Producing the subaltern

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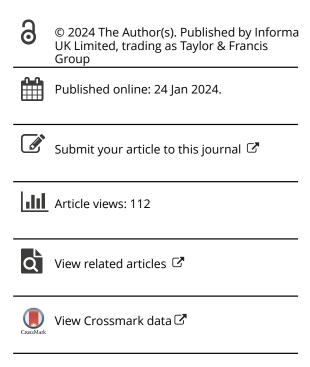
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Epistemic violence against the Malay left, c.1945–1957

Armand Azra bin Azlira

ABSTRACT

This article examines the epistemic violence enacted onto the Malay left (represented broadly by the Malay Nationalist Party, MNP), through the collaboration between the Malay aristocracy, represented by its political vehicle the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), and the British colonial state. It traces this epistemic violence through British re-colonisation in 1945 leading up to the independence of Malaya in 1957. This article argues that this collaboration has resulted in persistent constructions of the 'Malay' image as a discursive tool by marginalising those that deviate from this image into subalternity. This discursive control is salient not only in ensuring the fulfilment of the material interests of the colonial state (in re-colonisation), and the Malay aristocracy (in the consolidation of feudal institutions), during the period but is also a persistent narrative used in the current day as a form of legitimacy for the post-colonial state.

Artikel ini mengkaji kekerasan epistemik yang dikenakan ke atas golongan Melayu berhaluan kiri (yang sebahagian besarnya diwakili oleh Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, PKMM), melalui kerjasama antara golongan bangsawan Melayu (melalui alat politik mereka United Malay National Organisation, UMNO) dan kerajaan kolonial British. Artikel ini mejejaki kekerasan epistemik ini dari zaman penjajahan semula British pada tahun 1945 sehingga kemerdekaan Malaya pada tahun 1957. Artikel ini berhujah bahawa kerjasama ini telah menghasilkan pembinaan imej 'Melayu' berterusan yang digunakan sebagai alat wacana untuk menindas mereka yang tidak akur kepada imej ini, dan menjerumuskan mereka ke dalam 'subalterniti'. Kawalan wacana ini penting bukan hanya untuk memuaskan kepentingan material bagi pihak kerajaan kolonial (dalam penjajahan semula) dan golongan bangsawan Melayu (dalam menguatkan institusi diraja) pada zaman tersebut, tetapi juga sebagai satu naratif berterusan yang digunakan pada hari ini untuk menguatkan keabsahan kerajaan pascakolonial.

Introduction

The period leading up to the 'independence' of British Malaya was a much more contested time than what is currently presented in the orthodox narrative taught in

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schools and often reiterated in media and historiography. This is especially the case in Malay politics in which a multitude of complex groups had emerged in this period. The divide in Malay politics at that time has broadly been defined by Khoo Kay Kim (1981) and Mohamed Salleh Lamry (2017), as between the Malay right, the aristocracy who aimed to preserve traditional power structures led by its political vehicle the United Malay Nationalist Organisation (UMNO), and the Malay left, broadly the commoners against the preservation of such structures, largely represented by the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP). The national school syllabus for lower form history in 1989 goes in detail on MNP contributions including its anti-colonialism and its participation in the general strike action (hartal) in 1947 (Thambirajah 1979: 6–7). In contrast, the Form 4 history syllabus in 2003, written partly by pro-UMNO historian Ramlah Adam (Ramlah et al. 2004: 99–106), only mentions the MNP in the context of its support for the Malayan Union, and by implication colonialism, and vague references to its representation of 'business' interests (UMNO online 2019). Even the current Form 4 history syllabus, which was only possible due to the short-lived victory of the centrist Pakatan Harapan coalition, and which has been accused of being 'communist propaganda' by the then head of UMNO Youth, only makes brief references to the MNP in favour of a more conventional UMNO history (Ridzuan Hasan et al. 2019: 128–131; Fakhrull Halim 2021).

The significance of this, as Abu Talib (2016) argued, is the emphasis on only 'certain Malay struggles' as school textbooks are adopted as the official version of Malaysian history which further diffuses into local archives and museums. And from this emphasis, the trajectory of this historical narrative is obvious in that UMNO was the only significant representative of the Malays to independence in 1957. The perception surrounding the Malay left has been a negative one in which they are thought to be completely influenced by the communists while at the same time seen as insignificant to the nationalist movements. This article in part aims to address this tension by studying the developments in the Malay political sphere from the re-colonisation of Malaya in 1945 up until independence in 1957. It also aims to show that the co-operation of the Malay collaborators and the British colonisers in sustaining these narratives served to justify their hold on Malaya by marginalising the non-conformists into subalternity, that is, those whose voices were absent from history due to their subordinated status.

Using Anthony Reid's (2010: 1–25) framework of nationalism, Malay nationalism was dialectically constructed in two opposing strands: UMNO represented ethnic nationalism which was based around the homogenisation of culture, language, religion and history. The MNP pursued anti-colonial nationalism, which was based around the shared trauma of colonialism and was, therefore, more inclusive and anti-colonial-capitalist. The years immediately succeeding World War II were crucial in shaping Malaya as a nation-state and the numerous factions in Malaya were fully aware of that. The reality, however, was that the British had lost their institutional and discursive hegemony in Malaya due to the Japanese Occupation (1941–1945). Discursive, or epistemic, control was thus one of the weapons used to re-establish dominance in Malaya.

Here, orientalised constructions of the colonised served as means to restrict the agency of the colonised and allow the continuation of colonial capitalism which was possible due to the power asymmetry between the Malay left and the unofficial British-UMNO alliance. This alliance thus constricted any deemed, or wanting to be deemed, 'Malay'

relegating the Malay left to subalternity unless they conformed. Orientalism is often a concept used to deconstruct racial images of the colonised in the context of asymmetric power relations due to colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. This article will show that orientalism was still a prevalent method of colonial control despite colonial insistence on a racially neutral administrative state (Ban 2002: 97).

This article discursively analyses documents from colonial institutions such as government documents and newspapers, mainly from The National Archives (TNA), Arkib Negara Malaysia (National Archives of Malaysia) and the newspaper archives of Singapore. Ranajit Guha (1988: 47) outlines a useful methodology in analysing 'the prose of counter-insurgency'. The documents chosen were 'official' in nature as only these documents were reliable since they were produced to administer Malaya and are preserved in archives that are widely available. The difficulty in reading many of the documents used in this article whether they be government documents, newspapers or even history articles and books is that they are embedded in colonial discursive structures as they were produced for the purposes of colonialism to maintain, organise and control. The resources analysed were written under the context of power, specifically racialised colonial power with the intention of consolidating racialised colonial hierarchies, not only to benefit the colonisers but also those who benefited from colonialism.

Colonial hegemony and the construction of the post-war Malay

The collaboration of UMNO and the British has been subject to heated debate in recent years. The orthodox historiography, most notably Ramlah Adam (1998), tends to skim over the collaboration as a whole to portray UMNO as the sole and 'true' fighters for independence that compelled the British to give them independence (Badriyah Haji Salleh 2016: 9; Azmi Arifin 2016: 6–7). This historiography tends to be prevalent outside Malaysia as well since historians such as Mary Turnbull (1993: 589–590) and Anthony Milner (2008: 148–156) frequently classify the entirety of the nationalist movement in Malaya as taking the 'constitutional path' with UMNO as the vanguard or only briefly touching upon the alternative nationalisms in the lead up to independence in the case of the latter. This strand of history also tends to portray the Malay left, especially the MNP, as radical, unpopular, communist-controlled, and even 'two-faced' by historians such as Cheah Boon Kheng (2012: 282) and Ramlah Adam (1998: 81–100). This historiography, however, ignores the condition in which UMNO was able to gain dominance over the nationalist movements through its collaboration with the British, hence British historians portray it as taking the 'constitutional path'. Contemporary historians such as Azmi Arifin have attempted to challenge this narrative by acknowledging the contributions of the Malay left by even going so far as arguing they were comparable to UMNO despite attempts to repress them. In fact, the Malay left had pressured the British into giving as many concessions as it did to UMNO over the threat that they could become dominant in Malay politics (Azmi Arifin 2016: 80–84).

