i>? ‘Cause you see, thing is You seem smart and well-educated A beneficiary of the education system that a nation has established and implemented</p> <p>You know, reading and remembering and memorizing And gathering and memorizing And then regurgitating everything that you read and remembered and followed and memorized In exams in public schools, premier schools and boarding schools And then in the universities, colleges University colleges, college universities Government and corporation sponsorships over here and overseas So you may very well one day grow to be a minister Because you have already memorized the official <i>JPA</i> song</p>
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But let me tell you this  
You're wrong

Don't worry, I am not accusing you.  
Don't be defensive,  
I am not patronizing you.  
Don't be so sarcastic,  
I am not insulting you  
I am just saying that I know it's not you  
It's not your fault, no it's not  
It's the education system's,  
It's the system that educated you,  
Not yourself,  
It's the system that did not educate you,  
To educate yourself.

So you wouldn't have known  
Because you wouldn't have known how  
And now, you, are a part of that system  
You are the very people that reads the  
*Kosmos*, the *URTVs*, and the *Pancainderas*\*

You are the very people that could not even  
commentate a sports match decently in  
*Bahasa*\*\*

You, were the ones who translated "Duck!"  
to *itik* in movie cinemas  
Back in 2010, in the *The A Team* movie  
Instead of tank to *kereta kebal*  
It was tank to *tangki*

And you were the ones who translated  
melody to *melodi*  
When there is such a word as *irama*  
Or lyric to *lirik*  
When there is such a word as *senikata*  
And you are the ones who coined the term  
*Bahasa jiwa bangsa*

And now you want to call me a traitor for  
standing here speaking in English,

When you were the ones who allowed your  
souls  
Our souls, to be diluted

We borrow syllables and direct translations  
that was not even reflected on and regulated  
Losing context of what it was supposed to  
translate and convey  
Losing the message and the meaning along  
the way  
And you still have the guts  
To come up to me and say  
that I have a way with words

See, there's only one way with words  
And that's how they tell you what they are  
What they really mean  
And what their direction is

So, me, I know who I am,  
What I live for,  
And what I want to do with my life

A *Melayu*, who can  
Think in Malay,  
And yet express himself in English  
A *Melayu*, who can think in English,  
And articulate himself in Malay  
A *Melayu*  
Who will not use moderation as an excuse  
And will instead put his Malay and  
Malayness to better use

Because he realizes  
That his soul is his to lose,  
If otherwise

So, now let me ask you this  
What about you, huh?  
*Bagaimana pula dengan kamu?*

### Glossary

*Mahathir* - The last name of a Malaysian prime minister who is known for encouraging the use of English in Malaysian education and among civil servants

*Keris* - A traditional dagger with a wavy blade that is unique to Malaysia. It is synonymous with the Malay culture

*JPA* - A government scholarship program that sponsors Malaysian students to study abroad under the condition that they work in Malaysia after graduation

*Itik* - Duck, the aquatic bird

*Kereta Kebal* - A fighting vehicle used by the military

*Tangki* - A container

*Melodi* - Melody

*Irama* - Rhythm

*Lirik* - Lyric

*Senikata* - Lyrics

*Bahasa jiwa bangsa* - The language of the nation's soul

*Melayu* - A person who is ethnically Malay

*Bagaimana pula dengan kamu?* - What about you?

\* Well known Malaysian media outlets published in Malay

\*\* Referring to Malay



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## ACADEMIC VITA

### **Karen Hor**

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#### **EDUCATION:**

**Pennsylvania State University, The Behrend College**

Graduation Date: May 2019

Bachelor of Arts in English (Professional Writing)

Bachelor of Arts in Economics

Schreyers Honors Program

Dean's List: Fall 2018

Beta Gamma Sigma Honors Society

January 2018

#### **EDITORIAL AND WRITING EXPERIENCE:**

**Malaysian Vernacular Literature Research Project**

**Erie, PA**

*Undergraduate Researcher*

August 2018-Present

- Source, interpret, and organize credible data that supports the research topic
- Work closely with experienced faculty members with specializations in linguistics and postcolonial studies

**The Learning Resource Center**

**Erie, PA**

*Lead Tutor*

January 2017-Present

- Provide editorial feedback on grammar and content of writing assignments across various disciplines
- Proofread technical reports for Plastics Engineering projects on grammar, format, and clarity of content
- Collaborate with manager to increase the user friendliness of tutoring notes to increase the quality and efficiency of tutoring services

**The Behrend Admissions Office**

**Erie, PA**

*Editorial Intern*

August 2018-November 2018

- Provided ideas to make the department's website more user friendly such as using a format with less columns and decreasing the number of links in a web page
- Drafted effective email subject lines to generate effective participation from prospective students
- Operated a Content Management System (CMS) to send out mass emails on academic programs and events at Behrend to interested students
- Composed pamphlets with information on academic programs that is succinct, relevant, and memorable

**Start Right Foods**

**St Louis, MO**

*Marketing Intern*

May 2018-August 2018

- Assisted in the decision making of the company's venture into a new product category by comparing the performances of existing products in the market
- Managed social media marketing on Facebook and Instagram by developing and publishing creative and attractive content to increase the company's online presence

**Amphorae Publishing Group**

**St Louis, MO**

*Editorial Intern*

May 2017-August 2017

- Analyzed and assessed manuscripts based on the quality of the writing and the excellence of the content to determine its suitability for publication
- Edited manuscripts for grammatical and content errors to be revised by the writers
- Reviewed manuscripts of nonfiction and fiction works across romance, mystery, and fantasy genres

**LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:**

**Multi-Cultural Council**

**Erie, PA**

*Vice President*

August 2018-Present

- Actively implement a project tracking procedure to streamline the council's project processes
- Oversee and improve activities of cultural organizations by providing constructive feedback on an organization's leadership and structure to the organization's executive board members

**Engineers without Borders**

**Erie, PA**

*Public Relations Officer*

August 2018-Present

- Maintain communication channels with other clubs in efforts to collaborate on projects
- Design flyers for club events and meetings using attractive graphics and taglines in Adobe Illustrator

**SKILLS:**

**Language:** English (Native), Mandarin (Intermediate), Malay (Intermediate)

**Software:** Microsoft Office Suite, Minitab, EView, Studio R, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop