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The Anthropology of Remembering and Memory as Ethnography: Reflections on a Fishing Village and Firth's *Malay Fishermen*

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The Anthropology of Remembering and Memory as Ethnography: Reflections on a Fishing Village and Firth's Malay Fishermen

Zawawi Ibrahim

Abstract:

The Malay peasantry in peninsular Malaysia has been the subject of fieldwork and ethnographic research by both colonial and local anthropologists. Raymond Firth's *Malay fishermen*, based on fieldwork in Perupok, a fishing community in Kelantan, stands as an early and now classic example of the genre. I was born some seven years after Firth's first fieldwork in another east coast Malay fishing village, Kampung Che Wan, Kijal, in Terengganu. This article is about my own process of remembering the ethnographic details of my home village, thinking like an anthropologist over the period of a lifetime. While this is essentially an exercise in comparative ethnography, I suggest that such remembering represents variants of both collective memory and individual memory. The method of recall comprises various snippets of *collected* memory in the form of a discontinuous flow of selective ethnographic soundscapes and visualscapes, empowered by both a reflexive and critical anthropological gaze. It also entails a constant juxtaposition between the insider – outsider roles: the 'emic' and the 'etic' positioning on the part of the anthropologist But remembering itself is ultimately part of a historical and political project, an indigenising research project It is not part of a misplaced nostalgia that accommodates an old, worn-out colonial anthropological design aimed at preserving an 'unchanging society'. Nor should remembering be understood an act 'to reinforce the system in place, never to transform it' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 21). Rather remembering is considered a form of agency, which empowers local imaginings and is a mediator of social change, transformation and identity.

Keywords: Malaysia, Anthropology, Ethnography, Collective and Collected Memory, Soundscapes, Visualscapes, Indigenising, Identity

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Zawawi Ibrahim

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the possibilities associated with the anthropology of remembering. It derives from a personal account, as a local anthropologist, of my memory of growing up in a fishing village, Kampung Che Wan, Kijal, located in the east coast state of Terengganu in peninsular Malaysia. As an ethnographic mode, I make use of memory and the act of remembering as ways of engaging with and complementing Raymond Firth's classic ethnography, *Malay fishermen: Their peasant economy* (1966, originally published in 1946). Firth's ethnography was based on two fieldwork trips undertaken in another fishing village, Perupok, Kelantan, not long before I was born. While Perupok is located some 275 km from Kijal, it is positioned along the same coastal region of the peninsula and shares many of its social, economic and cultural characteristics (Fig. 1).

By comparing the findings of Firth's research with my own memories of a similar place, I suggest that this is an unusual exercise in comparative ethnography. The act of recall and remembering are the products of both collective memory and individual memory. The method of recall I employ comprises various snippets of *collected* memory of Kampung Che Wan in the form of a discontinuous flow of selective ethnographic soundscapes and visualscapes, informed by both a reflexive and critical anthropological gaze. This, however, requires a constant juxtaposition between the emic (insider) and the etic (outsider) perspectives of the anthropologist. But remembering is not part of a misplaced nostalgia that accommodates an old, worn-out colonial anthropological design aimed at preserving an 'unchanging society'. Rather, it is part of a historical and political project; an indigenising research project. Nor should remembering be understood as an act 'to reinforce the system in place, never to transform it' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 21).

The discussion is organised as follows. In part two, I trace my own evolution as an anthropologist, by unpacking the genealogical linkages between the dominant British school of social anthropology and its Malaysian proponents. This is followed, in part three, by a selected reading of Firth's *Malay fishermen* and an assessment of its value to Malay peasant ethnography. Part four then turns attention to Kampung Che Wan itself, offering a historical overview of its founding in the nineteenth century, and the ways that history helps shape collective memory. In part five, I offer an account of the social landscape and landmarks of the village, noting in particular the spatial organisation of household clusters. I then describe, in part six, what I call the 'soundscapes' and 'visualscapes' that provide some of the most enduring forms of recall in relation to village life. These reflections will interweave both my emic and etic perspectives together, i.e. my remembering as an insider and my analysis as an anthropologist. While Firth was alert to the changes brought about by the penetration of capitalist relations in a relatively small-scale fishing community, in part seven I examine two forms of social change that he overlooked—the significance of educational opportunities to profoundly alter the livelihoods and circumstances of everyday life and the role played by nascent politics during a period of nation-building. In the conclusion, I suggest that remembering should be considered a form of agency, which empowers local imaginings and is a mediator of social change transformation and identity, and propose that remembering has an mportant place as an ethnographic method and ultimately as an indigenising, historical and political project.