Moreover, despite narratives of unpopularity, the actual number of the Malay left has always been in contention to underplay its impact in Malayan politics. The debate on the size of the MNP at its peak before the Emergency (1948–1960) has varied from 150,000 members as contended by the then president of the MNP, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, to the much lower figure 6,000 by then former UMNO president Dato' Onn Ja'afar who had

dismissed them as the 'unemployed and disgruntled youths' in a 1960 interview (Soenarno 1960: 27). Onn, however, often omits conflicts or deviations from the orthodox UMNO narrative of a united Malay front against the British. The MNP, for example, was essential to the formation of UMNO and its importance can be seen by the fact that while most representatives of the first UMNO congress were aristocrats from each Malayan state, the MNP had a representative of their own, Ibrahim Karim, the then Secretary of API (Onn 2007: 41–42). Thus, even early on, the UMNO aristocrats were cognisant of the prevalence of the MNP in its Malay support base, even giving equal standing to the 'lower class' MNP representative. Though the British and UMNO were strongly conscious of the MNP's main base of Malay masses compared to UMNO's Malay aristocracy, it was essential, especially for UMNO, to portray the mass movements as unpopular and 'non-Malay' in its ideology, politics and characteristics.

The *Economist*[1] for example, had characterised PUTERA (Pusat Tenaga Ra'ayat), a conglomeration of all the Malay leftist parties, as unpopular despite mentioning that its support base was the 'masses'. The function of these discursive formations is, of course, to give the impression that the MNP did not 'represent' the majority of the Malays or capture the primordial political (or lack thereof) essence of the Malay. Yet even with a cursory glance of the sources at the time, it is easy to extrapolate some of the impact of the Malay left. An article in the newspaper *Utusan Melayu* (1950), for example, had focused on finding common ground between the MNP and UMNO because it perceived them as the 'two biggest Malay parties' especially with the sentiment that the British would soon ban the MNP.[2] In fact, as N.J. Funston (1976: 60) argues, though the impact of UMNO on Malay politics was undeniable, the actual size of UMNO should be in dispute.

While UMNO boasted a membership of more than 100,000 in mid-1947, it should be noted that irregularities were found in the calculation of members including at least 13 organisations said to have exactly 500 members, with rounded up numbers, and with paid-up membership of only a little more than 25,000. A key contention that led to the split of the MNP from UMNO was that UMNO had expected all affiliated organisations including the MNP to pay full membership dues of M$1 per member while retaining only one vote per organisation. This was despite the fact that the Malayan Security Service (MSS) itself had estimated a total membership of 60,000 for the MNP in 1946 meaning that the MNP would have had to pay a disproportionate amount while not holding significant influence.[3] That UMNO only had a paid membership of little over 25,000 in 1947 would suggest either a reversal of the membership dues policy or a wholly inaccurate estimate of its own membership.

The question then remains that if the contributions of these organisations were so large, why were they written out of history for so long? Scholars such as Azmi Arifin (2022) and Mohamed Salleh Lamry (2017) have comprehensively studied the marginalised voices of the left-wing movements in the growth of Malay nationalism. This often includes how British enforcement of laws and arrests with the collusion of the ethnic nationalists had dismantled anti-colonial factions in Malaya. However, rarely

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[1]*Economist* 153 (5441), 'Rumblings in Malaya', 6 December 1947, p. 926.
[2]Political Intelligence Journal (PIJ) no.15, The National Archives (TNA), FCO 141/15673.
[3]PIJ no. 6 of 1946, TNA, FCO 141/15954.

do these works focus on the use of epistemic violence to dismantle the Malay left not only in the political sphere but in the Malay population especially since many of the narratives from the nationalist historiography echo colonial discourses. To understand this epistemic violence as well requires a thorough investigation on the material basis of institutions that drive it, including the colonial state and the Malay aristocracy.

Azmi Arifin (2016: 82) has written extensively on how an UMNO myth was created but has not considered the discursive functions that worked in tandem to ensure the Malay left would not reach its former height. Donna Amoroso (2014: 168) and Milner (2008: xi) meanwhile described the period, including the conflict between the Malay left and right in the case of the former, solely in its symbolic and discursive form which ignores the power asymmetry of the Malay aristocracy that allowed for the imposition of epistemic violence to be enacted in the first place. After World War II, the British were able to re-position themselves in the Malayan political sphere and were thus able to control discourse structurally and institutionally by means of not only laws but also establishing a hegemony via censorship and amplifying British-friendly discourses such as those from UMNO. As Farish Noor (2009: 204–205) argues, UMNO as an alternative discourse made itself useful as a political vehicle to maintain the status quo and was even a continuation of the British-Malay aristocracy power sharing arrangement. Thus, this article aims to fill this gap in scholarship, not only of the role of the British in nation making, and particularly their use of discourse in constructing images of the Malays to maintain control over Malaya, but also on how these discursive formations were affected by the collaboration between the British and the Malay aristocracy to epistemically marginalise the voices of the Malay left into subalternity.

The myth of the 'non-political' Malay

The post-war period for Britain saw the decline of its empire with growing anti-colonial nationalism. Pressure from the United States to which Britain was financially indebted after the war, and the maintenance of the Labour welfare state (reliant more on colonialism than internal wealth distribution) contributied to a compelling need for more resources to keep itself afloat (Stenson 1980: 112; Gupta 1975: 283; Clough 2014: 79). It was thus essential for Britain to justify its re-occupation of Malaya, a profitable colony and one of its largest too due to its rubber and tin exports (White 2011: 214). To do this, the British began drawing from colonial narratives of preparing Malaya for self-government which came with the assumption that the colonised were incapable of self-determination. Political consciousness, however, was growing in Malaya in an anti-colonial form which gained popularity with the masses but was against the interests of the colonial state and the Malay aristocracy (Ariffin Omar 2015: 117–118).

Discourse surrounding Malaya often painted the 'native population' as non-political and requiring guidance. In 1944 the British War Cabinet, chaired by Clement Attlee who would later be Prime Minister, issued directives for the re-colonisation of Malaya. The directives mentioned that their 'declared purpose' was to promote self-government and that there was no reason to assume that traditional structures had changed, and that the sultanates 'continue to enjoy the loyalty and traditional respect of the Malays'.[4] Thus

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[4]Record type: memorandum former reference: WP (44) 258, 'Policy in Malaya and Borneo', 1944, TNA, CAB 66/50/8.

a report written by colonial officer Victor Purcell for the British Military Administration (BMA) after re-colonisation on the political climate of Malaya dated January to February 1946 similarly stated that the Malays did not feature prominently in the report because there was no evidence of political thought and activity within the Malay community.[5]

Despite these assumptions, the MNP had been established just four months earlier from said report and was already seen as one of the biggest threats to the colonial state by the BMA second only to the Malayan Communist Party (MCP).[6] The foundations of the MNP were established before the Japanese Occupation with the establishment of Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), a Malay organisation aimed at upending the political and religious established order (Rustam Sani 2008: 37). Importantly, the goals of the MNP clashed with those of the British as the MNP was a left-wing organisation purportedly representing the 'Malay masses' in contrast to the British who intended to rebuild their relationship with the Malay aristocracy to consolidate its extractive colonial-capitalist institutions (Badriyah 2016: 8). Perhaps because of this, Brigadier Alexander Newbolt insisted that the MNP did not represent the majority views of the Malays and the report by the BMA likewise claimed that the MNP was resented by the more 'moderate' nationalists.[7]

The image of the non-political Malay was severely challenged by the protests against the Malayan Union proposals which was a union of Malayan states to form a single government under the British. Though initially the MNP supported the proposals on the principle that they downgraded the status of the sultanates it saw as 'feudal relics', it then opposed them when it realised they entailed the consolidation of British power (Malhi 2021: 443). Due to internal protests, the MNP had passed a resolution in its standing committee that protested the White Paper of the Malayan Union due to its lack of consultation with the Malay people, the separation of Singapore and 'vagueness' on the issue of citizenship.[8] At the same time, UMNO was established in 1946 following the anxiety of the aristocracy over how the Malayan Union proposals would weaken the power of the sultanates (Amoroso 1998: 258; Azmi Arifin 2014: 3).

