

Epistemological Checkpoint: Reading Fiction as a Translation of History¹

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The Malayan Emergency, a war between the British colonial government and the communists, is cited as a rare model of success in the 2007 *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* published by the United States Army and Marine Corps (Dixon). During the Emergency, which lasted from 1948 to 1960, the colonial government embarked on a large-scale forced resettlement program that displaced up to half a million rural dwellers, 85 percent of whom were ethnic Chinese, from the jungle periphery into heavily patrolled camps (Ramakrishna 126). Masterminded by the British General Sir Harold Briggs, the resettlement plan was designed to sever the contact between the guerrilla troops hiding in the interior jungles and their civilian support network, the *Min Yuen* or People's Movement, on which the former relied for intelligence and food supplies. In addition, the British implemented a national registration system, issuing identity cards to anyone above the age of 12, to regulate civilian movement and weed out communists; food-restricted areas were also designated to curb civilians from smuggling food to the communists. Although initially beset with setbacks, the counter-insurgency eventually forced the communists' retreat and facilitated the 1957 transition of power to a postcolonial government, helmed by the conservative National Alliance (*Barisan Nasional*) sympathetic to British economic interests. Described by the British High Commissioner, Sir Gerald Templer, as an effort at winning "hearts and minds," the Emergency measures were effectively presented as a primarily political activity that appealed to the people's emotions and reason, and required minimal military force to win the people's loyalty to the government (qtd in Dixon 7). The "hearts and minds" approach has since been recognized as the distinctive feature of British counter-insurgency and informed recent U.S. military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan (ibid).

Han Suyin's novel, *...And the Rain My Drink*, offers a perspective of the Emergency that tempers its narrative of success.² Depicting the hardships experienced by the ethnic Chinese as a result of colonial counter-insurgency measures, the novel has been cited in historical and anthropological studies offering a more critical view of the Emergency's success.³ As the following examples suggest, such citations of the novel express a desire to legitimize the text as historical truth despite its fictional

form. In their history of decolonization movements in Southeast Asia, Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper quote a description of an overcrowded camp and its sickly residents from Han's novel to illustrate the "worst effects of resettlement" seldom mentioned in analyses of the "hearts and minds" approach (526). Similarly, Judith Strauch's ethnography of Chinese village politics in Malaysia describes the novel as "a more accurate assessment of the Chinese perspective of the period than most other more academic accounts" (64). Leon Comber's historical account of the Malayan Special Branch, the intelligence agency established during the Emergency, offers assurance of the novel's historical authenticity by explaining the circumstances of its writing. Comber, who was married to Han at the time, writes, "Han Suyin (Mrs. Elizabeth Comber) was a doctor in the Casualty Department of the Johore General Hospital in the early 1950s, and had first-hand knowledge of conditions in some of the Johore detention camps and resettlement villages at the time through her husband, the author, who was a Special Branch officer in Johore" (ibid).⁴

These invocations of the novel as testimony raise the question regarding the historical truth claim that may be made by the novel. Indeed, the controversy surrounding the novel's release in 1956 by New York and London publishers underscores the role of representations, literary or otherwise, in managing public perceptions of the then ongoing war. The novel's critical depiction of the counter-insurgency so concerned Sir Templer that he arranged for a London newspaper correspondent to be sent to the colony "to provide a more favorable account of the situation" (Comber 239 fn. 27). More recently, the 2012 revelation that thousands of incriminating government records concerning the Malayan Emergency and counter-insurgencies elsewhere were destroyed at the end of empire further underscores the urgency of considering what it means to use literary texts as counterfactual evidence to dominant historical narratives (Owen).

One is tempted to read the novel as a *roman à clef* given that Han's autobiographical writings and drafts of an unpublished sequel to *...And the Rain My Drink* offer suggestive evidence that the characters in her fictional work on Malaya are inspired by, if not altogether based on actual persons. In the 1956 U.S. edition of the novel, the preface playfully blurs the distinction between history and fiction: "This book is fiction. Any resemblance of the characters to anyone alive or dead is pure coincidence. Exception is made for the author, who insists on occasionally appearing in the chapters." The exception clause, signaling the author's intrusion into fictional space, might be read as a testament to the historical authenticity of the events in the novel—a point I further discuss later in this essay. One might further presume that the otherwise standard all persons fictitious disclaimer was intended as a safeguard against lawsuits from persons bearing likenesses to characters in the novel—a reading that the author's personal correspondence with her publishers in London appear to confirm.

However, the novel's oscillation between an autobiographical first-person voice and the free indirect discourse of an omniscient narrator calls for a reading of fiction as more than a savvy guise of historical fact for legal purposes. The first-person narrative voice belongs to a Dr. Han Suyin, a Eurasian doctor who has recently arrived in Malaya to work at a hospital.⁵ While this autobiographical voice anchors its narrative account in historical reality, the omniscient point of view generates an effect of historical objectivity and narrative reliability that the subjective perspective of a first-person narrator cannot offer. Dr. Han's firsthand account of historical events is bound by her limited perspective; however, the omniscient narrator is able to convey the thoughts and feelings of a wide range of characters, including the camp residents, communist fighters, British officers, the local police and the colonial elite. In so doing, the latter constructs a complex sense of reality, providing a big picture view of the Emergency, in which to situate Dr. Han's account. Shifting back and forth between these two modes of narration, the novel deploys the first-person voice to validate the historicity of events depicted on the page even as it uses the literary device of an omniscient narrator to produce the effect of historical reality. The incorporation of fictionalized diary excerpts written by a "communist terrorist," framed as an archival source obtained from colonial raids, as part of the narrative further contributes to the effect of historicity.

Hayden White proposes that narrative can be understood as a "solution" to "the problem of how to translate knowing into telling" (1). His point—that it is the formal properties of narrative that generate historical meaning—highlights the significance of form in producing historiography. ...*And the Rain My Drink* appears to affirm White's argument given that it underscores the extent to which the realist novel's heteroglossic capacity is especially well suited for the production of historical discourse. Whereas its first-person narrative establishes the novel's referentiality to actual events, the multiple voices represented in the text express a multi-layered historical reality. However, in the novel, translation does not merely operate as a metaphor, as used by White, for the transcription of history into a literary form. Translation is quite literally the means for telling a story set in a multilingual society to an Anglophone reader. This is especially apparent in the role of translator often assumed by the first-person narrator, primarily to convey dialogue between characters speaking in an admixture of Chinese and Malay. Furthermore, scenes of translation—or, more precisely, mistranslation—between the camp residents, surrendered enemy personnel and colonial police force abound in the novel, emphasizing the centrality of translation in the colonial government's intelligence gathering operations. In essence, the novel's depiction of (mis)translation is mediated through the narrator's acts of translation, through whom the novel's narrative is made possible.

The novel's presentation of translation as both its subject and mode of representation delineates what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as the two distinct yet intertwined senses of representation—"representation

as in ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy” and “representation as in ‘speaking for,’ as in politics”—respectively at work in knowledge production (28). In other words, the novel is a translation of history in the sense that it constitutes a literary representation of historical events and, in doing so, comes to stand in and speak as if it were history. Discerning the intractable dynamics of these two senses of representation, Spivak argues, is a means of illuminating the epistemic violence—the foreclosure of alternative modes of knowing and being—that is inflicted through the process of subject formation. Thus, I argue, a careful examination of how translation elucidates these two senses of representation in ...*And the Rain My Drink* illuminates the workings of Chinese subject formation during the Emergency period, which constitutes a form of epistemic violence that proves necessary for the safeguarding of British economic interests in the long term amidst the waning of Empire.

The Re-Ordering of Empire

In the years leading up to the Malayan Emergency, the British sought to consolidate its separate administrative units on the Malayan peninsula, which had consisted of separate units of protectorates and crown colonies governed by indirect and direct rule respectively, into a federalized entity called the Malayan Union. The restructuring was undertaken to redress the weaknesses of decentralized government exposed in the defeat of the British by the Japanese, who occupied Malaya from 1941 to 1945. The formation of the new federal entity entailed fashioning a Malayan national identity under which to unify the multiple ethno-linguistic groups residing on the peninsula. Moreover, it effectively constituted a marked shift from the previous divide-and-rule policy, which recognized the sovereignty of the Malay rulers over their respective territories, if only in name, and identified the Malays as “natives,” who were entitled to special privileges, as opposed to the “alien” racial groups, which primarily consisted of the Chinese and Indians.

Part of a broader re-ordering of Empire, the federalization of Malaya was also an effort to secure the future loyalty of Britain’s colonies under the aegis of the Commonwealth. The Malayan Union extended equal citizenship rights to all races and was intended in part to reward the Chinese, who primarily made up the communist-led guerrilla force, then known as the Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army, that fought the Japanese Occupation. However, the Malayan Union was vehemently opposed by the Malays, who viewed its liberal citizenship plan as an affront to Malay sovereignty and an assault on native rights guaranteed under the divide-and-rule policy. The extension of citizenship to non-Malays, the Malays argued, constituted a betrayal of the British colonial mandate of protecting the interests of the Malays against the “alien” races, in particular, the Chinese. The proposed Union sparked the political

mobilization of Malays against the British throughout the peninsula on an unprecedented scale. In response, the British abandoned their Malayan Union plan and, in consultation with the Malay rulers, implemented the Federation of Malaya, a centralized administration that continued to recognize the “special position” of the Malays and that imposed greater restrictions on citizenship rights for non-Malays. Left out of the negotiations on the new federation, non-Malay groups joined forces with leftist organizations. Among them, the Communist Party of Malaya was a potent force in mobilizing plantation and mine workers to stage industrial action, and agitating for national independence.

The challenges that beset the restructuring of the colonial administration in Malaya not only foreboded the end of Empire. It made apparent the ideological contradictions and failings of colonial racial discourse. On one hand, the British were forced to concede to the demands of the Malays, which were the direct outcome of decades of British paternalism and divide-and-rule policy, or risk a revolt among its primary supporter base. Yet, in doing so, the British alienated the non-Malays and effectively drove them toward supporting the cause of the leftist anti-colonial movement. The problem at hand for the British was how to integrate non-Malays into Malaya, historically posited as the land of the Malays to justify the distinction between native and alien races, without facing up to the shortcomings of its own divide-and-rule policy.

Literary representations of British Malaya of this period are a generative site for examining colonial racial discourse. As Adeline Koh argues, British colonial fiction written by authors such as Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, and Anthony Burgess shaped the colonial racial imagination by popularizing tropes of the lazy, beautiful Malay and the inscrutable, menacing Chinese. These racial tropes, Koh argues, aided in justifying British paternalism over the lazy Malays, who were in need of protection from the unscrupulous Chinese, while obscuring the economic motivations of Empire. ...*And the Rain My Drink* is distinct from its predecessors in this literary genealogy in that it offers a critique of colonial racial discourse. In particular, it highlights the manner in which the racialized trope of the Chinese as the communist menace, revitalized during the Emergency, was mobilized to resolve the predicament that the British faced in integrating the Chinese into the federation.

The novel lends itself to a comparison of its contemporary, Burgess's *The Malayan Trilogy*, which was based on the author's own experiences serving as colonial education officer in Malaya during the 1950s.⁶ But whereas Burgess's novels offer a view of Malaya from within the colonial ranks, ...*And the Rain My Drink* offers a narrative perspective of Dr. Han, who presents herself as an outsider with insider access. As a doctor in the colonial medical services, Dr. Han is able to move easily between the rarefied circles of the elite and the ordinary ranks of colonial society. In particular, her ability to speak standard Chinese grants her an affinity with the ex-guerrillas she encounters as her patients, for whom the language is

the *lingua franca* of the distinct Chinese ethno-linguistic groups in the jungle (34).

