

The Prison and the Anti-Colonialist in British Malaya

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Abstract This article argues for the need to view imprisonment as a transformational experience for anti-colonialists in British Malaya and beyond. Colonial prisons were fertile grounds that led to the shaping and restructuring of anti-colonial sentiments. They were also spaces where new forms of collective action, compromises and adaptations emerged. As will be shown, anti-colonialists' subjectivities and positions shifted from initial feelings of fear and submissiveness upon incarceration to the articulation of collective resistance and the manifestation of attempts to subvert and destabilize the colonial structures that bore down upon them. Such circumstances led to the alteration of the everyday practices not only of the colonized, but also of those in positions of authority.

'We have an excessive dread of prisons. I have not a shadow of a doubt that society would be much cleaner and healthier if there was less resort to law courts than there is.'

Mahatma Gandhi¹

Introduction

On the night of 21 June 2010, a large crowd of onlookers gathered in the darkness to watch bulldozers demolish a 300-metre wall of Kuala Lumpur's century-old Pudu Prison. The wall was adorned with what was reportedly the world's longest mural, which had been painted by former inmates of the prison. The onlookers' attempts to salvage pieces of the rubble as souvenirs bore testimony to the symbolic importance of one of the oldest colonial buildings in Malaysia's capital city. In fact, some few weeks prior to the day of demolition, battle lines were drawn between developers and conservationists advocating diametrically opposed views about the value of the prison. Real estate speculators and urban planners argued that the removal of the complex was necessary to make way for commercial buildings and hotels, as well as to solve traffic problems in the area. All of these efforts are part of Kuala Lumpur's ongoing project to transform itself into a model world-city. These arguments for the complete removal of the prison from the city landscape were met with objections from former political prisoners,

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heritage activists and opposition leaders who contended that Pudu Prison was one of Malaysia's historical landmarks. Granted, the prison once confined and hanged criminals and drug offenders; but to pull down a building that was at once a site where country's independence was fought would erase the physical reminder of a core constituent of Malaysian heritage and nationhood.²



Picture 1: Aerial view of Pudu Prison, Kuala Lumpur (Courtesy of Leong Yew).

The recent controversy surrounding Pudu Prison illustrates the importance of colonial prisons in the transformation of Asian societies. These sites of confinement have gained an equally prominent position in the recent colonial historiography in large part due to the arguments put forward by Michel Foucault in his widely-acclaimed book, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison (Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison)*. Foucault advances the view that the birth and early development of prisons in the late eighteenth century was largely inspired by the Benthamian notion of the Panopticon. Modern states developed new techniques of control in prisons that relied heavily on strict daily programs, rigorous training sessions, regimented working hours and constant surveillance, and these techniques were then transplanted and

imposed in various forms in mainstream societies. After Foucault, some colonial historians have shown that prisons lay at the heart of the colonial states' attempts to mould an ordered society in accordance with their hegemonic ends. These experiments in strategies of divide and rule within walled-in organizations were extended throughout the rest of the colonial societies, shaping the native self, livelihood and society.³

However partial they may be, Foucault's insights have generated productive debates surrounding the shape and character of colonial societies and colonial prisons in Asia. A notable case in point is a collection of essays entitled *Cultures of Confinement* (2007) which explores the interplay between local and global factors in the making of modern prisons in various parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. All of the contributors in the volume point refer to the problems of employing the ideas developed by Foucault, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and other theorists, in analyzing the birth and workings of modern prisons outside Europe. The realities of imprisonment in non-European states, particularly those that came under Western domination, were far more complex, for not only were colonial prisons "messy" and beset with problems of shortages and overcrowding, but they were also essentially reflections of, rather than models for, societies in general. That is to say, colonial prisons replicated and reproduced religious, social, class, ethnic and gender inequalities that persisted under colonial rule and thereafter. From this perspective, it is vital for scholars to shift their analytical gaze from looking at how the prison manifested itself in the wider society to scrutinizing the social histories of prisons and, more specifically, to the ways in which certain social groups often colonized the prisons.⁴

This alternative interpretation is certainly applicable to the case of a distinctive social group in Southeast Asian societies – the anti-colonialists – who populated colonial prisons until the end days of formal imperialism. Much scholarly work has been written about the experiences of political imprisonment around the region in countries such as Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines, usually by way of remembering the struggles and contributions of anti-colonial nationalists or as propaganda in support of present-day institutions and ideologies. The latest addition to this growing literature is a sophisticated and path-breaking monograph by Peter Zinoman, who unravels the ways in which the organization and disorganization of colonial prisons in Vietnam had a profound impact on the growth and expansion of nationalist movements in that country.⁵

Be that as it may, such a detailed treatment of the experiences of imprisonment among anti-colonialists is conspicuously absent in

the case of colonial Malaya. This lacuna becomes all the more glaring when we consider the availability of a whole array of unpublished documents, annual prison reports and digests, along with memoirs, diaries and autobiographical works written by former political prisoners in Malaya during the height of British imperialism. The yawning gap in academic writings about political imprisonment in colonial Malaya is closely tied to the excessive emphasis by many scholars on the anti-colonialists' activities when they were not imprisoned. Rather than seeing colonial prisons as important sites of both resistance and forced submission to the imperial dictate, prisons have been perceived as merely transitory places for anti-colonialists, to be noted in passing but not rigorously investigated, in the historian's endeavour to narrate the long walk toward freedom and independence.⁶

The first step to remedy this omission is to acknowledge that colonial prisons formed an important part of the spatial ordering of the colonies, and that these prisons piqued the imagination, memories and day-to-day lives of the elites and the common folk. For the majority of the native and immigrant population that came under European dominion during the height of imperialism in the early 19th century and thereafter, colonial prisons provoked, as Gandhi has put it, "an excessive dread". Colonial prisons signified immorality, shame and torment; they were the abodes of social outcasts and places where diseases were endemic. In Malaya, colonial prisons ensured civil obedience and mass compliance with the reigning state. Anxieties about the prospect of suffering and persecution that would threaten their very existence as well as their personal freedom loomed large in the minds of the Malayan populace. Such fear was magnified by the fact that colonial prisons were usually located in areas isolated from the larger society and in close proximity to mortuaries, asylums, graveyards and wastelands. In direct opposition to this, habitual criminals and members of triads, who were adroit at eluding the law, saw imprisonment as a time to regroup, while they viewed prisons as places to learn new tricks and trades that would make them more effective hustlers after their release.⁷

Anti-colonialists saw prisons in a very different way. This essay develops the argument that the years they spent in colonial prisons had an indelible impact upon the anti-colonialists who comprised a segment of the political prisoners in Malaya. On the one hand, the initial experience of arrest and imprisonment tended to threaten the anti-colonialists' self-confidence in their ability to rise up against the colonial state, given that their minds and bodies were left defenseless in the face of disciplining regimes and the tools of incarceration. And yet, rather than resulting in total dis-

empowerment, this shattering of the self, of identity and aspirations often encouraged the anti-colonialists to rethink their own tactics in confronting the colonizer. As it became clear to them that the prisons epitomized the limited degree of control and hegemony which the colonial power could exercise upon the colony at large, anti-colonialists sought to cultivate social and political networks within the prisons and capitalize on the weaknesses of the prison system. This was done through the establishment of solidarities and alliances and by brokering deals with agents of power while launching various strategies of resistance to ensure the survival of their mortal selves and their liberationist intents. Although it would be too far-fetched to maintain that in asserting their rights to space and other resources the anti-colonialists had, in the process, colonized the prisons as had their counterparts in India, China and Vietnam, there is little doubt that the experience of imprisonment had a transformational effect by politicizing the anti-colonialists in Malaya more intensely than they were before they were detained.