The MNP had joined UMNO 'since its inception' to ensure Malay unity in 1946, but the MNP officially seceded from UMNO in the same year. It cited a disagreement with the inclusion of the ethno-nationalistic kris in the UMNO flag but materially it was driven by UMNO's refusal to commit to full independence and failure to grant the MNP the number of votes proportionate to its support base (Amoroso 2014: 194).[9] The divide in the support base, UMNO representing the upper strata of Malay society on the one hand and the MNP representing the 'Malay masses' on the other, repeatedly caused conflicts in Malay public discourse. UMNO began adopting an offensive against any non-conformist Malay movements, targeting the MNP in particular because they

[5]Victor Purcell, Malaya's political climate VII. Period January 8th to February 4th, 1946, in Malaya: administration and a report on the long-term policy regarding the Chinese in Malaya, Singapore. TNA, WO 203/5283.

[6]'Malayan societies', in Malaya: administration and a report on the long-term policy regarding the Chinese in Malaya, Singapore, 1945–1946, TNA, WO 203/5283.

[7]Victor Purcell, TNA, WO 203/5283.

[8]The manifesto of the Malay Nationalist Party Malaya with regard to the British White Paper on Malayan Union in Policy: Malaya: Malay attitude, 1946, TNA, CO 537/1549.

[9]Strategic War Unit, Malaya: Malay Nationalist Party secedes from United Malay Nationalist Organisation, 1946, US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), A-70178.

represented the masses, and thus had a vested interested in depicting it as an unpopular party. Throughout 1947 *Majlis*,[10] the 'unofficial organ of UMNO', had consistently published headlines on alleged mass resignations from the MNP in different states in Malaysia including Malacca, Johor and Perak (Amoroso 2014: 179–180). This was a running theme in *Majlis*[11] as one article reads 'the Malaccan Malay people reprimands the MNP' which attempted to evoke an othering of the MNP from Malay interests.

In colonial newspapers, the credentials of the MNP as representing the 'Malay masses' was always questioned. The *Straits Times*[12] often published correspondence that criticised the MNP. For example, 'Questions from a Johore Malay' brought up many of the figures of the MNP's past collaboration with the Japanese to discredit them and probed their criticisms of the British and UMNO. Another article[13] queried the progress of the MNP in helping the 'dumb Malay masses' and the Malay peasantry. Even as PUTERA and All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) coalition, a multi-ethnic left-wing coalition, became a formidable force in 1947, the *Economist*,[14] a magazine aimed at business interests, only acknowledged that it had 'Japanese origins' and worked to 'split the Malay vote' which the magazine posited would lead to the demise of the Malays.

The significance of leftist inter-ethnic coalition, however, cannot be denied because PUTERA-AMCJA was a coalition of all the Malay left including Malay youth, women, trade unions and peasant movements, such as Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API), Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), Barisan Tani Se-Malaya (BATAS) and Gerakan Angkatan Muda (GERAM), and left-wing non-Malay political parties and trade unions (ibid.). It also included organisations founded on inter-ethnic initiatives such as the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU) which by July 1947 included 153 trade unions (excluding Singapore) with a total of some 260,000 members (Abdul Majid Salleh 2004: 59–61).[15] The anti-colonial aspect of these movements was driven by the post-war breakdown of the political economy accelerating organising efforts to meet the material needs of their communities. Most significantly, organisations such as BATAS were established to counter price-fixing and neglect of Malay peasants while the PMFTU was active in resisting British attempts to increase profits at the expense of labour for its post-war reconstruction efforts (White 2011: 214; Leong 1996: 30–31).[16] The MNP, AWAS and API meanwhile, were responses to marginalisation, by both the British and by the Malay aristocracy, of the *rakyat Melayu jelata* (Malay masses), women and youths in political processes that directly affected them (Aljunied 2013: 156; Amoroso 1998: 259–269).

This stood in stark contrast to Britain's more reliable ally UMNO which was the closest match to the British orientalised image of the Malay that was 'non-political', in that they did not challenge British power and were embedded in the sultanates with

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[10]*Majlis* (1947): 'Ahli PKMM Melaka menarik diri', 24 February 1947, p. 3; 'Ahli PKMM Tangkak menarik diri', 15 March 1947, p. 4; 'Menarik diri dari PKMM Parit', 1 March 1947, p. 4; 'Lagi menarik diri dari PKMM', 18 March 1947, p. 2.
[11]Majlis, 'Umat Melayu Melaka membidas PKMM', 8 November 1947, p. 1.
[12]*Straits Times,*10 December 1947, p. 10.
[13]*Straits Times,* 18 December 1946, p. 4
[14]*Economist*, 6 December 1947, p. 926.
[15]*Malaya Tribune,* 9 September 1947, p. 5.
[16]Statement issued by the All Malaya Peasant Union, Kuala Lumpur alleging increase of land rents by tenfold and eviction of peasants, Arkib Negara Malaysia (ANM), 1957/0294228W.

which the British were accustomed to working. Because of this, UMNO was particularly useful since they believed that the British were necessary. The then president of UMNO in 1946, Onn was reported to have said the Malays were 'unfit at present to maintain a separate existence outside the sphere of British protection' (Cheah 2012: 284). Onn had subjectified 'Malays' to align with his own interest and thus the Malay aristocracy. The British Political Intelligence Journal (PIJ) written by the MSS even had a section stating that Onn was 'aware' that his political survival depended on the presence of British armed forces.[17] This awareness of the material dependency of the Malay aristocracy was evident in a later statement by Onn that 'if the British left the Malay Peninsula, we [the Malays] would fall into the Communist threat' (Azmi Arifin 2014: 15). In fact, in 1949, information compiled by Special Branch (SB), the successor of the MSS, justified British collaboration with UMNO in hindsight by reporting that in 1946, UMNO was of the opinion that Malaya should remain in the British empire with its own elected legislature.[18] Rather than vying for independence then, the creation of UMNO led to the safeguarding of what the Malay aristocracy considered to be 'Malay interests', and that often meant protecting the sanctity of traditional institutions. Because the British colonial state and the sultanates were, at least before the Japanese Occupation, co-dependent, UMNO as a party had seen the British as necessary and the Malays not ready for self-government, a view shared by the British as they had been comfortable with the colonial-sultanate relationship (Farish Noor 2009: 204–205).

Externalising the Malay left: the politics of the 'influenced' Malay

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015: 103) posited that externalising a historical event often functions as rhetoric to obfuscate and delegitimise the agency of the masses, as they must have been 'prompted', 'provoked', or 'suggested', in their revolt. In this case, the colonial state's administrative documentation, or the process of fact creation, took the form of delegitimising anti-colonial resistance, which justified mass surveillance and repressive measures. Anti-colonial ideologies that often contradicted the colonial state discourse, such as Third Worldism and communism, were effectively externalised to marginalise them from Malay politics. By 1947, the anti-colonial threat was beginning to materialise within Malaya, as evident with the emergence of the PUTERA-AMCJA alliance. In 1947, PUTERA-AMCJA successfully enacted *hartal* that disrupted the colonial economy, bringing some essential services to a standstill (Noordin Sopiee 2005: 43; Yeo 1973: 45). This event proved a turning point as the British reports focused more on the Malay left and all the other left-wing groups.