Thus, in her position as narrator, Dr. Han also serves as a translator who makes otherwise inaccessible and non-establishment viewpoints of the Emergency comprehensible to her Anglophone reader. Given that the author herself was an insider and prolific writer of China's political scene, one might be tempted to read narrator-translator's linguistic affinity with the Chinese in Malaya as signaling the novel's presentation of an "authentic Chinese" view of the Emergency. Yet, what the novel makes clear is how colonial racial discourse constructs "the Chinese" as a unified, homogenized identity to reinforce the Emergency's binary logic of war. Indeed, the novel's sweeping cast of characters identified as Chinese—including members of the wealthy elite class; colonial police officers; guerrillas in the jungle, detained and surrendered; and camp residents—suggest that there is no unified "Chinese" perspective of the Emergency presented in the novel, and that to assume its existence as such is to obscure the myriad experiences and perspectives of those to whom the term, "Chinese," refers.

What the narrator-translator makes clear, however, is the manner in which Orientalist discourse produces "the Chinese" as a distinct subject, which shapes the Emergency's binary logic of war. As if anticipating an audience demand for the exotic East, the novel begins with an image of lustrous peacocks strutting about in the Sultan's Zoo, where people flock to see its current star attraction of three tiger cubs, the tiger an emblem of Malaya. A site for the exhibition and containment of exotic species, the zoo serves as a trope of Orientalist discourse at the same time that it prefigures the resettlement and detention camps housing rural Chinese populations and captured guerrillas. The containment of the "red threat" as a means of integrating the Chinese into the emergent postcolonial nation is thus presented as underwritten by colonial racial discourse.

The novel's persistent re-inscription of the colonial metonym of the jungle as communist menace clearly positions the narrator-translator as offering an anti-establishment perspective of the Malayan Emergency. This is evident in the novel's title, which derives from a revolutionary song sung by the guerrillas. Its opening line, "I will go to the forest for justice..." associates the jungle with the idea of anti-colonial resistance, in contrast to the sense of wildness that needs to be tamed, as invoked by the British. Moreover, the jungle is re-coded not to signify communism, but capitalism. This point is made by Intellectual Orchid, nicknamed The Abacus for her business acumen, a daughter of the business tycoon, Quo Boon. She reflects on her brother, Sen, who has run away to join the national liberation movement:

He had chosen the forest for justice, the darkness beneath the trees, the horror and the blood spilling... Was it worth it, all this violence, the nightmare endured for a dream to come? He sang: "The wind for my garment, the rain for my drink." What had the long years in the jungle done to his soul? (212)

Although lamenting her brother's idealism as folly, Intellectual Orchid recognizes that her own support of the colonial government was no less dehumanizing:

But then what did that other jungle, the ravenous, stupid, loud brash jungle of money-making, what did that do to one's soul? "Perhaps I have no soul," thought Intellectual Orchid. "In this jungle of money I am a machine, counting money, The Abacus clicking as the wheels roll and the rubber goes forth from the factories and estates of the House of Quo." (212)

Sen's political convictions put him in conflict with his father, Quo Boon, whose business empire earns him some influence with the British. Viewing the tycoon as a representative of his ethnic community's interests at large, the British General entreats Quo Boon to persuade the Chinese to pledge loyalty to the government instead of the guerrillas. Quo Boon remarks: "I suppose I am considered loyal because I have made terms with the setup as it is now, as I have made money out of it. I can read the wind, see the way the leaves blow, and I keep out of the rain. I do not like bloodshed. I build" (237). That his own son has turned his back on the family wealth to join the guerrillas drives home the point that Quo Boon's circumstances and political views are hardly representative of "the Chinese" community as a whole. Although his wealth puts him at odds with the communists, Quo Boon nonetheless offers an alternative perspective of the Emergency than that presented by the government. In his view, the Emergency is a war between competing visions of the future of the postcolonial nation and the position of the Chinese within it. Whereas his son's actions are motivated by the desire to dismantle the inequitable colonial economic and political structures in pursuit of justice for all, Quo Boon, who sees these ideals as unattainable, argues instead for the incorporation of the Chinese into the nascent postcolonial nation on the basis of their contribution to its economic development.

Quo Boon's views are an extension of the colonial racial stereotype of the Chinese as industrious workers without whom the colony would have remained backwards and yet from whom the supposedly idle Malays needed protection. His is one example in the novel of how colonial racial discourse is appropriated by those on whom it is imposed to advance their own interests amidst a time of political upheaval. Indeed, the novel situates the Emergency in Malaya as part of the international wave of Third World nationalism and foregrounds the ways in which colonial racial discourse provides a frame for making sense of a rapidly changing world. Specifically, the novel demonstrates how the British strategy of framing the communist insurgency as driven by communal Chinese interests serves, paradoxically, as a means of integrating the ethnic Chinese into the Federation of Malaya. While members of the Communist Party of Malaya primarily consisted of Chinese, the party also explicitly presented its political agenda as driven by workers' rights and actively recruited non-Chinese supporters to join its cause. By portraying the red threat as a Chinese menace, the British not only obscured the anti-colonial

political economic critique advanced by the Left. In presenting the Emergency measures as a means of containing the red threat, the British effectively fashioned the colonial government as facilitating the rehabilitation of the bad, i.e. communist, Chinese and the integration of the reformed Chinese into the nascent multi-racial postcolonial nation. This enables the maintenance of the colonial fiction that peaceful co-existence among the races could not have happened without the help of the British even as it allows the British to wash its hands of any subsequent inter-ethnic conflict that would arise.