Seen from this vantage point, this study's contribution to the wider literature on colonial prisons and the socio-political history of imprisonment is to stress the need to view imprisonment as a transformational experience for the anti-colonialists. Colonial prisons were fertile grounds that led to the shaping and restructuring of anti-colonial sentiments. They were also spaces where new forms of collective action, compromises and adaptations emerged. That is to say, these were crucial sites that affected the emotions, attitudes and behaviour of anti-colonialists, challenging them to formulate new ways to ensure their survival and pursue their politics more effectively. The close contact the anti-colonialists had with the agents of the colonizer also ushered in tangled and usually uneasy relationships, contestations and struggles between the two seemingly opposing dramatis personae. Such circumstances led to the alteration of the everyday practices not only of the colonized, but also of those in positions of authority.⁸

The main actors in this study are Malay anti-colonialists, also known as "Malay radicals", who were active in agitating for complete independence from British rule beginning in the 1930s. The term "Malay radicals" were men and women who mounted a challenge against the colonial order in Malaya, which included the British officials and capitalists, the Malay sultans and aristocrats, and the Chinese capitalists in the road towards establishing an equitable and just society for Malaysians of all classes and backgrounds. Influenced by a combination of nationalism, socialism and modernist Islam, the Malay radicals were active in several fronts and collectives which included the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*

(KMM), Kongres Melayu SeMalaya, Pembela Tanahair (PETA), Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Merdeka (KRIS), Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM), Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API), Majlis Agama Tertinggi Malaya (MATA), Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA), Persatuan Indonesia Merdeka (PIM), Hizbul Muslimin, Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), Barisan Tani SeMalaya (BATAS), Sayang akan Bangsa Ertinya Reda Korbankan Apa Segala (SABERKAS), Pemuda Radikal Melayu (PERAM), Gerakan Angkatan Muda (GERAM), Parti Rakyat Malaya (PRM), Himpunan Wanita Indonesia Malaya (HIMWIM) and Rejimen Ke-10.

Although I am certainly aware of the contributions of anti-colonialists hailing from other ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Europeans and Eurasians in shaping the politics and experiences in colonial prisons, this essay focuses on the Malay radicals because of their paradoxical social position: they were regarded as marginals by their own society as well as by the British, despite the fact that they belonged to the dominant Malay ethnic group that was recognized by the British as having a special position in Malaya at that time. This doubly compounded marginality was reflected most vividly in the Malay radicals' own reminiscences of their activism and of their eventual imprisonment – reminiscences that have come down to us in the form of published memoirs. Another striking characteristic of these sources that is worthy of some mention here is that they are imbued with a sense of self-reflection without compromising the richness of detail.

These memoirs are however not without limitations. As several historians working on prison narratives across Asia and Africa have highlighted, prison memoirs and narratives are often replete with errors in memory and the common tendency of writers to present information in ways that were intended to portray former political prisoners as heroic, enduring and driven by a strong sense of moral justice in confronting colonial rule. Prison memoirs, in many instances, have also served as tools of state and/or party propaganda and functioned as ideological levers that could be used to educate the younger generation on the importance of sacrifice, chivalry and selflessness.⁹ The theme of valour and the problems associated with inaccurate memories are certainly present in prison narratives produced by Malay anti-colonialists. Even so, it should be noted here that these narratives served less as party or state propaganda as evidenced in the case of their Vietnamese and Indian counterparts. Rather, Malay prison narratives should be read as individualized resistance to the hegemony of official histories. They are, to some extent, symbolic of a larger oppositional consciousness.



Picture 2: Malay detainees at Ipoh Detention Camp, 1952 Accession number: 2007-0025745 (Courtesy of Arkib Negara Malaysia).

The limitations of these sources also mean that they should be read and utilized not as sources that represent the totality of anti-colonialist experiences in prison but, rather, as “historical fragments” that “appeal to an alternative perspective, or at least the possibility of another perspective.”¹⁰ One alternative perspective that these sources offer pertains to the individual’s experience and observations in moments of duress. Certainly, these observations are absent in colonial official reports which, more often than not, are more concerned with reporting the “progress” of prison management than documenting the day-to-day anxieties of the inmates. My method of utilizing these prison memoirs is to cross-examine them against sources culled from the colonial archives and other contemporaneous sources, such as newspaper reports. By juxtaposing such historical fragments with other evidence in its time, it is obvious that the years these Malay radicals spent in captivity as political prisoners strengthened their resolution to end colonialism, albeit through diverse stratagems and with the help of newly-found coalitions.¹¹

More to the point, I have chosen to focus on the years between 1945 to 1957, when the Malay radicals were incarcerated for threatening the security of the colonial state. The twelve-year period under analysis is also interesting because it marked the time when the

largest number of Malay radicals was detained. When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, scores of radical Malay men and women were put behind bars for collaborating with the Kempeitai and other paramilitary bodies. Even though these radicals were released within a short time, many were arrested again upon the declaration of the Malayan Emergency in February 1948. There are no exact statistics regarding the Malay radicals who were arrested within this twelve-year period. One estimate has it that almost 1,000 Malays were detained during the early years of the Emergency, which meant that the number of Malays put behind bars was no more than twenty percent of the total number of people who were imprisoned during the Malayan Emergency, most of whom were Chinese.¹² What is clear, however, is that the mass arrests of the Malay radicals (who generally filled a complex set of roles as teachers, journalists, trade union activists and popular preachers) indicate that they were becoming more influential and were gaining substantial support from a broad section of the Malayan populace.¹³