In a secret meeting convened by the Governor-General, Malcolm MacDonald, the Director of the MSS emphasised how the Chinese communists duped the Malays and the Indians into their anti-colonialism.[19] The term 'communist-controlled' was explicitly used to deny the agency of the members of PUTERA-AMCJA by implying they were victims of manipulation rather than colonised people resisting the colonial state. The fear of communism also stemmed from the fact that a communist takeover was a

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[17]Supplement to PIJ no. 10, 1948, TNA, CO 537/3748.
[18]United Malay Organisation and Malay Nationalist Party, 1949, TNA, FCO 141/15457.
[19]Secretary of Chinese Affairs, 'Special Conference', p. 2, TNA, FCO 141/19947.

foolproof way to build a hostile nation-state that would compromise British control of its profitable colony. The colonial state's reaction to the PUTERA-AMCJA counter-proposals for Malaya's constitution was highly adverse. They insisted that it was against Malay interests even though PUTERA was arguably the largest Malay organisation at the time.[20] Its broad definition of 'Malay' to define a nationality, and therefore include all citizens of Malaya, was especially derided by the British as they saw it as a conceptualisation of 'Malay' that none of the communities in Malaya would accept. However, this conceptualisation resulted from inter-ethnic consensus-building between primarily grassroots organisations. In contrast to the British-led Working Committee, which drafted the constitution behind closed doors with only the British, sultans and UMNO representatives present, the PUTERA-AMCJA proposals were a collaborative effort and adjusted to represent the diversity of views, including the emerging middle class, Malay peasants, Chinese industrial labour and Indian plantation labour. These groups, however, had material interests directly opposed to the British-UMNO alliance (Ariffin Omar 2015: 125–149).[21] Conceding to their demands, which included increasing wages and rights to democratic expression, would decrease the colony's profitability and limit the aristocracy's traditional powers.

Those who opposed the British were thus classified as 'communist-controlled'.[22] Still, the designation of the MNP, which was the main Malay party in PUTERA-AMCJA, was a particular discursive formation meant to marginalise it from Malay public discourse as evident from the MSS document (Ahmad Fauzi 2007: 287). The schism in Malay politics was evident as Onn had emphasised how UMNO was the 'only true Malay organisation', describing the other organisations, especially the MNP, as foreign-controlled 'disloyal to their own race', which is rhetoric reminiscent of the discourse of the British administration.[23] Media discursive constructions also reiterated this, as evident from the common *Majlis* caricatures of the Chinese and Indians, derogatorily referred to as 'Ah Chong' and 'Ramasamy', which were often contrasted with the MNP to show disapproval of their attempts at inter-ethnic cooperation (Amoroso 2014: 183). A political cartoon in *Majlis*, for example, depicts Dr Burhanuddin, the then president of the MNP, as meekly being led by the 'Ah Chong' and 'Ramasamy' in contrast to an image evocative of the ideal Malay holding the UMNO flag (Fahmi Reza 2007).[24] Given UMNO's stance on the Indian and Chinese as foreign immigrants, it is obvious that such depictions were meant to paint the MNP as 'foreign-controlled'.

The *Economist*[25] painted the PUTERA-AMCJA as a short-lived and unpopular coalition. PUTERA was seen as Indonesian-influenced as their rallies often bared the Indonesian flag. The Malays were orientalised as a passive population loyal to the sultan, and this proved that the MNP was not and would never be popular among the Malays (ibid.). Colonial newspapers also accused the MNP of being communist-controlled. However, a somewhat contradictory discursive construction often reiterated in the media was the 'uneducated masses' duped into supporting the MNP 'against their

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[20]'Comments on the proposals of AMCJA-PUTERA on citizenship', TNA, CO 537/2148.
[21]*Straits Times,* 30 January 1947, p. 6.
[22]'Special Conference', p. 2, TNA, FCO 141/19947, p. 2.
[23]PIJ no. 8 of 1947, TNA, FCO 141/15955; PIJ no. 10 of 1947, TNA, FCO 141/15955.
[24]*Majlis,* 6 September 1947, p. 1.
[25]*Economist* 153 (5441), 6 December 1947, p. 926.

interests'. Such portrayal was complementary to the idea that the Malay left were predominantly 'Chinese-controlled' or 'Indonesian-influenced'. For example, a report on 30 June 1947 claimed that some members of the MNP intended to support the 'Indonesian invasion', which the report notes as an indication of an 'effectiveness of the propaganda'.[26] The previous correspondence in the *Straits Times*[27] had emphasised the Indonesian nature of MNPs rallies to which they sarcastically questioned the MNP's devotion to the 'dumb Malay masses' and the 'downtrodden' even going so far as asking if it was a Malay party at all as it emphasised how MNP rallies in Malacca often brandished the 'red and white' Indonesian flag.

In 1947 when GERAM took a leading role in condemning British action in banning API, the MNP's youth wing, the British PIJ report dismissed it as an 'Indonesian propaganda machine'.[28] It is worth noting that Aziz Ishak (1977: 6–7), the president of GERAM, considered it to be a centrist movement in PUTERA that moderated the MNP leadership. Further evidence is that Aziz Ishak was a cabinet minister in the UMNO government after independence. There is, therefore, a reason for further interrogation about how the colonial state determines what 'external' is. In contrast to the external threat discourse, UMNO was characterised as a 'pure' and 'sincere' organisation that stemmed from UMNO representing the British orientalist image of what a Malay is. UMNO was seen as a pure organisation due to its focus on the 'Malay race, customs, and religion'. UMNO would supposedly refuse to work with the MNP due to their Indonesian connections.[29] In 1946, Onn stated that: 'I plan to get Malays to put their own house in order and keep away from Communists and Javanese', which purportedly impressed British intelligence and was an obvious allusion to the MNP (Cheah 2012: 283). In fact, a British report in 1949 emphasised that UMNO emerged from an 'urge' that was 'felt deeply and widely amongst the Malays' compared to the MNP which was 'a largely artificial creation'.[30] The name UMNO itself as an 'organisation' rather than a political party to contrast with the MNP further encapsulates this self-orientalisation and complicity with the British. Hussein Onn, an UMNO youth leader and son of Onn, emphasised that UMNO's slogan *Hidup Melayu* (Long live the Malays) was not meant to be political (Amoroso 2014: 214–215).

The disingenuous 'externalising' at the level of fact creation from administrators is evident here. As Trouillot (2015: 103) argues, it is not that these 'influences' are inaccurate or impossible. Instead, contrary evidence is not treated with the same weight. Thus, while historians such as Ramlah Adam (1998) and Cheah (2012) present such influences as delegitimising factors of these movements, especially towards questioning the 'Malayness', similar influences towards UMNO are rarely considered. 'Internalising' colonial racial categories here does not solely mean subscribing to available discourses that were convenient for the UMNO Malay aristocracy but, to a large extent, were also subjectified through British institutions. Most notable is the Malay College of Kuala Kangsar, which often groomed the local aristocracy to collaborate with the British state. Amoroso (2014: 60–63) stresses that the Malay aristocracy had much agency in shaping the form in

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[26]PIJ no. 10 of 1947, TNA, FCO 141/15955.
[27]*Straits Times,* 18 December 1946, p. 4.
[28]PIJ no. 12 of 1947, TNA, FCO 141/15955.
[29]UMNO, 1949, TNA, FCO 141/15457.
[30]Political Report no. 3 for January 1949 in Malay Nationalist Party, 1948–1949, TNA, CO 537/4742.

which 'Malay tradition' would emerge from its subordinate state to the British colonial state. It is informative that such institutionalisation is not considered 'influence' by the colonial state. It shows the parameters of what it would consider 'external' from British institutions compared to British categorisations of the MNP.

Stripping the agency of the Malay left: no true Malaymen is anti-colonial

Discursive constructions, though helpful in creating a direction for both the colonial state and the Malay aristocracy, were not enough to deal with the genuine popularity of the Malay left. The formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 and the subsequent declaration of the Emergency in 1948 was a significant turning point in dealing with insurgent elements. Though the killing of three European, two estate managers and one assistant, was the catalyst for the Emergency, current historiography, such as Azmi Arifin (2019) and Furedi (1994: 150–160), claim that the Emergency stemmed more from British anxiety that they were losing control of their colony. On the side of Malay politics, the Emergency established a more robust discursive asymmetry between the British-UMNO alliance against the Malay left. A primary strategy of this period was a consolidation of externalising the Malay left as 'influenced' by non-Malay factors, as found in previous years. However, the renewed control of the British and UMNO over Malaya through the formation of the Federation of Malaya and the declaration of the Emergency allowed them to institutionalise these methods of control.