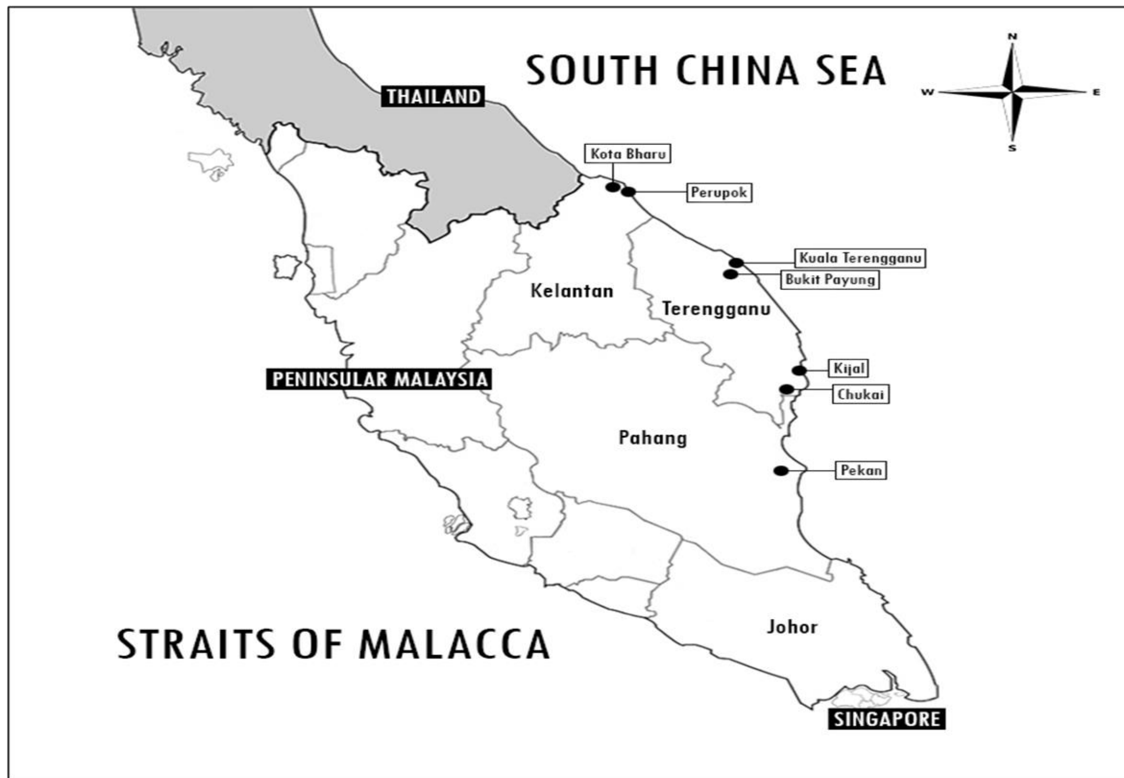

Fig.1: Peninsular Malaysia showing the location of Kijal, Terengganu, and Perupok, Kelantan

Getting to Know Anthropology and Anthropologists

My introduction to Firth's work came through my own rites of passage in becoming a professional anthropologist. I was just 20 years old when I was awarded a Colombo Plan scholarship in 1967 by the Malaysian government to pursue undergraduate studies at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. I must confess that before joining Monash I had never heard of anthropology, let alone entertained the idea of pursuing anthropology as a vocation. Under the terms of my agreement with the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the deal was for me to major in geography, a choice I made on the basis that it was my only school subject that focused on human relationships within their cultural and environmental contexts. To my dismay, in my second year at Monash there was a strong sociometrical component introduced in the geography coursework which made me re-evaluate my options. It so happened that I had scored a credit for my second-year anthropology course which enabled me to opt for the subject not only as a major in the third year but also to continue with honours in the fourth and final year of my programme. Had I gone on with majoring in geography, for which I only scored a pass, I would have graduated and returned home after my third year with a general degree. But

to acquire the green light for this move, I had to personally seek permission from the head of the Anthropology Department, Michael G. Swift. Thus began my accidental journey and pursuit of my métier as an anthropologist, since I eventually found myself eligible to extend my time as a postgraduate student in the same department, mentored by Swift himself.