Persons detained under the Emergency Regulations were sent to different prisons in accordance to the places in which they were first arrested and the sentences they received thereafter. There were a total of fifteen prisons that housed the detainees who were convicted for a period of three months to a maximum of twelve years. These prisons were located in Singapore, Taiping, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johore Bahru, Kelantan, Alor Star, Trengganu, Batu Gajah, Seremban, Malacca, Kuantan, Kuala Lipis, Kangar and Sungei Patani. In all of these prisons, the Chinese prisoners made up at least half of the total prison population, with the remaining prisoners divided into ethnic categories such as the Malays (33%), the Indians (12%) and the rest were categorized as "others" which included the Europeans, Eurasians, Arabs and other minorities. This breakdown remained fairly constant throughout the Emergency years from 1948 to 1960, just as the ratio of male to female detainees was consistent at a figure of a hundred to one. It should be mentioned here that female detainees were kept in separate buildings apart from the men and, because their numbers were relatively small, persons of different ethnic groups were allowed to stay in the same cells. As for the men, inter-ethnic contacts were disallowed to minimize the spread of communist propaganda and the coming together of leaders from the different ethnic groups to form a united front in the prisons. The division of the cells and buildings across ethnic lines also reflects – as will be elucidated in more detail below – the wider colonial policy of divide and rule and the assumption that each of these ethnic groups had their own peculiar sets of problems and needs.¹⁴

The constraints of space do not permit a detailed elaboration of the wider context of the Malayan Emergency. Suffice it to state here that the source of the emergency was the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), a populist organization comprised mainly of Chinese trade unionists and grassroots activists with a minority of Malays and Indians. The MCP's plans to launch an armed conflict between March and May 1948 was pre-empted by the imposition of martial law by the colonial regime a month before the MCP guerrillas could launch attacks. Terror and counter-terror led to the loss of thousands of innocent lives, with hundreds of villages burned down, large populations relocated to new settlements and scores of people deported to China and Indonesia. While mass detention provided the British with more information on the MCP's operations, it did much to alienate the Chinese and a section of the Malay populace. Karl Hack, in an incisive reassessment of the Malayan Emergency, has divided the twelve long years of struggle into three key phases: "(1) Counter-terror and sweep (1948–49); (2) Clear and hold characterised by population control, persuading minds, and massive concentration of resources, along with the declaratory aim of self-government (1950–52); and (3) Optimisation, characterised by winning hearts as well as minds, faster progress to independence, finessing operations, and becoming an efficient 'learning organisation' (late 1952–60)."¹⁵ A majority of the Malay radicals were arrested during the first phase of the emergency. Their ability to sustain anti-colonial resistance in the prisons amidst a host of constraints, as we shall see later, points to some of the inherent weaknesses of the emergency strategies put in place by the British.

Arrest and the Shaken Self

No analysis of political imprisonment can be considered complete without reference to the trauma of being suddenly detained at a moment's notice when one least expects it, or when one is in a vulnerable situation with no way to evade capture. For it was during this intervening period leading to the Malay radicals' incarceration in prison cells that their characters and the strength of their devotion to their cause were put to the test. To be sure, like many anti-colonialists throughout the colonized world who came under the thumb of European rule, the Malay radicals anticipated their arrests. Many even longed for days in captivity as a means to gain the much sought-after legitimating credentials of a prison term, which would confirm their status as freedom fighters against the colonial rulers. But what often came as a hard shock was not the fact of detention itself but rather the inopportune times in

which they were arrested, together with the spectacle of families and friends saddened and threatened by the presence of uniformed men with dogs and guns.¹⁶

The traumas of initial detention were played out most dramatically by Malay radicals. Ahmad Boestamam, for example, reminisced that he was suffering from a high fever when a lorry load of policemen came to his house to arrest him. Although he was known for his bravery as shown in his sharp critiques of the colonial state and his militant nationalism, he was nevertheless deeply shaken by the impending separation from his family. Ahmad broke down and cried in front of his wife, who clung to his arms while his children grieved at the moment of parting. His thoughts at that moment turned to anguished questions about his future and the future of his family, rather than the independence movement of which he was a leading representative.¹⁷ Similarly, Ishak Haji Muhammad described the day of his detention as an event that he “will not forget until the day I die.”¹⁸ He was arrested at his home by Malay officers of the Special Branch in the midst of experimenting with cooking some new dishes. It was clear to him at the very outset that life in prison would be hard and mortifying and that Malayan independence was not the highest priority in his life at that moment. Khadijah Sidek’s experience was far more trying as she was seven months pregnant when she was arrested. Already informed of the arrests of the spouses of other female activists, Khadijah was detained during her husband’s absence. She was very anxious about the effect that her imprisonment might have on the health of her unborn child, as well as the fact that she would have to give birth behind bars.¹⁹

All told, the radicals were arrested in the most unusual places, at the most capricious times and by persons they once regarded as close associates. In the dead of night, in the midst of working in farms and plantations, while boarding and alighting from buses, while shopping in the market, while relaxing with families and friends and even as they were leading the daily prayers, the Malay radicals were suddenly taken into the custody of the security agencies. The sense of disillusionment with the anti-colonial cause grew even deeper when the radicals saw familiar Malay faces among the men who were responsible for their arrest. Many of the Malay policemen who were working undercover disguised themselves as “loyal” members of anti-colonial movements.²⁰

One of the greatest difficulties that these radicals faced when they reached the detention centres was the subjection of their bodies and minds to disciplining regimes. If Foucault’s insights have any relevance here, the purpose of these regimes was to undermine the captives’ morale and generate “docile bodies” which could perform the tasks that were expected of them by the prison management and

by the colonial state upon their release.²¹ The point was also to instill fear and to break the will of the radicals at the start of their imprisonment in order to obtain cooperation and to ensure minimum resistance. One could add that these disciplining regimes were also directed towards severing the individual from his radical past and from the group that he represented and transforming him into an individualistic, compliant and timid subject of the state.

These regimes came in a few forms and typically involved a series of stages during the duration of imprisonment, foremost being debasement and deprivation. After verifying their identities, all political prisoners were ordered to strip naked *en masse* for routine inspection and were made to shower in an open bathing area. This experience of public nudity particularly affected the Malay radicals because their culture taught them that they must not expose their private parts in public.²² Making matters worse was the condition of the prison cells that were allocated for political prisoners. These places were badly-lit, overwhelmed by the stench of latrines and infested with bed bugs and rats, which ensured that the prisoners had minimum rest. The prisoners were required to relieve themselves in the cells where they were not provided with any water, and they could only dispose of the filth every morning. They were also deprived of reading and writing materials and forced to squat while consuming their meals. Such deplorable treatment of political prisoners prevailed up till the end of British rule in Malaya.²³