During this period, the British had an interest in portraying the resistance against the British as a wholly communist, or often interchangeably Chinese, endeavour. The British emphasised how communist influence was essential to the Malay left and could not function without the MCP. Furthermore, due to the Emergency, institutional violence against the Malay left had diminished their numbers, seemingly becoming evidence of its dependence on the MCP.[31] Though the MNP had emphasised that they had 'concluded' their connections with the MCP, a PIJ report in August of 1948 had instead focused on a notion that the MNP were in collaboration with Moscow and was waiting for 'the day' on which a third world war would break out so they could truly achieve independence.[32] The depiction of the Malay left as communist served to discredit them in the eyes of the Americans who, in the early years of the MNP, were somewhat sympathetic to their goals.[33] The Malayan Emergency especially imposed this discourse with violence in order to ensure that Malay-Muslim communists remained an 'aberration' (Malhi 2021: 447). Remnants of the Malay left were targeted as they represented an ideological threat to the colonial state. A British Brigadier was cited for saying that a Malay terrorist was worth 'seven or eight Chinese', not just because of the physical threat to the state but also the ideological threat towards the British-UMNO hegemony (Caldwell 1977: 225).

The 10th regiment of the MCP, which consisted solely of Malay members, often those who had escaped the Emergency, was quickly stamped out to maintain the image of the MCP as a 'Chinese' movement (Caldwell 1977: 225–226). Such a situation especially emboldened UMNO, which was anti-Chinese and utilised the MNP policies of bettering

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[31]UMNO, 1949, TNA, FCO 141/15457.
[32]PIJ no. 15 of 1948, TNA, FCO 141/15673.
[33]NARA A-70178.

Malay-Sino relations and British characterisations of the MNP to paint the party as a movement against Malay interests. For example, the president of AWAS at the time, Shamsiah Fakeh, was often accused of being a 'communist influence' due to her inclusive nationalism. These accusations even came from her previous allies in women's liberation, notably the founder of UMNO's women's wing Aishah Ghani (Ting 2003: 165–166). In turn, the internalisation and conformity to Malay aristocratic patriarchal discourse benefited the British, facilitating further externalisation of the Malay left by portraying the Malays as backward and archaic (Ting 2003: 165–166). A leaflet distributed during the Emergency stated clearly that:

> In the present Emergency, all Malays must unite in support of UMNO and the government in ending the Communist threat. As Onn has said, 'it will go down in Malay history that Malays today face grave danger, and they have united to protect their rights'.[34]

Similar projections to 'all Malays' sentiments were made in leaflets encouraging registration for identity cards in the National Registration programme, which 'all Malays' apparently supported and conversely meant that only 'non-Malays', the implication being Chinese, were against it.[35] This intentional decision to create a divide between the Malays and Chinese in the name of anti-Communism was also evident in British propaganda targeting the 'bandits' in Temerloh-Mentakab area, where the 10th regiment was established and operated, which advised Malays to stop following the 'Chinese bandits' as families of known Malay Communists in Temerloh were 'removed' (Mohamed Salleh Lamry 2015: 42).[36] Labour Day propaganda as well was racially targeted; only the Jawi leaflets aimed at Malays mention the 'Communist Dictatorship', a common British discursive reference to the outbreak of racial violence during the period after the Japanese surrender, to stoke anger and blame against the 'Chinese Communists'.[37] In all versions of this propaganda, whether Malay, Tamil or Chinese, the Communists were subjectified, both racially and nationally as (China) Chinese by telling the Communists to 'go back to China' to externalise anti-colonial resistance to the British.[38]

Because the British had intended to preserve its control over the Malay population through the sultanates as it had before World War II, the lack of social control resulting from the Japanese Occupation was a cause of anxiety for the British. For example, when describing the MNP, the British often emphasise its roots during Japanese colonialism to discredit them.[39] The portrayal of Japanese influence is persistent in the British accounts of how the MNP was able to establish itself, so much so that even Malaysian history textbooks today include these links in the brief mention of the MNP, or its preceding organisation, the KMM. These fears were not entirely unfounded, as the Japanese had supported the anti-Western nationalist political organisations in Indonesia and had done the same in Malaya (Ahmad Fauzi 2007: 383). The success of the Indonesian Revolution, coupled with the affinity of the Malay left towards rapprochement or even unity with Indonesia, emboldened many of the leaders during the period of Japanese

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[34]No. 131 Malay extremist repent – ask sultan for pardon, 1948–1949, ANM, 1957/0473801W.
[35]National Registration, 1948–1949, ANM, 1957/0473801W.
[36]Emergency Leaflet no. 296 in Issue of facts and advice to Malays and Kampongs under present Emergency Period, 1950, Arkib Negara Malaysia Negeri Johor, State Secretariat Johore No 30/1950.
[37]مي 1 بوروه دا فـد هاري ويـلأم تانه كرجـ2 فـكـ انفاتتك in 1162 'MAY DAY', 1952, ANM, 1957/0675449W.
[38]1162 'MAY DAY', 1952, ANM, 1957/0675449W
[39]UMNO, 1949, TNA, FCO 141/15457.

colonialism. It was a cause of concern as it disrupted British direction for Malaya as a post-colonial state. British intelligence had, as Greg Poulgrain (1998: 42–48) argued, manipulated events in Sumatra to isolate the revolution and compel the Malay monarchs into taking political initiatives against the MNP, lest they be targeted by revolutionaries which was the case for the Sumatran aristocracy.

Thus, radical elements or those deemed radical were often proscribed as 'Indonesians', further externalising the Malay left's political activities and as an excuse to institutionalise more measures. For example, the amendments to the Aliens Ordinance Act of 1940 gave the British discretionary powers to conduct surveillance on any problematic individuals they considered 'Indonesians' (Aljunied 2009: 10–11). Especially in the 1950s, the line between Malay and Indonesian was often blurred. The British differentiated them through the criterion of 'political-mindedness' with the Malays considered a 'passive race'. Therefore, documents presenting information on the nationalism of the mid-1940s often portrayed 'extremely left-wing Indonesians' as the subject and cause of upheavals (ibid.). Contemporary secondary literature also reiterates this discourse, such as Tim Harper (1999: 165), who mentions that the primary support of the MNP came from 'Indonesian settlements', and Hara Fujio (2010: 225), who states that the majority of MNP supporters were 'working-class Indonesians'. Yet, the definition of Indonesian as 'politically-minded' and the generalisation of whole ethnicities in British censuses that place so-called 'Indonesian' ethnicities under the Malay column show that these categories were largely arbitrary in the first place (Farish Noor 2009: 76). Onn was, in fact, aware of these blurred lines and was open to the idea of an inclusive definition of 'Malay'. Yet crucially, the UMNO conceptualisation centred on the Malayan peninsular and, therefore, the dominant aristocratic institutions of the peninsular (Milner 2008: 155). Thus, even to the ethnic-centred aristocracy, the idea of a 'pure Malay' was largely rhetorical. Instead, these discourses were meant to marginalise those who did not conform to Malay aristocratic institutions in Malay politics, discrediting and even muting them entirely by removing them from the political sphere.