Swift had built his reputation as an expert on peasant societies. His own PhD research and ethnographic publication was on Malay peasant society in Jelebu, a rubber-growing matrilineal society in Negeri Sembilan (Swift 1965). As I became more immersed in anthropology, I began to realise the value placed on ethnography as a particular kind of representation of the communities studied by anthropologists. According to the norms of the time, this could only be undertaken via the participant observation method—the signature fieldwork tradition that was bequeathed by Bronisław Malinowski, one of the founders of modern British social anthropology while based at the London School of Economics, whose ideas about field research had a lasting influence on the discipline. It is a methodology that has since become anthropology's foundational mode of representation of 'other' cultures, followed religiously by generations of anthropologists through their various fieldwork endeavours in different parts of the world such as Africa, India, Oceania and Southeast Asia, including British Malaya (Asad 1973).

In following the different social anthropology courses offered at Monash, including Swift's 'Peasant Society', during my undergraduate years, I became aware of the genealogy of the anthropologists of the British school themselves. Swift was a product of the British school and was mentored by Firth who in turn had been a student of Malinowski. I also noted the genealogical connections of the British School with early exponents of Malaysian anthropology. For example, Syed Husin Ali (1964, 1975), a prominent rural sociologist who worked on social stratification and leadership patterns in Malay peasant society, undertook his master's degree under Swift at Universiti Malaya and then completed his PhD under Firth at the LSE. Similarly, Mokhzani Abdul Rahim (1973, 2006), who specialised in peasant rural indebtedness, also completed his PhD under Firth at the LSE.

My first serious introduction to Firth's *Malay fishermen* was through a library research project undertaken by my colleague H.M. Dahlan, who completed his master's degree in anthropology under Swift. While at his home institution, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Dahlan was a tutor to Shamsul A.B. while the latter was an undergraduate. After finishing his master's degree at Universiti Malaya under Syed Husin Ali, Shamsul also came to Monash to complete his PhD under Swift. He is now one of Malaysia's best-known anthropologists (Shamsul 1979, 1986, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2004). For his master's thesis, Dahlan (1973,

1976) contributed a paradigm-breaking examination of the effects of capitalism and underdevelopment on the Malay peasantry by utilising the analyses and empirical micro-studies undertaken by anthropologists in the field, including those of Firth and Swift. My second serious revisiting of Firth's work was when I was preparing for my inaugural professorial address at Universiti Malaya in which I critically reviewed the contributions of both colonial and indigenous anthropological scholarship to the analyses of the Malay peasantry (Zawawi 2009, 2010).

Malay Fishermen as an Ethnographic Contribution to Malaysian Anthropology

Before I begin a memory representation of my fishing village, it is important first to evaluate the place of Firth's *Malay fishermen* in the wider context of Malaysian anthropology. As noted earlier, ethnography has been and remains a consistent mode of representation of communities studied by anthropologists based on fieldwork utilising the participant observation method. In this regard, Firth was an important pioneer of this method, focusing his fieldwork on Malay 'peasant' fishermen and the changes affecting their livelihoods. As I discovered later, over time the traditional ethnographic method has come under criticism not least as a result of the postmodernist turn, which questioned the author-driven authority of the ethnographic text (Marcus and Fischer 1986). The new wave in anthropology also drew inspiration from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and from the deconstructionist ideas of Michel Foucault's *The order of things* (1973; see also Gardner and Lewis 1996: 21–24). Postmodernist ethnography has since become significant in empowering the researcher-anthropologist to enter into a dialogue with the 'other' as partners in a research, hence providing them with a voice rather than treating them as mere 'objects of research' (Fontana 1994). Going beyond postmodernist ethnography, the Maori Anthropologist Linda Tuhuwai Smith (1999) has taken us a step further towards indigenising research in anthropology. Closer to home, Asian scholars such as S. Hussein Alatas (1977) and S. Farid Alatas (2006) have both pursued their critiques of Eurocentric epistemologies in their quest for an 'alternative social science' (also see Zawawi 2015a: 49-50).