Following their initiation into prison life, the new prisoners were subjected to a period of isolation during which they were forbidden to communicate with other prisoners and warders. Malay radicals who were reputed to wield enormous influence in society were placed in solitary cells for as long as a hundred days, while those of lesser social status were lumped in cells where the prisoners were often suspicious of others as threats to their security or position. The next step was the inculcation of a sense of impermanence. Political prisoners were moved from one prison cell to another and from one prison to another. At each stage, they were given the impression that the next cell would be worse than the one before. In the movement from one cell to another, the prisoners were chained or handcuffed in rows of three to twelve and when they were moved to a different prison they were made to march in public places to the train stations.²⁴ Those arrested in Peninsular Malaya were first placed in a lockup within the confines of a local police station before being moved to a state prison and then to a detention camp at either Tanjung Beruas in Malacca, or Taiping, or Ipoh, or Seremban or Pulau Jerejak off Penang Island, or the infamous Pudu Prison in Kuala Lumpur for men and the prison for women at Batu Gajah. In the case of Samad Ismail, he was placed in a

“recalcitrant house” at Outram Prison in Singapore that was designated especially for dangerous criminals prior to being held in a solitary cell. Samad was then moved to a high-security prison on St. John’s Island, about six kilometres south of Singapore. Little wonder that after experiencing physical suffering in various cells, Samad Ismail fell into a psychosis, running hysterically around his cell, shouting his wife’s name repeatedly and knocking his head against the wall until he bled.²⁵

No less arduous was the series of interrogations to which the Malay radicals were subjected. Interrogation sessions for political prisoners were held repeatedly and these sessions were designed to obtain more information about certain persons and groups, to solicit plans that had been hatched by the prisoner unbeknownst to the colonial state and to drive home the guilt of the accused. Aside from the ordeal of having to answer the same set of questions while trying not to contradict themselves or reveal information that could jeopardize their organization and movement, the Malay radicals were deprived of food and drink and subjected to verbal assaults in sessions that could last for several hours at a time.²⁶

There is practically no evidence of systematic torture or programmed violence meted out upon the Malay radicals. It is worthwhile to speculate that corporal punishment was avoided mainly because the British rulers saw physical violence as reminders of their own painful experience when they were prisoners of the Japanese. Not wanting to be compared with or, even worse, seen as a continuing legacy of Japanese colonialism, the British were also aware that the rapid change in global climate during the age of decolonization meant that any maltreatment of political prisoners would soon be exposed by the international press or the prisoners themselves. Such revelations might serve to destabilize the legitimacy of British rule in the eyes of the general populace while encouraging public support for the political prisoners.²⁷ This notwithstanding, Malay radicals who were arrested and found guilty of the possession of firearms and ammunition or of having committed serious acts of violence against the security forces were sentenced to death by hanging.²⁸

Imprisonment as Empowerment

The demoralizing effects of these disciplining regimes tended to last for as long as the colonial state was able to sustain their imposition. Clearly, the British were unable maintain their grip on the political prisoners in Malaya given the shortage of resources which affected the management of prisons throughout the empire during the post-World War Two period. An official report on the prisons from

1948 to 1954 stated that the declaration of the Malayan Emergency worsened the state of prisons almost everywhere in Peninsular Malaya and on the island of Singapore. The prison population grew rapidly, from 3,497 in 1947 to 9,879 in 1954, resulting in severe over-crowding. The ratio of prisoners to warders during these seven years was one to more than four hundred prisoners. In spite of many restructurings that were made to transform prisons into "healthy and homely villages", the pace of reforms was too slow to mitigate the rapid spread of contagious diseases and the dissemination of radical ideas within these institutions.²⁹

But even if finances and associated resources were readily available, the British were unwilling to apply the penological methods that prevailed in the United Kingdom to other places outside the metropolitan centre, let alone improve upon them. The basic rationale was that the large majority of prisoners in England had at the very least attended school, but this was not the case in the colonies. The educated person who possessed the ability to adhere to rules and regulations and to act with a measure of equanimity should be treated differently from inmates who lacked such thinking capacity.³⁰ So odious and onerous then was the task of managing criminals and political prisoners during this period that the Commissioner of Police, O.V. Garratt, wrote that superintendents and their senior offices had "to combat a virile propaganda – both verbal and written – in addition to maintaining discipline and introducing the various methods of training. . . . The struggle inside prisons is a silent one and, because of this, it is perhaps more intense."³¹

Although additional personnel were brought in to staff the prisons in response to the growth in the number of prisoners, this did not alleviate the problem of prison warders having to work fourteen-hour shifts. Ill-discipline among the rank and file was commonplace and this provided fertile grounds for illegal and illicit practices. Within the twelve years from the end of the Japanese Occupation in 1945 to the declaration of Malayan Independence in 1957, several hundred warders were warned or fined for offences such as "insubordination", "negligence", and "asleep on" or "absent from" duty. From these figures, a hundred and twenty were dismissed for various crimes committed within the prison complex, and the number who tendered their resignations was equally high. Adding to the list of difficulties was the ethnic composition of the prison staff. More than two-thirds of the lower-ranking officers who dealt directly with the prisoners on a day-to-day basis were Malays and other local people who felt a strong sense of belonging to that community. Because the Malay radicals were usually persons who were well-known and admired within the Malay community for their daring calls for the immediate end of colonialism and the media coverage given to their activities, it

was not surprising that Malay warders tended to display much sympathy towards this class of prisoners. To this must be added the shortage of Chinese warders in the colonial prisons. Sikh, Indian and Malay warders were thus assigned to watch over prisoners belonging to the Chinese community. Linguistic differences meant that propaganda and other clandestine attempts to spread anti-colonial ideas and communism in the prisons could not be easily detected, what more, effectively curbed.³²

Some bargaining, concessions and compromises, official or otherwise, had to be made with the political prisoners to ensure the smooth running of the prisons. This was achieved in ways that were akin to how the colonial state managed the Malayan society at large based on a model that was developed in India. Divide and rule was one of the methods used to encourage cooperation and to prevent the creation of troublesome cliques within the ranks of the political prisoners. The prisoners were ethnically segregated, with Malays, Chinese, and Indians locked up in the separate blocks. The prisoners were then divided into groups incarcerated in different cells, usually based on the time when they were arrested.³³

Overall, it could be said that Malay political prisoners received far more humane treatment than the Chinese detainees. The Malays were provided with special places to say their prayers and opportunities to take part in other cultural activities. This was intended to convey the message that the prison administration was more concerned with the welfare of the “native” race (the Malays). Any efforts by the Malays to identify themselves with the cause of the non-Malay races, more specifically with the promotion of communism (which was especially identified with certain elements of the Chinese component of the Malayan population), would result in the loss of these special privileges for Malays. Still, the better treatment given to Malay prisoners did not exceed the many liberties which European and Eurasian prisoners enjoyed. These two groups of political prisoners were segregated from the rest of the prison population and were seldom subjected to ill-treatment or kept in cells under the appalling conditions experienced by the Asian prisoners, which underlined the racism that pervaded the colonial penal institutions.³⁴