To recall the novel's opening image of the Sultan's Zoo, the entrapped tiger cubs not only symbolize the Emergency strategies of communist containment in the form of resettlement camps. The number of tigers also allude to the three major racial groups that make up Malaya, the Malays, Chinese, and Indians—what Dr. Han describes as the “three ingredient races,” “three sweeping generalizations out of which it has been planned to forge a nation, to create a country called Malaya, a single people to be called Malaysans...” (31). Put another way, long after the dismantling of the camps' fences, the colonial racial discourse which undergirded their existence would continue to endure into the postcolonial national imagination, shaping how the nation defined and managed difference in the long run. The assimilation of colonial racial tropes into the postcolonial national narrative is foreshadowed in an exchange between Dr. Han and her colleague at the hospital. Feeling rundown by the inefficiencies of colonial bureaucracy after her first week at the hospital, Dr. Han finds herself being written into the Orientalist script of expatriate suffering the corruptive effects of the colonial outpost: “In one week, I had become a witch's cauldron of seething irritation, boiling resentment, and hissing rage. Betchine assured me, unsoothingly, that it was Malaya” (21). Betchine, a British-educated sari-clad “Euro-Indian” doctor is described as embodying the image of the “Woman of Modern Asia”; she represents the voice of the emerging British-educated Third-World elite, the class that would assume leadership of the future postcolonial nation following the departure of the British (21). That she serves as the mouthpiece of Orientalist discourse suggests that colonial racial tropes would be folded into the postcolonial national narrative.

In contrast, Dr. Han presents herself as offering a critical perspective of the situation in Malaya rather than one that simply rehearses the Orientalist tropes of Malaya that her colleague unquestioningly adopts. Questioning her initial impressions and Betchine's pat explanation for the hospital chaos, Dr. Han comes across as a reliable narrator who does not unthinkingly toe the line offered by the colonial government, but is able to offer a critical, independent perspective of the situation in Malaya. Making her night rounds, Dr. Han further ruminates on Betchine's words as she walks down “one long night-filled corridor, the treading of an endless, shallow dark ravine”:

Perhaps it is Malaya, as Betchine says. Everything seems to me out of gear, awry, disproportioned, tedious and grotesque, and therefore unreal. I must not try to make a meaning and a shape out of this. Like my footsteps in this corridor, at the moment there is no resonance to any event, no significance to any gesture, no illumination to any explanation. There is only repetitious exuberance, the raw undiluted essence of growth, a violence in all that I apprehend, in which I must not instill significance, for at the moment it dispenses none. This is Malaya. And there is no pattern as yet. Only confusion. (29)

By recasting her colleague's ontological statement ("...it is Malaya") into an epistemological one ("Everything seems to me..."), the narrator reveals the ontic fallacy—the mistaking of a phenomenal experience for an empirical object—in Betchine's statement. Whereas Betchine's pronouncement presumes an unmediated relation between the perceiving subject and the object of perception, Dr. Han's reflexive statement foregrounds the colonial lens through which the perception of the East as inscrutable—"out of gear, awry, disproportioned, tedious and grotesque"—is derived.

Invoking images of wilderness ("endless shallow dark ravine"; "the raw undiluted essence of growth") in her description of the hospital, Dr. Han appropriates the jungle, a colonial metonym of the communist threat, to describe the state of confusion in the hospital. Poorly built and mismanaged, the hospital is a synecdoche of the dysfunctional state of the Emergency. Rather than accept the state of disarray as a natural condition of Malaya—an assumption that is used to justify the paternalistic attitudes of both the colonial *and* postcolonial elite—Dr. Han suggests that the "confusion" in fact stems from the government's failure to recognize and meet the challenges that arise from governing a linguistically fragmented and ethnically diverse population. Specifically, as the passage below indicates, translation failure is cited as the root cause of the confusion:

From ward to ward, up and down the stone stairs, the sinusoid of sound pursues me. Words, words, words, all adding up to this soft cacophony, this unending flat unquietness. Words in all dialects and languages which are spoken in Malaya. Is not so much of what happens in this country a reciprocal confusion, rooted in ignorance of each other's language and customs, producing blindness, intolerant inhumanity? I begin to feel, uneasily, that Malayan episodes are a comedy of errors due to this division between the ruler and the ruled; not one in a hundred of the rulers can boast to speak well the language of the ruled. A few speak it so badly, and on such a low scale, that thereby only another source of error is created.

... In each ward the nurses must act as *translators* as well as nurses, and where they fail, an orderly, or an amah, must be found to interpret with all the inaccuracy and the florid inventiveness of the illiterate Asian. Among the doctors few can speak to all patients, for in Malaya a university education, by its very insistence upon excellence in English, hampers a doctor from acquiring the vernacular languages of this country. And thus at night, when the patients confide in the darkness and in their own tongue what they have withheld from physician and nurse, *I begin to understand the terror, the confusion, the essential need to prevaricate of those who are always at someone else's mercy, because they cannot communicate with those who decide their fate, except through an interpreter.*

In the process, how many deviations, changes, siftings, warpings, and twistings; how many opportunities for blackmail and corruption, before, transformed,

sometimes unrecognizable, the stories of the poor who do not speak English reach their rulers, who are handpicked, among their own peoples, on the basis of their knowledge of English.

Pacing the corridors, night dark, of the hospital, I heard the poor talk, Malays, Indians, Chinese, and asked myself whether out of this babel reassembled, a pattern would emerge. (31-32; emphasis added)

As the passage above suggests, the “confusion” that arises from translation failure is not simply the communication breakdown that is likely to occur when two parties rely on an interpreter to exchange information. Rather, the failed communication is an indication of the fact that translation is akin to the act of political representation in the sense that the translator speaks on behalf of one party in the same way that a political representative speaks for her constituencies. Yet, because translation is categorically defined as a mode of re-presentation or repetition, that is, as the act of speaking *of* rather than speaking *for*, its latter political function is often obscured. Thus, the confusion that derives from translation failure effectively functions as an obfuscation of the workings of power. In the subsequent sections, I demonstrate how the novel’s figure of the translator as traitor is a central means of tracing the “pattern” “out of this babel,” that is, of illuminating the ways in which colonial racial discourse is re-articulated and assimilated into the postcolonial national narrative.