Malay fishermen constitutes only one component of Firth's prolific contribution to the study peasant society and the field of economic anthropology more generally, spanning a remarkable seven decades (see, for example, Firth 1929, 1939, 1959, 1963, 1975, 2003). He undertook two field trips to study fishing communities in Kelantan and northern Terengganu, focusing predominantly on Perupok. The initial research was conducted in 1939–1940, immediately before the Japanese occupation of Malaya; this was followed by another brief period of

fieldwork in 1963 in the context of a recently independent Malaysia (Firth 1966; Dahlan 1976: 103–116; King and Wilder, 2003: 159). The first fieldwork was characterised by a fishing economy that was still Malay-based and essentially non-capitalist, shaped by a rudimentary traditional technology of small fishing boats (*perahu*) utilising small sails (*layar*), fishing nets and oars. By the time of the second fieldwork, Firth was able to observe the use of modern fishing technology, capitalisation, extensive market relations, the role of financial credit institutions and the greatly expanded presence of Chinese middlemen. Dahlan (1976: 108) emphasises that Firth's analysis 'reveals a growing gap between a new *taukeh* class (i.e. an incipient but increasingly growing mercantile class comprising mainly capitalist entrepreneurs, in a rural environment) and the ordinary propertyless fishermen who formed the bulk of the fishing population'. The *taukeh* class was interpreted as being a combination of two groups—'a fisherman-cum-capitalist group and a financier-capitalist group' (ibid.) and together they constituted what Firth calls as 'the economic aristocrats of the fishing community' (Firth, 1966: 144).

Local scholars have applauded Firth's critical analysis of the emerging dominant capitalist class due the penetration of capital into the fishing economy as mirroring what was also occurring in land-based peasant economies. For example, in reviewing Firth's findings, Jomo K.S. (1986: 119) observes that:

> [t]he trend towards concentration of land-ownership in peasant agriculture appears to be matched by a similar trend in peasant fishing, at least on the East Coast.… The transformation in the relations of production in fishing has also affected the relative income of the fishermen, as the rate of exploitation has risen in capital's favour.

It is interesting to observe that a crucial analysis by Swift (1967) also highlights the 'concentration of economic ownership' in the peasantry under the new economic system mediated by British colonialism (see also Zawawi 2010: 15–18). Subsequent studies on the Malay peasantry by local anthropologists have arrived at similar conclusions as those of Firth regarding the increased concentration of wealth in the Malay peasantry under 'capitalist domination' (Syed Husin 1972; Shamsul 1979; Zawawi 1982, 2010). Further, anthropologists researching Malay fishermen in other parts of the wider Malay world, including Langkawi, southern Thailand and Brunei, have all utilised Firth's ethnography as an important reference in their analyses (see Fraser 1960; Lim 1986; Wan Hashim 1988; Carsten 1997).

Though by no means a Marxist in any thoroughgoing sense (Firth called himself a 'liberal anthropologist of socialist tendencies'), in a memorable commentary he clearly demonstrated

that he recognised 'the analytical value of certain Marxist ideas in non-capitalist or non-western societies' such as 'the processes of radical social change … from the colonial period, the expansion of market relations, the development of wage labour and the emergence of new social classes and class conflict' (Firth 1975; Parkin 1988: 366; King and Wilder, 2003: 179).

In doing so, Firth (1975: 52−53) draws our attention to 'the basic significance of economic factors, especially production relations; the relations of structures of power; the formation of classes and the opposition of their interests; the socially relative character of ideology; the conditioning force of a system upon individual members of it'. He strongly believed in the 'rational conceptions' underlying choices, but equally contended that the whole discourse of rationality must be mediated through the understanding of the relationship between the social and the economic system, and not simply understood as residing in the domain of the economy. This led Firth to argue that 'economic activity is subordinate to social ends' (Firth 1971: 153; see also Firth 1967). In the case of the emerging economic concentration and social differentiation observed in the 'modern' Malay fishing industry, Firth (1966: 348) pinpoints the fact that:

> [e]conomic processes, which had widened the gap between capitalist entrepreneurs and property-less fishermen, were not cushioned to any apparent degree by the elaborate network of kinship ties in the local social system.… The kinship ties of these fishermen do not inhabit their economic calculation, though they may soften its intensity.

He concludes:

> What seems to appear quite clearly from this analysis is the strength of economic forces in making a new kind of society. Initially at least these economic forces are not automatic; they operate through the choices of individuals. (ibid.: 346)

The main arguments of Firth's ethnography based on these two fieldwork periods are driven by a deep curiosity about the nature of social change and its relationship not only to the dynamics of very real economic processes but also to the agency—the choices—people make. My task in the rest of this article is not to deny the value of the Firth's overall approach and its critical findings to Malay peasant ethnography and Malaysian anthropology in general. However, based on my own memory of coming of age in my own fishing village in Kijal, and reflecting on the changes that have occurred since I left the village, I feel obliged to present an alternative ethnography of another east coast fishing community captured at almost the same time as Firth's Perupok. The objective is not to reject Firth's ethnography, but to present an exercise in comparative ethnography.