To further divide the Malay fraternity, special treatment was given to prisoners who demonstrated a keenness to reform and to comply with the rules of imprisonment. The most sought-after concession was to be given a temporary release from prison to attend a relative’s funeral. Depending on the proximity of these funerals, prisoners who were considered to be showing progress in terms of conformity to rules and a good attitude towards the warders could be given up to a week out of prison, albeit with police escorts. Some other rewards offered by the prison administration

included extra time in canteens and authorization to order groceries and other products outside prisons, as well as placement in working areas that were far less grueling. Cigarettes were also used as rewards for collaboration.³⁵

The prison authorities also instituted a programme of differentiated work, leisure activities and dress codes for the political prisoners.³⁶ The more recalcitrant Malay radicals were given jobs that entailed the use of heavy equipment, such as blacksmithing and building construction work. Spare time was to be spent watching propaganda films and attending anti-Communist talks. They were also required to wear black uniforms to signify that they were dangerous and resistant to reform. Prisoners wearing grey uniforms were seen as less dangerous and were required to undergo frequent counseling at a rehabilitation centre.³⁷ As for the majority who demonstrated a readiness to drop their radicalism, they were assigned white uniforms and were given less-strenuous jobs, such as supervising their peers and other lighter trades in the areas of gardening, sewing, carpentry, printing and bookbinding.³⁸

The measures undertaken by the prison management to deal with the Malay radicals yielded unanticipated outcomes. On the one hand, the special privileges offered to the Malay radicals enticed a minority of the political prisoners to choose to steer clear of political activities in prison. A select few went even further and agreed to serve as spies for the British. Unable to cope with the stresses of prison life and not wanting to serve long sentences in the manner of the hardcore detainees, these spies chose to inform the authorities about the plans made by the more committed Malay radicals. The activities of these spies did not go unnoticed, which leads us to a consideration of the second line of responses by the Malay prisoners to the attempts by the prison management to gain the cooperation of political prisoners.

Indeed, as the prisons systems and structures gradually became more familiar and predictable to the prisoners after several months in custody and as the political prisoners became increasingly conscious that there was so much that the colonial state could do to break their spirits and turn them into willing collaborators, the Malay radicals devised and employed a multitude of tactics to deal with the deterioration of their condition and to further their pursuit of political change and mass support. The execution of these tactics was made possible not only by the weaknesses of the colonial prison system but also because of the gathering of Malay radicals from different parts of Malaya and Singapore in a few detention centres. For many, imprisonment was probably the first and most opportune time in their years of anti-colonial activism to meet and craft plans with other like-minded compatriots. This was also

evident in other Southeast Asian colonies. Ian Brown, in his illuminating study of colonial prisons in Burma, the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies, argues that political prisoners tended to view their time in colonial prisons “as an opportunity for political education, for learning techniques of political agitation, and for building comradeship and party organization.”³⁹

One of the survival tactics was to build a political hierarchy within the prison population. The chief purpose behind this was to keep political activities and awareness alive so as to better prepare the Malay radicals to confront the colonial state after their release. Another purpose was to maintain discipline within the ranks regarding the distribution of food and issues relating to health, education, religious affairs, cleanliness and other concerns. Ironically, this political hierarchy was modeled on the image of the European democracy and parliamentary system, which reveals the influence of Western notions of governance on the minds of even the most vehement among the Malay anti-colonialists. While opposing the hegemonic rule of the Europeans, the Malay radicals embraced Western-style democratic systems as an alternative to the feudalism of pre-colonial Malay polities and traditional elites, which the radicals believed had persisted into the postwar period.



Picture 3: Daily life at Tanjung Beruas Prison, 1951 Accession number: 2007-0025861.

Elections were held periodically among the prisoners to elect “ministers” from different groups that took on the names of political parties. These ministers were given portfolios, such as the Prime Minister, Minister of Food, Minister of Health, Minister of Culture, and Minister of Religious Affairs, and they were entrusted with political duties. Together with representatives from different blocks in the prisons, these ministers formed a cabinet which did not exercise absolute authority over the prisoners, since it was vulnerable to votes of no-confidence and actions taken in connection with complaints against malpractices, such as corruption. Fresh elections would be called upon the airing of such complaints and the frequent leadership changes provided many prisoners with opportunities to gain valuable leadership experience.⁴⁰ Concomitantly, new members were also recruited into the political movement and its leadership hierarchy. This was made possible through personal interactions during recreational activities and through classes that were conducted by the Malay radicals. Subjects taught during the classes included basic reading and writing, conversational English and Chinese, Quranic reading and exegesis, history, and literature, all of which were infused with political messages. Interestingly, the use of intimidation and violence to forcibly recruit prisoners with no strong political convictions into the political movement was more common in the women’s prisons than in the prisons for men.⁴¹

The prison thus became a school for the inculcation of democratic values and practices. This raises the question of the correlation between democratic processes and disciplinary regimes. On the surface, it would seem that democratic processes could not flourish within the colonial prison environment due to inhibiting factors such as the design and physical layout of the prisons and the regimented time structure imposed on the prisoners. The long set of rules and regulations in place also served to restrict prolonged communication between the prisoners and, thus, might have been expected to hamper consensus building. But the very conditions which restricted the movement and activities of the anti-colonialists became motivating forces in their own right. In trying to recover their humanity and ensure that their political ideals and objectives would not dissipate under the weight of the disciplining regime, the anti-colonialists sought ways and means to construct democratic structures of their own. These structures were continuously fertilized by ensuring that no one person or collective could exercise complete power over others. They were also kept alive through the construction of a fluid prisoner organization, one that allowed new leaders to be elected and functions to be redefined as and when necessary. In other words,

the more draconian the colonial prisons became, the more resolute the anti-colonialists became in keeping democracy alive among them.⁴²

To safeguard the political hierarchy, close relationships were forged with the prison warders and staff of different prison departments. The most sympathetic of these warders would assist the political prisoners by allowing them to secretly conduct political classes and organize their elections. The more brazen ones would go so far as to smuggle banned newspapers and relay information about the progress of anti-colonialist activities, and even smuggle manuscripts written by the detained Malay radicals to political activists outside the prison walls. Ahmad Boestamam, for example, related how two prison warders named Yusuf and Husain assisted in sending his manuscripts to editors of Malay newspapers, such as *Utusan Zaman*.⁴³ The radicals who gained the trust of the senior prison officers were permitted to publish magazines for the reading pleasure of fellow prisoners. One of these magazines was named *Siasat* (Investigate) and another was called *Cempaka* (Cloves). Handwritten on old school exercise books, these magazines were between sixty and a hundred pages long. Each issue was filled with commentaries on politics, social affairs, short stories and poems written by voluntary contributors from across the prison complex. Once completed, the magazines were passed from one prisoner to another until a whole block of prisoners had the opportunity to read them. Besides getting to know the warders, the Malay radicals also cultivated cordial relations with the staff of the prison kitchens, and this resulted in extra rations during meal hours.⁴⁴