Pre-emptive colonial violence as a response to the 'threat' of violence

Before the Emergency, API was a particular target of the British. Their slogan 'independence through blood' gave the excuse the British needed to shut them down as a violent organisation in 1947, the year preceding the Emergency. An issue arose during the trial of API's president, Ahmad Boestamam, in which a passage from his book was intentionally translated to be seen as violent.[40] Because of the epistemic space the Malay left occupied as a subversive movement, appeals by the defence counsel were ignored and shortly after Boestamam's arrest, API was banned (Harper 1999: 119). API, however, would not be the last Malay mass movement organisation to be targeted. Especially after the Emergency declaration, many of these processes to detain or disrupt could now be expedited or ignored altogether. Officially the Malay left were not the Emergency targets, but historians such as Azmi Arifin (2022) disagree as the Emergency was an event that effectively dismantled them as more than a thousand Malay leftist leaders were targeted during its early stages. At the Emergency declaration, UMNO was quick to give its full support. The

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[40]*Malaya Tribune,* 20 March 1947, p. 5.

MNP was still UMNO's main competitor for Malay support at the time, and intelligence reports suggested that the MNP was growing at UMNO's expense (Furedi 1990: 72). It was evident that the British had intended to use the Emergency to dismantle their competitor. In consolidating its image as a collaborative force to the British, UMNO often organised 'volunteer corps' or supported the police.[41]

The label communist also removed international pressure on Britain to decolonise Malaya. In the early years of re-colonisation, international perception, especially from the United States, had viewed the Malay left positively due to its commitment to democracy and countering of communist rhetoric of decolonisation in the developing world.[42] By 1952 however, an American consul was cited for saying that the extensive action against the Malay left was necessary to combat communism, playing into British paranoia about the links between the Malay left and international communism.[43] The British PIJs had focused entirely on the MNP's links to the MCP in constructing them as a threat. UMNO took advantage of this to characterise the Malay left as 'communists', which the British had slowly conflated to 'terrorists' in the mid-1950s.[44] After forming the Federation of Malaya, the British legislated and enforced several laws to ensure British hegemony. The most notable is the Sedition Act of 1948, which provides that anyone seen as a threat to the state could be arrested without trial to expedite the process. In these conditions, the Emergency saw 5,362 persons detained with 214 dependents by the end of 1949 which further rose to 8,508 persons and 527 dependents by 1950 (Cheah 2009: 136; Renick Jnr: 21–23). From this, it is evident that the rhetoric around national security and 'sedition' were valuable tools in suppressing the Malay left. Although it was convenient that API gave the British all the justification it needed to arrest its leaders, the offensive against the MNP was a much longer process that made full use of British discursive hegemony.

The banning of the MNP was not an immediate process but designed to gradually discredit the mass movements starting from the banning of API. When asked to be an editor for the *Melayu Raya* newspaper, Dr Burhanuddin had declined, citing how his involvement in any organisation would endanger them as he was sure to be arrested under the pretext of the Emergency, and sure enough, he was arrested in 1950.[45] A British intelligence report had stated that the MNP was not a subversive or violent organisation through its admission. But because they attracted those who were 'susceptible' to communist influence, it was sufficient evidence to ban the MNP, which by 1950 was the last real threat to the British-UMNO hegemony. Thus, in June 1950, the British declined the MNP's application to the registrar of societies, effectively banning it as an organisation.[46]

The danger of being associated with the Malay left became apparent in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The then president of the MNP, Ishak Haji Muhammad, had commented on how difficult it was to rely on the previous support he had received from friends and family. After being isolated, the British finally arrested him in 1950 under charges of

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[41]PIJ no. 15 of 1948, TNA, FCO 141/15673.
[42]NARA A-70178, pp. 247–248.
[43]Extract from Pan-Malayan Review (PMR) of Political Intelligence no. 6 – June, 1952, TNA, CO 1022/183.
[44]PIJ no. 13 of 1948, TNA, FCO 141/15673; A.H.P. Humphrey, 'Expressions used in public references to the communist organisation', 1954–1955, TNA, FCO 141/7462.
[45]*Straits Times,* 19 December 1950, p. 1; PIR no. 9 of 1950, TNA, CO 537/6086.
[46]PIR no. 3 of 1950 1950, TNA, CO 537/6086.

sedition, an act that was met with severe backlash by *Utusan Melayu* and even Tan Cheng Lock, the first president of the Malayan Chinese Association and former member of AMCJA, who stated that Ishak had always pursued constitutional means for his political goals.[47] British harassment and enforcement served as a form of psychological warfare on the Malayan populace as it was meant to intimidate them into submission. Abdul Majid Salleh (2004: 62–65), an MNP labour leader, recalled a British raid on the last PMFTU conference, which deterred further public conferences and a grim environment after the last MNP conference in Singapore in which members were sobbing and contemplating leaving Malaya to escape the British.

The harassment worked to compel many to dissociate themselves from the Malay left. As a result, one *Majlis* article noted, many resigned from the MNP to escape British persecution.[48] British hostility towards the Malay left had thus empowered anti-left Malays to join in on the harassment of its members. A British PIJ report noted that they were able to gain more informants against the Malay left when API was banned.[49] Mustapha Hussain (2004: 351), the then advisor to Dr Burhanuddin, was evicted from his rental home due to his landlord's disapproval of his politics. Abdullah C.D (2009: 70), a Malay communist, recalled being harassed by a group of Malay men that wanted him to 'be Malay again' and forced him to bathe and perform prayers for being a communist, though he suspected them of being British agents.

Co-opting anti-colonialism: creating the UMNO myth

In contrast to the Malay left, the onset of the Emergency was a welcome breather for UMNO as they used the opportunity to consolidate their position. To deal with widening criticisms of UMNO as an aristocratic and elitist party and to counter the material conditions that made the Malay left so appealing, UMNO had adopted many of the policies of the Malay left. Most notably, UMNO had changed its slogan from *Hidup Melayu* to *Merdeka* (Independence), the slogan for the MNP since its founding.[50] The adoption of *Merdeka* as both a slogan and a policy was a compromise the Malay aristocracy was willing to make for its survival due to the failure of the colonial state. This could be attributed to the substantial influx of the Malay left joining UMNO including Mustapha Hussain (2004: 368–369) who was instrumental in changing the slogan. The Malay aristocracy during this period was able to absorb the language and symbols, and even members of Malay nationalism to portray UMNO as a party dedicated to the nationalist interest of the Malays since its founding, exemplified by its protests against the formation of the Malayan Union. Yet aesthetic or discursive efforts alone would not have allowed UMNO to dominate the Malay political discourse (Amoroso 2014: 168). Epistemic assault after the direct force enacted on the Malay left was essential in ensuring this dominance. In other words, the co-option of the policies of the Malay left, while ensuring it did not transgress the traditional social hierarchies of Malay feudalism, was intended to create an UMNO myth as a vanguard party and protector of the Malays at the expense of erasing the contributions of the Malay left. As a result, today's historical image of

[47]PIJ no. 14 of 1948, TNA, FCO 141/15673.
[48]*Morning Tribune,* 22 July 1948, p. 3.
[49]PIJ no. 15 of 1948, TNA, FCO 141/15673.
[50]Othman Wok, Political history of Singapore, National Archives of Singapore, 6 January 1982, 00013.

Merdeka in Malaysia has been thoroughly monopolised by an image of the then president of UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman and his proclamation of *Merdeka* at the Merdeka Stadium. Trouillot (2015: 59) noted that historical silencing could also involve a 'symbolic killing' by denying its original meaning. In this sense, the co-option of *Merdeka* as a slogan and then to name a stadium, intentional or otherwise, overshadowed the Malay left, whose epistemic death was to play a part in creating a nation-state based on the UMNO myth.