Historical Antecedents and Collective Memory

Kampung Che Wan is a village located in the administrative district (*mukim*) of Kijal. Kijal is situated about 120 km south of Kuala Terengganu, 60 km north of Kuantan and only about 20 km from the Pahang border. The *mukim* is an administrative constituency consisting of several villages, bordering Telok Kalong to the south and Kemasik to the north. Several villages are located along the seafront of Kijal facing the South China Sea, with Kampung Penunjuk being at the extreme southern end and Kampung Che Wan in the north of this coastal stretch. The 'land's end' of Kampung Che Wan to the north is the estuary of Sungai Kijal (Fig.2). Today there are about 60 families consisting of about 270 people living in Kampung Che Wan. Many people have left the village to pursue better job opportunities outside. Those who remain consist of fisherman, factory workers, teachers, retirees and government servants.

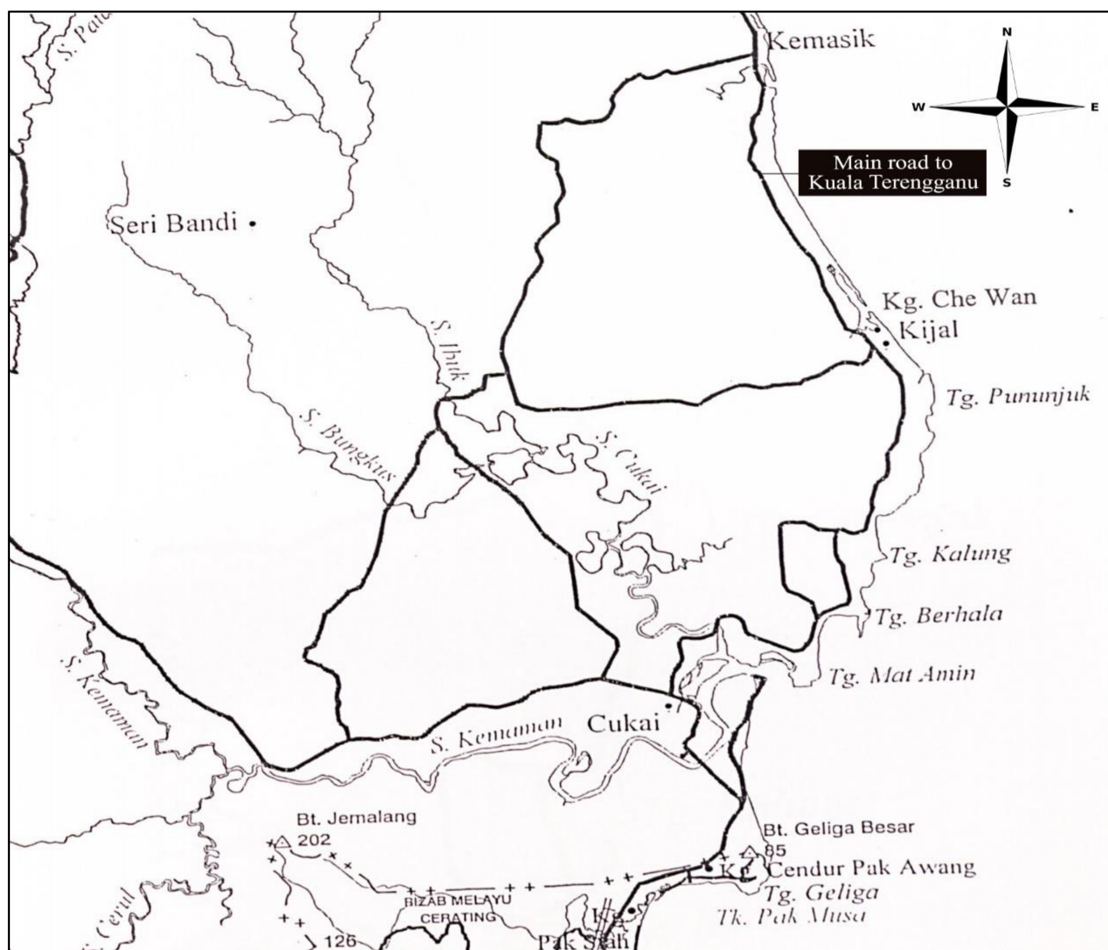

Fig. 2: Kampung Che Wan, Kijal, in relation to Cukai Kemaman and adjacent villages