At the same time as selected prison personnel were won over by the Malay radicals, deliberate efforts were made to form an underground communication network. At the centre of this network was a group dedicated to the work of counter-espionage. They were tasked with rooting out spies to ensure that the solidarity within the prison remained strong and committed to anti-colonialism. Referred to by prison inmates as “hantu (ghost)” or “musang-musang berbulu ayam (civet-like animals with chicken feathers)”, spies who solicited information from the Malay radicals were ostracized by other prisoners, who often learned about their activities through interactions with warders. Rumours about the spies’ work were spread by way of informing as many people as possible about their activities. This policy of denunciation and social exclusion was applied only to the group of spies who were once friends but had fallen for the rewards offered by the regime. The Malay radicals were cognizant of espionage work carried out by other self-proclaimed Malay anti-colonialists planted among the prisoners by the British. Groups of prisoners made plans to clobber these

spies before their “release”. Men in hoods would corner the spies in an unguarded place and beat them up. As expected, there were no enquiries into these beatings, because the identities of the victims would thereby become known to all.⁴⁵ Another facet of this underground communication network was a covert postal system. Malay radicals in one block who wished to send secret messages to friends in another block would write their messages on a piece of paper, wrap it around a stone, and throw it to a messenger in the next block. The message would then be relayed to the rest of the prisoners in that block.⁴⁶

Reprisals and Resistance

It would be historically inaccurate and misleading to claim that the struggles between the Malay radicals and the prison management that functioned as the tentacles of the colonial order receded as both parties made compromises and adjustments. On the contrary, more serious conflicts between the two opposing sides developed as the Malay radicals became increasingly organized and sophisticated and as the prison management realized the impending danger of losing control over the political prisoners. The tensions between Malay radicals and prison warders were usually over issues of food, sanitation, verbal and physical abuse and disagreements over the type of work assignments. Most, if not all, of the Malay radicals were averse to being treated like common criminals, by being provided with only basic rations, such as porridge and hard bread, for their daily meals, and being made to clear the latrines in their cells. The political prisoners were resistant to the idea of serving their time in prisons as cheap labourers and engaging in hard labour at construction sites. They maintained that their guilt had not yet been legally established and, therefore, there was no real basis for them to adhere to the obligatory tasks assigned to convicted criminals. Moreover, although incidents of physical abuse of political prisoners were generally uncommon, there were cases when the warders were guilty of brutality. Verbal abuse of political prisoners was also commonplace, especially by Sikh warders who were well known for their unflinching loyalty towards the colonial state. The warders would brand the Malay radicals as “communists”, “dreamers” and “fools” and these remarks were often made in the absence of high-ranking officers.⁴⁷

These issues provoked a range of resistance strategies on the part of the political prisoners. These strategies were aimed primarily at circumventing and dismantling the sinister practices and underhand methods of the prison management that sought to demoralize the prisoners and cripple the various hierarchies and structures

that the radicals had established. The repertoire of resistance employed by the Malay radicals also helped to further publicize and strengthen the political movement within the prisons.

The most basic form of resistance was discursive in nature. The Malay radicals would respond to offensive remarks directed against them by calling the Malay warders “traitors” and the non-Malay warders “dogs” who were loyal to the Europeans. In some instances, the warders were even threatened that they would be beaten or otherwise penalized if verbal complaints were made to the higher authorities about abusive remarks and insulting behaviour. Indeed, the political prisoners often made complaints through their representatives, and this could result in the transfer of a particular warder or even his suspension and termination from service.

Another variant of discursive resistance was through the writing of petitions. A survey of archival materials relating to political prisoners in Malaya and Singapore during the postwar period revealed that prisoners and their families sent more than one hundred petitions to the colonial government. While many of these petitions pertain to the wrongful arrests of Malays, an equal number consists of written complaints made against warders and counselors. These petitions provoked a series of investigations by the Commissioner of Prisons, which culminated in the setting up of a Detainees’ Advisory Committee to attend to the prisoners’ misgivings and to redress misconduct among the prison staff.⁴⁸

The Malay radicals also embarked on a series of strikes to demonstrate their discontent with the prison management and to send a strong signal to the other prisoners that the struggle for their autonomy within the prison walls must be kept alive. Two types of strikes were discernible. The most prevalent were hunger strikes that could last for more than three days at a time, with prisoners refusing to eat and warders resorting to force-feeding them. The second type of strike was called a “go-slow” work strike. Political prisoners would abandon their tools or refuse to finish the tasks assigned to them. The precipitating causes behind these strikes ranged from the inability of a given prisoner to attend the funeral of a close relative, to insufficient food or violence against prisoners, but not all strikes were motivated by specific causes. Some were products of the handiwork of several firebrands who were simply bored or despondent with life in prison.

One of the most highly-publicized strikes was a combined hunger strike and work stoppage that occurred on 23 November 1949 at Tanjung Beruas Camp in Malacca. Led by some leftist-oriented leaders and supported by more than ninety Malay prisoners, the strike broke out in reaction to poor sanitary arrangements.⁴⁹ Another incident involved close to 300 male and female prisoners at

Batu Gajah Camp in Ipoh on 14 June 1955. As the hunger strike was underway, "the women detainees in the camp created a row. They tore down the walls of some of the huts, banged on the zinc roofs and shouted as the men were taken away."⁵⁰

The British reactions to these strikes varied from prison to prison and depended on the seriousness of each incident. Not wanting to make martyrs out of the anti-colonialists, the concerns of the prisoners were addressed promptly on many occasions, with political detainees being relieved from hard work and subsequently allowed to occupy their time with gardening and games. Many were, in fact, allowed to consume food given to them by relatives and friends and thereby avoid the prescribed rations provided by the prisons. More often than not, the ringleaders of the strikes were sent to another camp to avoid a recurrence of such incidents. The remaining leaders were forbidden from receiving visits or letters from friends and relatives.⁵¹

The political prisoners established a disciplinary structure to govern the conduct of their group and discourage violence and escape attempts, since these acts would lead to negative consequences for the rest of the prison population. Nevertheless, violence and escape attempts did occur from time to time. Political prisoners in the Seremban prison, for example, often assaulted their warders whenever they felt their rights had been violated. Assaults on the warders were so frequent that a prison report noted that the political prisoners in Seremban refused "to co-operate and frequently cause[d] trouble by their defiance of authority. During the year, a 'go-slow' labour movement and several serious assaults on warders necessitated serious measures."⁵² Some of the serious measures included the lengthening of the period of detention and the confinement of violent prisoners in dark rooms for close to a hundred days.