Beyond the co-option of symbols and language, it was pivotal that UMNO co-opted the economic and social policies of the Malay left to absorb its popularity and deter similar material conditions that led to its emergence. UMNO's success in this area was facilitated mainly by its institutional advantage, as most of its members were influential aristocrats who received British financial and political support. During the 1950s, after years of collaboration with the British, many UMNO members were in positions of power within the colonial state. Onn himself was a District Officer and then Chief Minister of Johor, which he used to bolster UMNO by using his office as a political strategy centre and using his connections to the *penghulu* (village headmen) to connect UMNO to villagers. Using government institutions afforded to them by their close relationship with the British, UMNO was able to establish Malay schools to compete with the educational activities of the Malay left that they were conducting through Islamic institutions such as Lembaga Pendidikan Rakyat and with the grassroots education through the *rakyat* schools established by the religious, peasant, women, and labour wings of the MNP. They were able to compete for the religious groups and peasantry as well through government institutions, using village chiefs and other community leaders as intermediaries to support UMNO. They were also able to give economic assistance with British financial assistance for their five-year plans for the state of Perak to weaken the activities of Pusat Perekonomian Melayu Se-Malaya, an MNP initiative to promote economic development (Azmi Arifin 2016: 82–85).

Furthermore, UMNO had established its labour department with one of its main objectives being 'to dissuade Malay labourers from joining trade unions which are organised and run by other groups' which likely referred to the multi-ethnic PMFTU.[51] However, these compromises were made to garner the masses' support and were only adopted so long as they did not disrupt the traditional structure. Even as UMNO was adopting Islamic education, many Islamic reformists among the Malay left were unhappy with the development of UMNO's nationalism, which led to the establishment and subsequent splinter of the Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya (PAS; Funston 1976: 69–71). UMNO's inclusivity of trade unions was because they were not disruptive in targeting strike action, especially during *hartal* (Dass 1991: 42).[52]

With the Malay left being systemically dismantled and their branches raided by the British, UMNO began opening branches and expanding their usual support base to include that of the Malay left. UMNO's actions during this period were measured as they had welcomed the old MNP members unhesitatingly with *Majlis* urging ex-members of the MNP to join UMNO.[53] A report in June 1950 by the Special Branch

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[51]U.M.N.O Labour dept., 1947. ANM, 1957/0638245W.
[52]PIJ no. 17 of 1947, TNA, FCO 141/15955.
[53]PIR, no. 5 of 1950 in Political Intelligence PMR of Political and Security Intelligence, 1950. TNA, CO 537/6086, p. 8.

(SB) even expressed concern over the number of people from the Malay left seemingly joining UMNO, leading to a fear of UMNO being 'disrupted' or 'influenced'. Yet it became apparent that most of the changes were either moderate or symbolic of appeasing their new support base, especially as they were facing financial issues and were looking to expand their membership.[54] However, UMNO still had to ensure that these new members would tow the party line and consent to the traditional power structures. Hence, party discipline was a policy that UMNO had enforced. For example, the Youth Corp was founded to attract former Malay left youth activists. It was established in Ulu Langat, a former API hotspot. It was made clear that the youth was meant to focus on sports and culture while leaving politics to the elders. Similarly, in trying to emulate the popularity of AWAS to gain the trust of Malay women, UMNO established the Kaum Ibu that absorbed many of the members and policies of AWAS. However, its activities were limited by traditional UMNO leaders who were averse to allowing women in politics (Aljunied 2013: 166–170). Anti-colonialist and Kaum Ibu leader Khatijah Sidek, for example, was expelled from UMNO in 1956 after continuously challenging male hegemony in UMNO by attempting to push for structural change in the resolutions of Kaum Ibu (Sohaimi 2011: 47).

This strategy was followed by improved UMNO public efforts to fight for more democratic institutions, such as the representation of Malayans in the legislative council and greater attempts at getting independence from the British. UMNO used anti-colonial language to win over the MNP members that had lost their sense of direction from the banning of its party. UMNO had held events such as raising the Indonesian flag in solidarity with the Indonesian resistance to the Dutch invasion despite their accusations of the Malay left being Indonesian influenced. Despite this, UMNO was still in close collaboration with the British, often only making changes approved by the British. UMNO's fight for more legislative seats in 1954 was limited to boycotting the legislative assemblies and letters of protest. The Tunku for example, collaborated with the then High Commissioner of the Federation of Malaya, Gerald Templar, to ensure they did not overstep their boundaries by accepting his suggestions for alternative actions during the 1954 boycott.[55] Another example was a letter from a British official which responded to UMNO-MCA's various petitions and boycotts with assurances that there were 'no substantial differences between them, and they were adamant about only producing public statements that they collectively agreed to.[56]

The Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) was established in 1949 as UMNO leaders realised they required inter-ethnic support. Onn Ja'afar was cited as having said in 1951, UMNO should not be 'deluded' into thinking independence could be achieved by any one racial group.[57] However, the CLC drew the distrust of many UMNO members due to the anti-Sinicism prevalent in UMNO. A PIJ report in 1950 noted that Onn was facing tremendous opposition to his citizenship proposal for non-Malays. UMNO under Onn later found out that it would be impossible to build the

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[54]PIR, no. 6 of 1950 in Political Intelligence PMR of Political and Security Intelligence, 1950, TNA, CO 537/6086, p. 6.

[55]Telegram from Gerald Templar to the Secretary of the State for the Colonies, in United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) Alliance, 1954–1956, TNA, CO 1030/310.

[56]Second letter from Oliver Lyttelton to Tunku Abdul Rahman, Laporan Mengenai U.M.N.O. Tahun 1953–1954 no. 1–12. (A), p.1, ANM, 2003/0008799W

[57]Pan Malayan Reviews PMR of Political Intelligence no. 11 – November 1951 in Constitution and functions of the 'United Malays National Organisation' (UMNO), TNA, CO 1022/183.

nation through a purely ethnic lens. But even then, the structure of UMNO prevented any real change in their outlook. Thus, Onn was under pressure from UMNO for his citizenship proposal, and it eventually announced his resignation in June 1950.[58] Historians often cite the CLC as the first attempt at creating a multi-ethnic coalition. Dr Burhanuddin himself was frustrated over how stronger Sino-Malay relations were a policy first pursued by the Malay left but was now adopted by the very people that derided it. Yet UMNO as an institution was resistant to inter-ethnic cooperation since it was an organisation built under the auspices of the Malay aristocracy. An article by 'Che Det', a known pseudonym of Mahathir Mohammed, who later became the fourth and seventh prime minister of Malaysia, embodied the new homogenous approach towards ethnic nationalism as he attributed the unpopularity of the MNP to its commitment to ensuring equal rights.[59]

Producing the subaltern: erasing the Malay left as a popular Malay movement

A major objective of the collaboration between the colonial state and UMNO in the early years of the Malayan Emergency was to diminish the importance of the MNP. Information compiled from the Special Branch (SB), the successor of the MSS, records written by the General-Governor's Office estimated that MNP membership in Singapore alone in late 1947 was around 1,300 members which curiously contradict the MSS report of the same year which estimated more than double the number of members in Singapore and a total of 53,380 members in all of Malaya (Stockwell 1979: 142).[60] An extract from the political intelligence Pan-Malayan Review in 1949, by the SB and the Police intelligence bureau, estimated only 4,000 members in the MNP at the start of the Emergency.[61] These contradictions were not mere oversights as evident from its consistency; rather, they served the particular function of diminishing the importance of the MNP. Numerous pages from the MSS PIJ reports, SB PMRs, police reports and meeting minutes were dedicated to discussing the Malay left. Resources were directed towards surveillance of individuals and party meetings; these included hiring spies and reporting on the daily activities of party leaders, particularly Dr Burhanuddin, who often had sections dedicated to him in the PMRs in the early 1950s, long after the MNP had been defunct.[62] Documents and letters from the Malay left were often intercepted to locate and intimidate members of the Malay left parties. Raids on the Malay left became especially frequent during the early years of the Emergency as intentional intimidation tactics to break the spirit of members of the anti-colonial groups (Aljunied 2012: 395–398).

The often violent marginalisation of the Malay left limited political involvement to either continuing in the form of armed struggle against colonialism by joining the MCP, defecting to UMNO to continue political activities, or retiring from political activities. The leaders of AWAS and Ikatan Pembela Tanah Ayer Malaya (PETA), who were

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[58]PIR no. 6 of 1950, TNA, CO 537/6086, pp. 3–4.
[59]C.H.E. Det, New thoughts on nationality, *Straits Times*, 9 April 1950, p. 8.
[60]UMNO, 1949, TNA, FCO 141/15457.
[61]Political Report no. 3 for January 1949, TNA, CO 537/4742.
[62]Singapore: PMR of Security Intelligence, later Singapore Police Intelligence Journals (Political and Security), 1952–1955, TNA, FCO 141/15952/1.