War and Translation

From the onset of the Emergency, the colonial government recognized translation as crucial to Emergency operations, particularly for intelligence gathering and propaganda purposes. The failure of intelligence operations in British Malaya to anticipate the communist taking up of arms, Comber notes, was attributed in part to “the acute shortage of office staff and translators,” which resulted in “a considerable backlog of CPM documents in Chinese awaiting translation” (42). Knowledge of Chinese was an especially urgent need, as underscored by efforts to recruit British and local Chinese personnel fluent in the language to join the Special Branch. The production of government and communist propaganda materials in the four main languages spoken in Malaya—Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English—emphasized that operating in and across multiple languages was a key weapon in winning the hearts and minds of a diverse ethno-linguistic population.

The Emergency historian, Kumar Ramakrishna, argues that the hearts and minds campaign was successful not so much because it changed the political beliefs of the people, but because it met their basic needs. The disastrous conditions of the camps in the early years of the resettlement plan had deepened the mistrust of government among the rural, ethnic Chinese. Thus, Ramakrishna argues, it was less the use of “propaganda in words”—that is, mass media such as print, radio and film to disseminate anti-communist rhetoric—than the use of “propaganda in deed”—the

implementation of policies and social services to improve the resettled populations' quality of life in the Emergency's subsequent years, rectifying its earlier missteps—that secured the people's confidence in the government's ability to protect their well-being. Interestingly, however, in presenting Karl von Clausewitz's insights on war as the theoretical grounds for the counter-insurgency's hearts and minds campaign, Ramakrishna offers translation as a metaphor to describe its operations. He paraphrases Clausewitz's argument as follows:

...war in real life is waged when the basic passions of the People are harnessed by government and *translated* into policies as well as military strategies which the Army pursues. It follows that the People are the well-spring—in not only the physical but also the moral sense—of the capacity of the Government and the Army to wage war. To Clausewitz, therefore, the People represents the ultimate 'centre of gravity'—the 'hub of all power and movement on which everything depends'—of a country at war. (11; emphasis added)

Ramakrishna's recognition of "propaganda in deed" importantly foregrounds the material aspects of the war otherwise obscured by the ideological emphasis on the phrase, "winning hearts and minds." However, by treating "propaganda in words" primarily as an ideological weapon, his distinction between words and deeds overlooks the materiality of language and representation, and their effects on bodies and subjects.

In contrast to Ramakrishna's invocation of translation as a metaphor to describe Emergency operations, ...*And the Rain My Drink*'s attention to translation as a material practice suggests that the ideological and material dimensions of war cannot be considered separately. Alluding to the rocky start of the resettlement plan mentioned by Ramakrishna, the novel describes the unsanitary and uninhabitable conditions of Todak Resettlement Camp, whose residents are at the mercy of corrupt local police officers and contractors in charge of security and building huts, respectively. While the residents' complaints are not heard, the brutal murder of Tommy Uxbridge, an inept and racist resettlement officer in charge of overseeing the camp, forces the authorities to acknowledge the plan's failings, which they address through the adoption of a hearts-and-minds campaign. At the same time, the Emergency's Operation Starvation efforts, which entailed the imposition of food rations, spot checks and the designation of food-restricted areas to curb civilians from smuggling food to the communists, lead to the surrender of guerrillas, who supplied information to the police in exchange for cash and a reduction of their sentences.

Ah Mei is one such informer. Caught in a police ambush of a jungle hideout, Ah Mei earns her freedom by cooperating with the police and eventually comes to work as a servant in Dr. Han's household. Her role as an informer requires her to translate the information she gathers from her meetings with suspects, conducted in Chinese, into English-written police reports. She is contrasted with the historical figure of Lee Meng, a

Captured Enemy Personnel who—like Ah Mei—is accused of carrying a grenade, an offense punishable by death. The reversal of her acquittal—a verdict reached at an earlier trial presided by Chinese and Indian judges—by two British judges in a subsequent appeal sparked an international controversy that turned her court case into an example of colonial racial injustice. Moreover, Lee Meng’s refusal to betray her comrades and her denouncement of ex-guerrillas as “running dogs” earns her a reputation of courage (185–6). Compared to Lee Meng, Ah Mei is cast as a traitor, her work of translation in her role as informer exemplifying the classic aphorism, *traduttore, traditore*.⁷

The notion of the translator as traitor registers the anxiety of betrayal that beleaguers translation, on which the colonial government relies for intelligence-gathering purposes. Embodied in the character of Ah Mei, the translator as traitor comes to figure as racial difference, specifically, as a Chinese subject whose loyalty is always subject to question. While preparing a report, Ah Mei invites Dr. Han to check her work for mistakes. Dr. Han finds no errors, but discovers, in a subsequent conversation with Ah Mei, that the latter has been supplying false information to the police. In particular, Ah Mei rues the fate of a Chinese girl accused of smuggling food when she was merely observing the Ching Ming festival of bringing offerings to her ancestral graves. The cause of error, Ah Mei laments, is not due to miscommunication, but racial discrimination: ““But of course the *mata-matas* [police] are Malay, the troops are British, and they punish us, the Chinese. There are many injustices today, doctor”” (92). Urged by Dr. Han to point out the police’s mistake, Ah Mei points to her own precarious position: ““they [the police] would not think I write good reports, if I cannot find something wrong”” (92). Used for Emergency intelligence gathering purposes, translation is thus always beset by the inevitability of betrayal. Moreover, the figure of the translator as traitor constitutes an inscription of racial difference, in particular, of being Chinese. As the case of the girl observing Ching Ming suggests, to be Chinese is to arouse suspicion in the eyes of the state. Ah Mei’s circumstances further suggests that this suspicion can never be fully allayed given that betrayal is necessary to prove her loyalty to the state, but at the same time always renders it subject to question.