The name Che Wan apparently derives from the fact that the village was founded by Che Wan ancestors who migrated from the royal household of the neighbouring state of Pahang. Following the gradual decline of Johor empire, the result of Malay–Bugis dynastic conflict, the modern Pahang kingdom came into existence with the consolidation of power by the Bendahara family in Pahang. In late eighteenth century, Tun Abdul Majid (r. 1757–1803) established himself as the first Raja Bendahara in Pahang while still owing allegiance to Johor (Andaya and Andaya 2017: 126; Trocki 2007: 25–30). The weakening of the Johor empire and a series of disputed successions to the throne gradually led to an increasing independence of the Bendahara branch of the ruling family. In 1853 the fourth Raja Bendahara Tun Ali (r. 1806–1857) renounced his allegiance to the sultan of Johor and became an independent ruler of Pahang. During his reign he was able to maintain peace and stability, but his death in 1857 precipitated a civil war between his sons, Mutahir and Ahmad. The conflict had a regional dimension since both princes sought support elsewhere. Mutahir found an ally in Temenggung Ibrahim of Johor, while Ahmad gained the support of Sultan Ali of Muar and Baginda Umar of Terengganu, who promised to help him with men, money and arms (Andaya and Andaya 2017: 153). Indeed, the initial stimulus for the Che Wans to migrate to Terengganu was due directly to the quarrel between the two brothers. The 'Brother's War' between Mutahir and Ahmad lasted from 1857 to 1863 and forced the migration of people from Pahang to Terengganu. In 1863, from his base in Terengganu, Ahmad successfully invaded Pahang, took control of important towns, expelled his brother and became the Raja Bendahara (ibid.: 154).

Ahmad assumed the title of sultan in 1881, and was acknowledged as such by most of his chiefs. Six years later, and under intense pressure, he signed a treaty with the British by which his authority was severely curtailed. In accordance with the colonial model of indirect rule, he became a ruler-in-council and acted only with the advice of the British resident and the state council, except in matters pertaining to Islam and Malay customs. In July 1895 Ahmad signed the Federation Agreement, which made Pahang, along with Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan, one of the Federated Malay States, a protectorate of the British Empire (ibid.: 175–176).

Between 1891 and 1895, anti-colonial sentiments and discontent flared up as followers of the Malay chiefs Dato' (Abdul Rahman) Bahaman, Tok Gajah and his son Mat Kilau launched an open revolt against the British, each with his own grievances with the residential system. This resulted in a prolonged series of skirmishes and ambushes that became known as the Pahang War, in which Bahaman was aided by his Orang Asli supporters. Attempts to engage Bahaman and his followers failed, but the British pushed them to take refuge in Terengganu,

where local Malays were sympathetic. But they were followed into Kelantan by British forces under the command of Hugh Clifford and with the support of Ahmad's son, Che Wan Ahmad Penglima (ibid.: 177). Sultan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu, it seems, was taken by Che Wan Ahmad and bestowed on him the title of Penglima Raja (royal warrior) and Kampung Che Wan was also given as a gift to him and his followers. He was later made an emissary by the sultan to foster the vassal relationship between Siam and Terengganu. Since Che Wan's ancestors were drawn from the Bendahara royal household, they were accorded respect and status higher than ordinary commoners.

Clearly, not all Che Wans are familiar with the historical details of their genealogical connections to the Pahang royal household. Nor would they share the same version of the narrative. As noted, many Che Wans have already left the village to work and reside in other parts of the country, and indeed some are also based overseas. Nevertheless, when Che Wans enter into conversation with one another (and nowadays these conversations are largely conducted via social media), the subject of genealogy or *asal-usul* (origins) of the Che Wans in Kijal is invariably an important subtext.

Through orally transmitted storytelling across the generations, the historical narrative in one version or another has become a 'collective memory'. In an interesting study of the cognitive features of collective memory, Henry Roediger and Magdalena Abel (2015: 359) define it as 'a form of memory that is shared by a group and of central importance to the social identity of the group's members'. They go on to show how collective memory operates in different, complementary ways: as a body of knowledge (for recall), as an attribute (the image of a people) and as a process (reshaping the past and fighting over it). Similarly, Henri Lustiger Thaler (2013) demonstrates how the sociology of memory helps unravel the dynamic interplay between individual and collective memory—the idea of the 'communicative memory'—in reimaginings of the past. For the community of Kampung Che Wan, keeping alive such a memory provides them a sense of *asal-usul*. For some, there is pride in being historically linked to a royal household, even though this connection may in strict terms be quite tenuous. And to many others, the association of their identity with ancestors from the Malay world of 'warriors' (*pahlawan*) who fought against colonial transgressors animates a present-day spirit of independence and resistance.