Escape attempts were relatively rare among the Malay radicals. The explanation can be found in a fascinating study of political prisoners on Robben Island during the height of apartheid in South Africa. Fran Buntman argues that, while many political prisoners on the island contemplated and even planned their escape, a majority felt that "one kind of escape was to use the prison against itself – to survive as individuals and organizations but also to craft a society based on a social code of their creation, not the regime's, to forge a new polity in and from the prison."⁵³ This was undoubtedly the prevailing line of thinking among the Malay radicals. Moreover, the Malay radicals were aware that the failure to evade their pursuers once outside the prison walls would lead to a lengthening of their sentences, or even being shot to death. The physical location of most detention camps,

isolated far from inhabited areas and in close proximity to the sea reduced any thought of escape to an exercise in futility and wishful thinking.

But there were exceptions to the rule. In the years between 1950 and 1954, six prison escapes occurred in Singapore and Malaya, with two of the cases arising from assistance given by a prison warden. The number of escapes in the years prior and subsequent to those cited above would have made the figures greater than what has been reflected in official statistics. Most of these escapees were caught within a few days.⁵⁴ One interesting story of a failed prison break involved a Malay political prisoner at Tanjung Berau in 1949. One night, the young man climbed over the fence and tried to swim across the sea. However, he was soon caught by Malay warders and was lucky to have lived after being shot at. On 15 February 1952, two prisoners jumped off a lorry as it was entering the Johore Bahru prison compound in an unsuccessful bid to escape.⁵⁵ These incidents sent a powerful message to all prisoners. Rashid Maidin concluded that he must “act in a calculated and rational fashion” if he hoped to escape and avoid recapture.⁵⁶ He pretended to show signs of a reformed attitude towards the warders before he was allowed to engage in work outside the prison in the presence of Malay policemen. Once outside, Rashid exploited the opportunity to befriend the Malay policemen to the point that they would allow him to roam around unattended. With the help of communist workers operating in the area, Rashid and another political prisoner ran into the jungle and were never recaptured.⁵⁷

Conclusion

While serving their prison sentences, the Malay radicals achieved a new awareness of the colonial order of things. The years spent had informed the Malay radicals of the frailty of state institutions and revealed the possibilities and prospects of resisting colonialism through subverting and exploiting the very systems that were established by the foreign power. It was obvious that the British in Malaya were no longer able to extinguish the forces of anti-colonialism operating at all levels of society, and even within the penal institutions.

Within the prison walls, the Malay radicals learnt about the stark discrepancy between colonial policies and everyday practice. Colonial prisons, like the colonial society, were marked by shortages, disorder and mismanagement and these conditions provided crucial spaces for anti-colonialists to ensure the survival and longevity of their movement. After the initial shock of detention in the

presence of their loved ones, and being faced with disciplining regimes which the Malay radicals loathed, the paradoxes of incarceration came to the fore and were laid out in front of them. The rigours that they endured taught them how to employ different tactics and strategies of resistance, compromise and adaptation. Warders, who were previously seen as tools of the colonial state, were courted to become allies for the dissemination of crucial information and the smuggling of necessities to make the prisons more tolerable. Political hierarchies and a closed system of espionage and communication networks functioned as channels of feedback, propaganda and mobilization. Petitions, strikes and violence held back attempts by the state to dissolve battles waged within the prisons. These measures taken by the Malay radicals and the lessons learnt from many setbacks and successes informed their anti-colonial activities after their re-entry into mainstream society and up to the eve of Independence.

From this, it follows then that an examination of Malay radicals in colonial prisons can indeed illuminate and contribute to important areas within the social and political history of Southeast Asia. Many scholars working on the social and political history of colonialism in Southeast Asia have tended to scrutinize the colonies as sites of contestations between two monolithic blocs: the colonial regime dominated by white Europeans on the one hand, and the coloured subjects on the other. In conceiving the colonies as such, these scholars have obscured the divisions and contradictions within the relationships between the colonized and the colonizer while neglecting the roles of persons and institutions that existed in the interstices of both sides of the power equation. In that regard, colonial prisons provide us with crucial entry points towards rethinking the colonial situation in the manner that would dissolve dichotomies, binaries and boundaries between the powerful and the powerless, between Europeans and their Asian subjects.

Above and beyond their roles as arenas of contestations or even “universities” for political training, colonial prisons were miniature sites that mirrored the negotiations, adaptations and strategic alliances of various actors in the wider colonial society. These were places where pacts were brokered between unlikely partners, where policies were bent to suit the interests of transient friends and where the weak and the discontented employed the weapons of the regime against itself to initiate change. One is led to agree with the suggestion made by the Czech novelist, Milan Kundera, that a “prison, even though entirely surrounded by walls, is a splendidly illuminated theater of history.”⁵⁸ And yet, the many histories of the hanged and the flogged, of political prisoners and defiant warders who make

up the cast of characters that shaped and reshaped colonial prisons in Malaya and across Southeast Asia, still remains to be written.

Notes

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¹ *Young India*, 3 December, 1919.

² *The New Straits Times*, 12 May 2010; *The Star*, 21 June 2010 and http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/1064755/1/.html, accessed on 1 December 2010.

³ For an extensive review of recent studies of prisons and penology in Asia, see Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), pp. 1–29.

⁴ Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (eds.), *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁵ Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

⁶ The most recent book by Ramlah Adam on radical anti-colonialism in Malaya makes no mention whatsoever of the prison experiences of former members of the “Malay left”. See: Ramlah Adam, *Gerakan Radikalisme di Malaysia, 1938–1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004).

⁷ R.J.H. Sidney, *Malay Land – Tanah Melayu: Some Phases of Life in Modern British Malaya* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1926), pp. 115–124; Robert Bruce Lockhart, *Return to Malaya* (London: Putnam, 1936), p. 131 and Loh Kah Seng, *Making and Unmaking the Asylum: Leprosy and Modernity in Singapore and Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2009).

⁸ Gaik Cheng Khoo, “Filling the Gaps of History: Independent Documentaries Re-present the Malayan Left”, in Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (eds.), *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 256 and Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 181.

⁹ See for examples: Peter Zinoman, “Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs”, in Hue-Tam Ho Tai (ed.), *The country of memory: remaking the past in late socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Marshall S. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: history, memory, and politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998) and David Arnold, “The Self and the Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories”, in David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (eds.), *Telling Lives in India: biography, autobiography, and life history* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Gyanendra Pandey, “Writing from the Edge: The Struggle to write Subaltern Histories”, in Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 296.

¹¹ Some parallels can be made here with the experiences of other anti-colonialists around Asia memorialized in oft-cited memoirs, such as Mahatma Gandhi's *Jail Experiences as Told by Himself*, M. N. Roy's *Letters From Jail*, Ho Chi Minh's *Prison Diary* and Tan Malaka's *From Prison to Prison*. These memoirs portray time spent in prison as both trying and stimulating as it was reflective of their peripheral position in society in the pursuit towards independence. Helen Jarvis, "Introduction", in Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1991), p. xxvi.