The experiences of the residents of the Todak Resettlement Camp, who “stand between fire and water, between the Police, and the People Inside,” most starkly dramatize the epistemic violence inflicted by the racializing effects of the Emergency’s logic of translation (42). While working at the rubber plantations, Meng, a camp resident, is murdered by his fellow residents who are members of the People Movement for supplying information to the police for a cash reward, an attempt that goes awry due to a series of mistranslations. His dead body is put on display for the other residents to see, the murderer announces, as a warning against would-be informers. Aware of their precarious situation, Neo and his family—as do many others in the camp—assume a veil of ignorance to protect themselves from either warring sides. Thus, when he and his wife,

Neo Saw, hear Meng's blood-curdling scream pierce the air, the latter commands her children: "Hush... We have not heard. We never listen. We do not know" (41). When he is put on the court stand, Neo, who was present to hear the murderer's warning, maintains his ignorance and remains silent: "He did not know. He could not say... [He]...could not bring himself to betray a neighbor, and thus betrayed himself" (174). As was noted earlier, Hayden White suggests that narrative is a means of translating knowing into telling. Yet, Neo is unable to narrate not because he does not know, but because the binary frame of the Cold War compels his silence, which is rendered untranslatable. One is either a faithful member of the People's Movement or a traitor to the communists, a collaborator with or combatant against the state. His silence marking him as an enemy of the state, Neo, along with his Malayan-born son, is "deported" to China, "the unknown land...of his ancestors" (175).

The untranslatability of Neo's silence within the Emergency's frame of war compels an alternative conception of war and translation. Emily Apter's re-inscription of Clausewitz's notion of war is useful in this regard. Adapting Clausewitz's famous pronouncement, "war is a continuation of politics by other means," Apter writes that "...war is the continuation of extreme mistranslation or disagreement by other means. War *is*, in other words, a condition of nontranslatability or translation failure at its most violent peak" (16; emphasis original). Augmenting Apter's claim, *...And the Rain My Drink* suggests that if war is a "condition of nontranslatability" or "translation failure," then it is so because war is a reductive codification of knowledge—or of "the passions of the People"—into a Manichean frame of friend and enemy. Moreover, the novel suggests that the war's violence does not stem from the translation's infidelity to the original per se, but from its operating as if the condition of nontranslatability does not exist. That is, acts of translation operate as weapons of epistemic violence *not* in the sense that Ah Mei has failed to translate truthfully, but in that the binary frame of war necessitates that she not do so in order to survive.

Duplicity

My point then is that the novel's racialized figure of the translator as traitor is a means of foregrounding the manner in which the Chinese—historically cast by the British as an "alien" race as opposed to the Malays, who are viewed as native to the land—are rehabilitated and integrated into the emerging postcolonial nation. In other words, the novel's translator-traitor figure discloses the fact that colonial racial taxonomies in operation during the preceding years of British rule are assimilated as the epistemological frame or the technology of subjectification of the postcolonial nation. For this reason, I propose that the novel ought to be conceived as an *epistemological checkpoint* in the sense that its production

of the literary figure of the translator-traitor illuminates the process of racialization, the inscription of race on bodies, that is fundamental to the constitution of postcolonial national subject. If Neo's so-called deportation points to the significance of racial difference in delineating the emergent nation's borders, then the novel's depiction of the camp checkpoint demonstrates that racialization is the means through which the national subject is constituted.

My use of the checkpoint as metaphor derives from the novel's depiction of the camp checkpoint, a site where racial difference is articulated and performed. As camp residents exit the camp to work in the rubber plantations, they surrender their government-issued identity cards at the checkpoint to be collected upon their re-entry by curfew hours. Part of a registration program implemented by the government, identity cards are a means of rooting out and isolating guerrillas from the midst of camp residents. Passing through the checkpoint thus becomes a ritualized test of the Chinese subject's loyalty to the government. At the checkpoint, bodies are subject to inspection to curb smuggling, a process by which the ideological figure of the traitorous Chinese is ascribed to embodied beings. Women's bodies are deemed particularly amenable to smuggling contraband and are thus particularly subject to invasive searches. Neo checks his rage, feeling emasculated, as his wife, Neo Saw, is groped by the guards. Fong Kiap, who is pregnant, titters when a Malay guard places his hand on her abdomen to make sure that it is not a decoy, their wordless exchange, his grin and her "coy" chuckle, expressing the sexualized nature of procedural body inspections (39). Her flirtation with the guard enables her to smuggle through "a kati of pork between her thighs" (39). The pork marks Fong Kiap's racial difference in relation to the Malays, who are also Muslims. Her ability to pass through the checkpoint, which marks her loyalty to country, with her contraband intact signifies the articulation of racial difference as a means of integration into the emergent nation. However, the pork's manner of concealment on Fong Kiap's body, along with her flirtatious behavior, marks her as sexually promiscuous, that is, as unfaithful. Indeed, as a pregnant woman living alone in the camp, Fong Kiap earns a reputation among the colonial officers for being a loose woman, an image she maintains in order to protect her husband, a guerrilla in the jungle. The novel's attentiveness to the vulnerability of women's bodies to sexual violence at the checkpoint gestures toward the gendered, sexualized aspects of the translator-traitor figure and their significance in shaping institutional and affective structures of national belonging.

The translator as traitor, Lori Chamberlain persuasively argues, is essentially a feminized figure that is grounded in the prevailing marital trope of fidelity and betrayal. As an example, she offers the French adage, *les belles infidèles*, gendered as such because *traduction* is a feminine word, which submits that translation, like women, can be either beautiful or faithful, but not both. Chamberlain adds:

For *les belles infidèles*, fidelity is defined by an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father or author). However, the infamous ‘double standard’ operates here as it might have in traditional marriages: the ‘unfaithful’ wife/translation is publicly tried for crimes the husband/original is by law incapable of committing. This contract in short, makes it impossible for the original to be guilty of infidelity. Such an attitude betrays real anxiety about the problem of paternity and translation; it mimics the patrilineal kinship system where paternity—not maternity—legitimizes an offspring. (315)

Noted for her charm and beauty, Ah Mei exemplifies the truism not only in the fabrications in her reports. Following the police discovery that Ah Mei is also Small Cloud, the much sought after yet elusive courier for the People Inside, she betrays her lover, Sen, a leader of the communist regiment responsible for the attacks in the Todak area, in order to save herself.