Social Landscape and Landmarks

I was born in 1947 and spent the first six years of my life living in Kampung Che Wan, Kijal. But for the next 16 years, until I left Malaysia to study in Melbourne in 1967, my time in Kijal was more infrequent: school holidays, Hari Raya festivities, weekend visits, family ritual feasts (*kenduri*) and burial ceremonies, or visiting sick relatives. In 1951 my father was transferred to be the headteacher of a Malay primary school in Bukit Payong, about 10 km from Kuala Terengganu, the capital of Terengganu. Today, it takes just over two hours make the journey. But in those days, the main route was interrupted by five rivers compelling the use of ferries, so that it would take almost a whole day.

I attended my father's primary school until standard six and then moved on to study at an English-medium primary school for two years until 1960. From that year onwards, when I was 13 years old, my father was transferred to work and live in Cukai in the district of Kemaman, and I studied in a secondary school there until 1964. Since it only took a 30-minute drive from Cukai to Kijal, I was able to visit the village more frequently until my paternal grandmother, Tok Wan, passed away. From 1965 to 1967 I was a full-time boarder as a higher secondary student in Kota Bharu in the neighbouring state of Kelantan, and I only visited Kijal when I was on my long holidays back home with my parents in Cukai, and mostly these were only day trips.

Fig.3 is a map of Kampung Che Wan and its key features and landmarks as I remember them from my years living in the village. As the map indicates, the village is flanked by a river, Sungai Kijal, to the west, and the South China Sea on the eastern shoreline. I remember the river was a popular playground for children to swim and have fun as the undercurrent of the sea was too strong for swimming. It was also used for bathing and washing clothes. The river estuary, Kuala Kijal, borders the northern part of the village, acting as a boundary to Kampung Che Wan beyond which is a landscape of uninhabited wetlands and the shoreline. The area of the estuary and the uninhabited land beyond was regarded then by villagers to be guarded by spirits or the supernatural, and children were reminded not to venture into the area.