¹² Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist Front* (Singapore: Times Book International, 1979), p. 63. Noel Barber estimated the total number of detainees from 1948 to 1954 to be 29,828. See: Noel Barber, *War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerillas* (London: Collins, 1971), p. 199.

¹³ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 434.

¹⁴ See, *Report on the Prisons of the Federation of Malaya, 1949–1954* (Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1948–1956).

¹⁵ Karl Hack, "The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, 3 (2009), p. 404.

¹⁶ Nelson Mandela captured these emotions well when he wrote: "It is not pleasant to be arrested in front of one's children, even though one knows what one is doing is right. But children do not comprehend the complexity of the situation; they simply see their father being taken away by white authorities without an explanation.", See: Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1994), p. 173.

¹⁷ Ahmad Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam* (Bangi: UKM Press, 2004) pp. 261–262.

¹⁸ In Malay: "Sampai mati pun saya tak boleh lupa" in Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1997), p. 195.

¹⁹ Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesateria Bangsa* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1995), pp. 97–98.

²⁰ Abdul Majid Salleh, *Memoir Abdul Majid Salleh* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2004), p. 145 and Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police 1945–60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2008), p. 34.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 135–169.

²² Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 197.

²³ "M.N.P. protests on camp detainees", *The Singapore Free Press*, 13 April 1950; "Probe sought on treatment of detainees", *The Straits Times*, 27 July 1958 and A. Samad Ismail, *Memoir A. Samad Ismail di Singapura* (Bangi: UKM Press, 1993), p. 176.

²⁴ Rashid Maidin, *Memoir Rashid Maidin: Daripada Perjuangan Bersenjata kepada Perdamaian* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development, 2005), p. 39 and Abdul Majid Salleh, *Memoir Abdul Majid Salleh*, p. 147.

²⁵ A. Samad Ismail, *Memoir A. Samad Ismail di Singapura*, p. 175–177.

²⁶ Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 204.

²⁷ "An Uneasy Citizen", *The Straits Times*, 26 September 1950; "Detention is abuse of power", *The Straits Times*, 7 July 1953 and Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 209.

²⁸ "Bandit Hanged", *The Straits Times*, 1 October 1950; "Death Of Prisoners & Detainees – Report Of 1948 & 1949", Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1957/0305268 and Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 198.

²⁹ "Detention camps were homely", *The Straits Times*, 10 July 1949; *Report of the Prisons Department, Federation of Malaya* (Taiping: The Department, 1948–1954) and *Annual Report: Singapore Prisons Department* (Singapore: G.P.O., 1948–1957).

³⁰ Anon., "What cannot be done", *Majalah Penjara*, 1 (1959), p. 8 and Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 162.

³¹ *Report on the Prisons of the Federation of Malaya 1950* (Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1952), p. 3.

³² *Report of the Prisons Department, Federation of Malaya* (Taiping: The Department, 1948–1954) and *Annual Report: Singapore Prisons Department* (Singapore: G.P.O., 1948–1986).

³³ Ahmad Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam: Merdeka Dengan Berdarah Dalam Api* (Bangi: UKM Press, 2004), p. 293.

³⁴ "Detainees to be split up", *The Straits Times*, 16 July 1949; Khatijah, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*, p. 103 and David Arnold, "The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge, and Penology in Nineteenth-Century India", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 158.

³⁵ "Supplies of cigarettes and other necessities to Malay Detainees in Detention Camp, Seremban", Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1957/0297412; "Haji Said, a detainee in the Detention Camp, Seremban: Arrangement for the supply of biscuit & cigarettes to", Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1957/0461750 and Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*, p. 331.

³⁶ *Report on the Prisons of the Federation of Malaya 1951 & 1952* (Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1953), p. 3.

³⁷ "Malay Rehabilitation Centre for Malay Detainees", PRO/ CO 1022/ 151.

³⁸ Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 211 and Abdul Majid Salleh, *Memoir Abdul Majid Salleh*, p. 88.

³⁹ Ian Brown, "South East Asia: Reform and the Colonial Prison", in Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (eds.), *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, p. 223.

⁴⁰ Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 207 and Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*, p. 325.

⁴¹ *Report on the Prisons of the Federation of Malaya 1951 & 1952*, p. 17.

⁴² The same proclivity among prisoners could be seen in the case of Latin America and in Colonial Philippines. See: Michael Salman, "Nothing without Labor: Penology, Discipline and Independence in the Philippines under the United States Rule", in Vicente Rafael (ed), *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 113–132 and Ricardo D. Salvatore and Carlos Aguirre (eds.) *The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America: Essays on Criminology, Prison*

Reform, and Social Control, 1830–1940 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

⁴³ Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*, p. 327 and 344.

⁴⁴ Rashid Maidin, *Memoir Rashid Maidin: Daripada Perjuangan Bersenjata kepada Perdamaian*, p. 45; Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*, pp. 305 and Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 212.

⁴⁵ Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*, pp. 308–309.

⁴⁶ Boestamam, *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*, p. 323.

⁴⁷ “Sufferings of Malay detainees”, Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1957/0299178 and Abdul Majid Salleh, *Memoir Abdul Majid Salleh*, p. 147.

⁴⁸ “Detainees’ Advisory Committee”, Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1957/0473507.

⁴⁹ “Hunger strike by Malays”, *The Singapore Free Press*, 23 November 1949.

⁵⁰ “312 Rebel Detainees Moved to Jail”, *The Straits Times*, 14 June 1955.

⁵¹ Samad Ismail, *Memoir A. Samad Ismail di Singapura*, p. 159; Ishak Haji Muhammad, *Memoir Pak Sako: Putera Gunung Tahan*, p. 208 and *Annual Report: Singapore Prisons Department* (Singapore: G.P.O. 1957), p. 4.

⁵² *Report on the Prisons of the Federation of Malaya 1953 & 1954*, p. 60. On 20 January 1956, for example, a riot broke out in Seremban prison which left 3 prison officials severely injured. *The Singapore Free Press*, 20 January 1956.

⁵³ Fran Lisa Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 4–5.

⁵⁴ *Report on the Prisons of the Federation of Malaya 1953 & 1954* (Kuala Lumpur: The Government Press, 1954), p. 62.

⁵⁵ “Three fail in attempt to escape”, *The Straits Times*, 15 February 1952.

⁵⁶ Rashid Maidin, *Memoir Rashid Maidin: Daripada Perjuangan Bersenjata kepada Perdamaian*, p. 44.

⁵⁷ Rashid Maidin, *Memoir Rashid Maidin: Daripada Perjuangan Bersenjata kepada Perdamaian*, pp. 48–53.

⁵⁸ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (trans. by Michael Henry Heim) (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 24.