The revelation of Ah Mei’s double identity comes as little surprise to Dr. Han, who, having observed her over a period of time, grows increasingly suspicious of her behavior. Trying to put a finger on what it is about Ah Mei that disturbs her, Dr. Han observes:

...I cannot fathom why Ah Mei switches herself from the third to the first person so often. I get the impression that she thinks of herself as two people...one in the jungle, when she says “she,” and one now, an “I”...I wonder whether she has really split herself into two, so that she can now betray where she once believed? (190).

Here, Ah Mei’s duplicity, necessary for survival, is recoded as a kind of double consciousness, a splitting of herself into two different subjects in order to survive the violence of war. This trope of doubling is also evident in Neo, when he is forced to meet with members of the People’s Movement at the rubber plantations when Meng is killed. Directing his eldest son to return to the camp with his siblings and mother while he remains behind, Neo’s speech shifts from first-person to third-: “‘Tell your mother to carry the pails without *me*,’ Neo instructs his son and then, speaking of himself as another person, ‘tell her *he* will be back in half an hour’” (41–42; emphasis added). As indicated by the pronoun shift in Neo’s speech, the act of doubling operates as a protective device, compartmentalizing knowledge so that what “he” knows, the “I” does not, shielding his family from the heightened danger signaled by the scream. When forced to view Ah Meng’s lifeless body, Neo’s mind is described as perceiving the scene: “There is knowledge that is not knowledge, not in words and yet inhabits the mind, informs it with facts and events. And although no one told the story, yet this is what Neo grew to know, without once acknowledging that he knew” (42).

Further proving her loyalty to the government, Ah Mei marries Tong, a Surrendered Enemy Personnel, after she is discovered to be pregnant with his child. The novel ends with the marriage of the couple, which is viewed by the British as a symbol of its victory over the hearts and minds of the people, the legitimization of her unborn child conceived out of wedlock analogous to Ah Mei’s rehabilitation from her communist

affiliations. Yet, Ah Mei's marriage marks her as the ultimate traitor—not just to her party, but to her past, her lover and herself. Ah Mei's abandonment of her lover in the jungle, Sen, who is described as one who would “never surrender,” thus constitutes a tale of tragic love in Malaya, described by Dr. Han as a place “where there is no space nor time, nor light nor air, nor any ground to grow the strange weed called love” (253). Within this narrative of tragic love, marriage thus signals, ironically, the absence of love, in its place a sense of loyalty haunted by betrayal.

The signification of marriage as securing a political allegiance underwritten by betrayal is also evident in Luke Davis's relationship with Maxine Gerrard. Deeply critical of colonial Emergency policies, Luke Davis, a British police officer, writes a report recommending that the transition to independence promised by the colonial government be expedited; he argues that the “passive non-cooperation” not just of the Chinese, but of all races in Malaya, signals less an allegiance to communism than a resentment of colonialism. Davis is dismissed by his superior as “a socialist, ... with his damn queer theories on freedom for Malaya” (137). The mention of queerness here alludes to an earlier reference to Somerset Maugham and his homosexual affair with a Malayan boy, a synecdoche of the sex scandals between British colonial officers and locals. Possessing a soft spot for the locals, Luke displays an anxiety about his colonial masculinity, which he represses by proposing marriage to Maxine Gerrard, an English colonial secretary:

With Maxine, he would no longer be able to see much of Lam Teck [his Chinese friend], only in secret, perhaps, feeling half guilty, telling Maxine that he was out working. He would never be sure that he was doing the right thing, here and now. Maxine would save him from all this. She was so sure. Her voice said so. (70)

The impending marriage of Luke and Maxine, in other words, is thus a trope for the repression of colonial racial anxiety, a function that the union of Ah Mei and Tong similarly perform. The latter also signals the impending end of Empire and the integration of the Chinese, historically cast as outsider, into what would soon be independent Malaya. The containment of the Chinese red menace, symbolized by Ah Mei and Tong's marriage, effectively legitimizes the independent nation as the offspring of Empire. However, as a result of the racialized counter-insurgency measures, the Chinese are integrated into the postcolonial nation as the racial Other; thus, the marriage further betrays the repression of the fact that postcolonial racial communalism is a legacy of colonial divide-and-rule policy and its re-articulation during the Emergency. Put another way, what Empire cannot acknowledge and seeks to disavow is its own duplicity in the treatment of the Chinese, whom the British depended on to fight the Japanese yet were subsequently politically disenfranchised. In contrast to the conscience-stricken Luke, who is unsure of whether the Emergency's counter-insurgency measures constitute a right or wrong, the British General, in seeking Quo Boon's co-operation with the government

to fight the communists, remains resolute in his refusal to acknowledge the Empire's shortcomings:

I know that your people have got grievances. The Chinese half of Malaya, your three millions, half the population of this land, have had a raw deal from us in many ways. But it's no good dragging up the past. We must get together to build the future. And that means, first and foremost, winning this jungle war. (237)

Yet, when Quo Boon demands an equal stake with the Malays in shaping the future of the nation, the General denies its possibility by blaming the Chinese and Malays for their respective selfish, communal interests. By presenting the British as benevolent peacemakers who have the best interests of all groups in Malaya at heart, the General effectively disavows the role of colonialism's divide-and-rule policy in stirring political dissensions along racial lines:

It is because we're here, Mr. Quo, that you aren't at each other's throats. If we were to leave, there'd be terrible bloodshed. Malay and Chinese would be massacring each other, just as Moslems and Hindoos in India. ... All this talk about giving a stake in the land, an equal place to Chinese culture... Our only hope is to have one nation, one country, one loyalty. ... (239)

Although the portrayal of Ah Mei as *la belle infidèle* seems at first to endorse the sexist metaphor, the novel ultimately exposes what Chamberlain calls the "double standard" inscribed in the marital trope of translation that "makes it impossible for the original to be guilty of infidelity." The novel does so by re-writing the marital trope of translation to expose the colonial racial anxiety that structures its logic of fidelity and betrayal. In so doing, the novel demonstrates that the Emergency's racialized counter-insurgency measures are symptomatic of Empire's inability to reckon with the social, material contradictions generated by colonial racial ideology. Thus, on the eve of its collapse and the emergence of postcolonial nation, Empire sought to obscure its own duplicity and the contradictions of its civilizing mission by figuring the Chinese as traitor, whose loyalty is perennially under suspicion.

Significantly, this critique of Empire is conveyed through the novel's duplicitous or double narrative consciousness, as signaled by its oscillation between first- and third-person narrator. Much in the same way that the double or split consciousness of Neo and Ah Mei was a means of survival, the doubling of the novel's narrative consciousness can be read as a strategy for coping with the consequences of critiquing colonial power. Following the publication of the novel, her husband, Comber, was forced to resign from his position as a Special Branch officer as was Han from hers in the colonial medical service, and subject to surveillance under the colonial government (*My House Has Two Doors* 92). If in the novel translation literally constitutes a means of survival, perhaps then the transcription of lived history into fiction was a means of apprehending violence while erecting a buffer from its eviscerating effects. Thus, to conceive of the novel as a translation of history is not to say that the work

has creative license to be unfaithful to historical fact. Rather, it is to read the novel as a surviving record of the epistemic violence of colonialism and the Cold War that remains inscribed in the postcolonial racial imaginary.

Yet, in speaking truth to power, the novel too inflicts an epistemic violence of its own, as evident in the portrayal of Ah Mei. A comparison of the novel with Han's autobiography, *My House Has Two Doors*, suggests that the character of Ah Mei is based on the historical figure of Ah Mui, the "stool pigeon" servant girl in the Comber household (91). As Han writes in her autobiography, "Through Ah Mui and all the others [the Surrendered Enemy Personnel that visited her home], through my travels in Malaya and the medical care I brought to the 'new village' I had adopted, I began to see Malaya" (92). This point is notable in light of the author's correspondence with her publisher regarding the legal ramifications of her novel, which further accentuates the significance of the fictitious persons disclaimer cited earlier in this essay. A letter forwarded to Han from the legal department from her London publishers, Jonathan Cape, concerns the traceable likeness of the novel's characters, particularly those in government service, to actual persons in the interest of avoiding lawsuits. The letter contains the following comment on Ah Mei: "I assumed—rightly, I gather—that Ah Mei could only be identifiable with someone who would not dare take action. ..." The traceable likeness between the novel's character, Ah Mei, and the actual person, Ah Mui, which imbues the novel with historicity and a greater urgency to its critique of the Emergency, is left intact because the latter does not have the means to take legal action against the author and thus suffers a greater risk of representational violence.

I have argued that the novel illuminates the role of translation in facilitating the implementation of Emergency policies, and demonstrates its function in re-articulating and assimilating colonial racial tropes into the postcolonial national narrative. In particular, translation operates as a weapon for inflicting epistemic violence by obscuring the condition of untranslatability, thereby concealing its own limitations in producing knowledge. At the same time, the productive power of translation is made evident by its capacity to reproduce categories of racial difference despite the fact of untranslatability. Yet, in foregrounding translation as a productive site for examining the Emergency's role in shaping the postcolonial racial imaginary, the novel invites further scrutiny of its own translational function as well. As noted earlier, the novel legitimizes its critique of the Emergency and its undergirding colonial racial policies in part by positioning Dr. Han as a figure who blurs the distinction between fiction and history, thereby generating the literary text's historical truth-value. And, as it turns out, the servant girl Ah Mei/Ah Mui plays a similar function, albeit her role is not conspicuously signaled as such. To note that these instances signal the disparities of power between the novelist/narrator and her servant girl in shaping their respective representational forms is a reminder of the novel's complex relationship

with history. Namely, ...*And the Rain My Drink* offers far more than a from-below perspective of the Emergency. Indeed, the novel invites us to think of literary representations as a mode of translation that discloses an otherwise obscured aspect of history, even as it in so doing inflicts its own form of epistemic violence.

Notes

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2. All citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the 2010 edition of the novel.

3. Despite a prolific, high profile and, at times, controversial career of writing fiction, autobiography, as well as historical and political essays, Han’s work has received little scholarly attention within literary studies. In addition to several journal essays, the most in-depth analysis of Han’s work to date is Wang Xuding’s dissertation on her writings about China.

4. Han Suyin is the pen name assumed by Elizabeth Comber, the name by which she is otherwise generally known. Comber directs her reader to the novel for an “unflattering non-establishment view of the [Emergency] situation in Johore [the southern state of the Malayan peninsula] from a Chinese point of view” (169 fn. 20).

5. I refer to the novel’s narrator as Dr. Han and to the author as Han.

6. For a reading of Burgess’s *The Malayan Trilogy*, see Chapter Four of Koh.

7. The translator as traitor serves as a grounding figure in poststructuralist and deconstructionist approaches to translation theory such as those outlined by Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, whose ideas are informed by Walter Benjamin’s. In forwarding the radical claim that the original is always already a translation, Derrida and de Man debunk the notion of translation’s treachery, revealing the ideological function of its being presented as such. Later in this essay, I turn to feminist theories of translation that expose the gendered and heteronormative assumptions that undergird the prevailing notion of translator, traitor.

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