Shamsiah Fakeh and Wahi Anuar respectively, chose the first option. This caused a split in the Malay left and many organisations, including BATAS, followed suit. Shamsiah Fakeh and Wahi Anuar wrote a manifesto explicitly condemning the British-UMNO alliance's role during the Emergency and MNP inaction, which they argue was akin to complicity. The diminishing MNP influence was exacerbated by mass defections of the 'transient left' that joined UMNO and who often had to denounce the Malay left movements to further their political careers (Abu Talib 2008: 26).

Many of the sources written about the Malay left, after concerted effort to dismantle it, came from those that benefited its institutional marginalisation which was, to a large extent, enabled by the Emergency. Strict UMNO party discipline often meant a need for its members to display their loyalty by diminishing their roles in the Malay left movement and discrediting the MNP as a contributor to Malay nationalism. A few months before the MNP was disbanded, Daud bin Ismail, a former member of API, denounced the MNP. Through letters jointly written with other former MNP members to Taha Kalu, the then acting president of the MNP, he stated he only did it to join the Padang Rengas branch of UMNO but still continued asking advice from Kalu on whether joining UMNO was 'advisable' and who to vote for in a general election.[63] In her biography, Aishah Ghani, founder of UMNO's women wing denounced the MNP as communist, and as something the Malays could not accept (Ting 2013: 161). The Malay newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, though, was sitting on the fence between UMNO and MNP but wholly aligned itself with UMNO after the banning of the MNP (Syed Husin Ali 2018: 101–102). High profile individuals such as the former president of GERAM, Aziz Ishak (1977: 10), had joined Tunku Abdul Rahman's cabinet. British officials would often taunt Aziz Ishak as an anti-colonial colonial collaborator. Mustapha Hussain (2004: 371–377) was one vote away from becoming president of UMNO in its 1951 presidential election. While this shows the extent to which the transient left had joined UMNO, it is also significant to mention that the loss was cited to have occurred due to British intervention in monitoring and limiting his movement as well as his rival Tunku Abdul Rahman's status as a prince. From this it is evident that despite the dismantling of the MNP, the British were still actively intervening to ensure that the structures of Malay aristocracy would remain dominant.

While the British were anxious about the high number of defectors, UMNO welcomed it for bolstering its Malay credentials. In an article in *Majlis* in 1948, whose sentiments were echoed in the *Straits Times*,[64] UMNO denounced the arrest of former MNP members not for anti-colonial sentiment but because these members were leaving the MNP as they had found 'reason'. The *Straits Times* article had referred to the MNP support base as 'rustic and naïve peasants' and took a paternalistic tone towards these new members in that they should be 'more aware of what political actors were offering. This was a result of the extension of UMNO's party discipline policy to ensure that the new members would conform to the traditional power structures as well as UMNO's party structure. Former members of the Malay left who had not defected to UMNO, especially from the more radical groups, were expected to prove their loyalty to traditional power structures and the colonial state. For example, propaganda leaflets

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[63]PIR no. 6 of 1950, TNA, CO 537/6086.
[64]*Straits Times,* 22 July 1948, p. 10.

during the Emergency emphasised that 60 former members of API, PETA, and the MCP had 'asked forgiveness from the sultan' and 'performed prayers of atonement'.[65] These ritualistic acts were symbolic of the 'folly' of the anti-colonial movements as they publicly subordinated themselves to the hierarchical structures that these organisations intended to resist. Besides personal accounts from biographies of notable figures in the Malay left, sources on the Malay left are imbued by these discursive power structures successfully constructed by the British-UMNO collaboration, from government documents to newspapers (Aljunied 2015: 4–12). Therefore, it is difficult to measure the real impact of the Malay left. While many of the leaders of the Malay left remained active in politics, rarely did they recapture the support of the Malay masses (Harper 1999: 333–339). Thousands of voices were thus relegated to subalternity following the diminished importance of this movement.

Conclusion

Studies on the British empire have thus far captured how discourse was used to maintain and organise control of its colonies. Still, they rarely express the internalisation of the discourses by the colonised and how they reproduce the discursive structures. UMNO was just as responsible, if not more so, in the epistemic violence against the Malay left that severely dismantled it for decades to come. On the British side, this was ideal as they had intended for a friendlier, arguably neo-colonial, post-colonial Malaya, which would not have been possible under the anti-colonial Malay left. Meanwhile, UMNO wanted to maintain the traditional structures of the aristocracy which oppressed the masses of the Malay left and were therefore opposed. The relationship between the British and the Malay aristocracy that consolidated these structures before the Japanese Occupation thus continued with the British-UMNO alliance that sought to marginalise opponents of this structure, especially the Malay left. Though direct violence was an essential tool in doing this, epistemic violence was a precursor as well as what consolidated the violence through a particularly racialised lens.

During the mid-1940s, the British had independently categorised the Malay as a non-political race needing guidance to justify re-colonisation. However, this policy backfired as a unified Malay movement resisted their efforts in creating the Malayan Union. Thus, the British had to acknowledge that they required some form of Malay collaboration to maintain the colonial state they chose. Given a choice between UMNO, which wanted to maintain traditional structures the British were familiar with, and the Malay left, that wanted to disrupt the colonial state, the British chose to work with UMNO for a concerted attack on the Malay left. Thus, previous 'non-political Malay' discourses carried over as both the colonial state and UMNO characterised the Malay left as 'dumb masses' to delegitimise the movement. Such an approach led them to externalise the Malay left as 'influenced' due to their need to control the image of the Malay and thus the Malay population as a whole.

Direct violence in the form of the Malayan Emergency followed the epistemic construction of the Malay as a corrective mechanism to create a normative order. Thus, those that did not conform to the British-UMNO construction of the Malay were

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[65]ANM, 1957/0473801W.

targeted and construed as threats to Malaya. The British gave a platform to UMNO, which it could use, especially after creating the Federation of Malaya to consolidate its control over the Malay population. This strategy meant that the British-UMNO alliance could institutionalise their epistemic violence, especially the externalisation of the threat of the Malay left, in which they emphasised and consolidated their 'foreign' origins from the Japanese, Indonesians, Chinese and even Russians.

The banning of the MNP, the last bastion of the Malay left, was the nail in the coffin, but that was not the end of the epistemic violence. To counter the material conditions that created the Malay left, UMNO, with the assistance of British government institutions, co-opted many of the policies of the Malay left to attract the mass base movement as well as counter criticisms that it was a wholly elite political entity. Thus, though policies such as economic development and inclusion of women were adopted, they were only accepted if they did not disrupt the traditional structures. This policy was followed by diminishing the Malay left's importance as it no longer had the platform to defend itself. UMNO was now able to present itself as the only and 'true' Malay movement that Onn thought it had been since its inception. UMNO's difficulty in gaining the trust of Malays, especially the non-elite Malays, was all ignored in favour of a nationalistic narrative of UMNO's construction of a nation-state.

The British-UMNO alliance was thus essential in the epistemic violence against the Malay left. With its modern colonial institutions, the British were able to materially and epistemically restrict the Malay population to conform to the image that was in line with UMNO. UMNO constructed an orientalist image of the Malay that did not disrupt the colonial state but would be a continuation of it in post-colonial Malaya. The collaboration between the two was essential in curbing the Malay left and any political action from the mass movements during this period and the decades after it. It is challenging to know the extent of these movements, especially the anti-colonial mass movements from the Malay left. Epistemic violence has resulted in silencing their voices. Therefore, those that did not conform to the image of the Malays constructed by the UMNO-British alliance were relegated to subalternity and erased from history.

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Disclosure statement

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