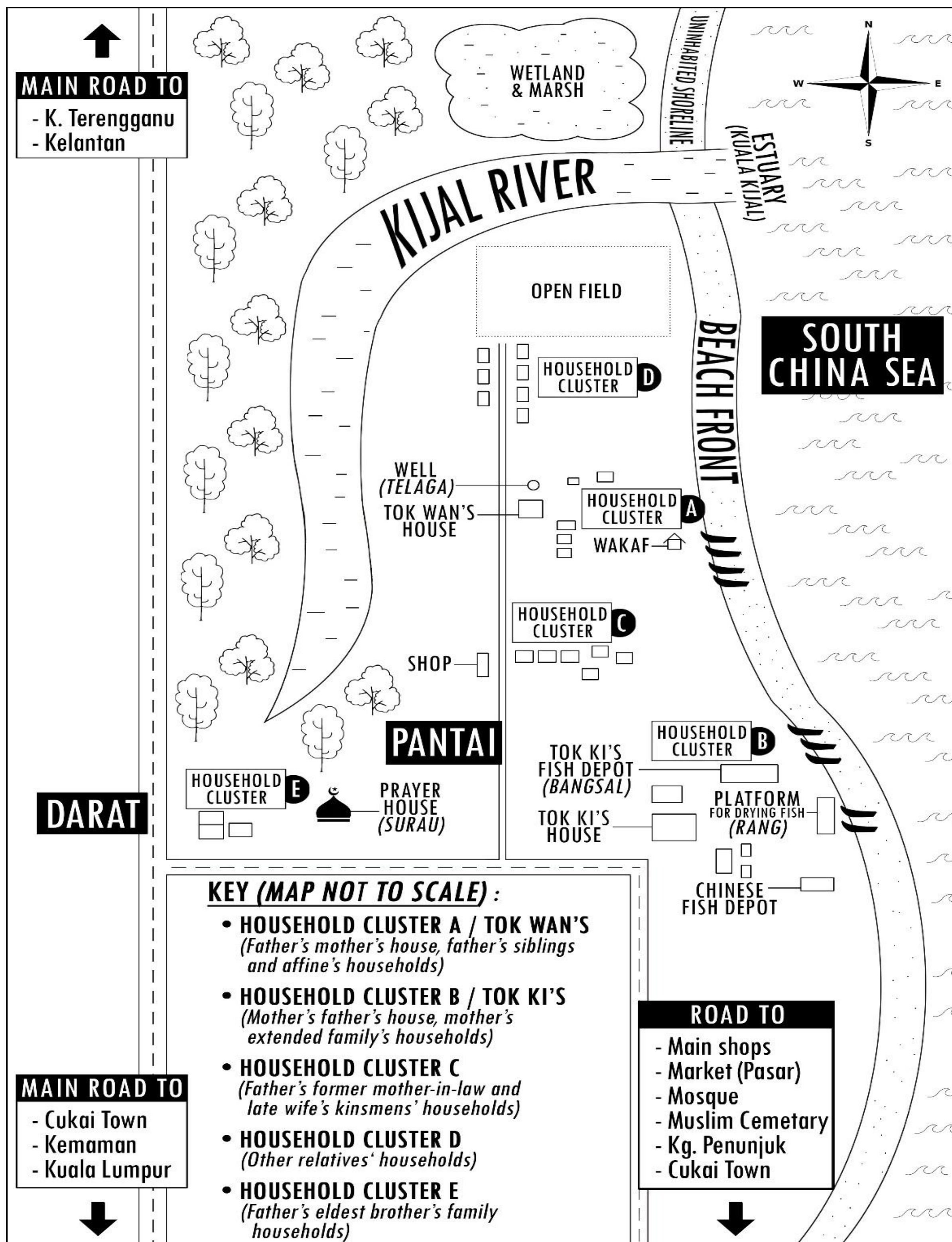

Fig. 3: Kampung Che Wan, Kijal: Landscape, Landmarks and Household Clusters

The land was sandy and flat and so you could walk to any part of the village without following any special pathway. The village was connected by road to the rest of Kijal, Cukai in Kemaman and the major cities of Kuala Terengganu, Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur. The most accessible public transport was the bus; in those days, the main express bus from Kuala Terengganu to Cukai passed right in front of the village.

The Che Wans who lived in the village referred to themselves as people of the shore (*pantai*), while those residing inland were referred to as living upland (*darat*). Logically, most of those living on the shore pursued fishing for their livelihoods, while those living inland were involved in other economic activities, either on the land (growing coconuts and fruits, including durians), petty trading or working for the government. As part of a wider community, Kampung Che Wan was linked to other villages of Kijal. So, while the village had a prayer house (*surau*), which was adequate to cater for everyday prayers and annual religious festivities, the mosque (*masjid*) was located in another part of Kijal, where Friday public prayers were normally held. The main government school, the police station, the Muslim burial ground (*tanah perkuburan*) and sundry shops were also located outside Kampung Che Wan. The village did have a small sundry shop (*kedai*) which was part of a house.

The sandy beach of Kampung Che Wan has always given the village its landscape and identity as a typical fishing settlement. Small *perahu* used by fishermen were parked on the shorefront, at a distance away from the water's edge. Dispersed nearby on the same ground were many wooden steps (*tangga*) to facilitate pushing the boats from the sea to dry land and vice versa. Fishing nets were strung out on cut-up coconut leaves on the ground, either to dry or for repair, and some were kept under some form of shelter. In the same vicinity was a *wakaf*, an open-sided shelter which provided a resting place at night for the fishermen to have a smoke or chat with friends, rest and sleep.

The settlement pattern of the village in the 1950s and 1960s comprised five clusters of households grouped together and all of them were linked by kinship relations. Household cluster A consisted of my father's siblings, the majority of whom were female with their respective affines and children. My paternal grandfather had already died by the time I was born, so the head of the cluster was my paternal grandmother, whom I called Tok Wan. Her late husband must have been a man of substance as the house she lived in stood out, like the house of a Malay 'big chief', being architecturally traditional, made of good-quality chengal wood, with *attap* roofing supported by strong tall pillars. Another interesting feature was that the kitchen was an integral part of the house. The front porch was joined by a steep traditional stairway leading to the ground. Nearby was a deep well (*telaga*) to supply fresh water for daily

use of those living in the cluster. The well itself was located on concrete paving where users, both men and women, bathed (*mandi*) as well as draw water. Women brought their laundry to wash there. Since the land was sandy and close to the sea, the well needed to be dug deep in order to reach the underground fresh water source. Such an undertaking was costly, and not affordable for many households, so those without access to a well used the river as an alternative.

Household cluster B was located very close to the main road. This was the domain of my maternal grandfather, Tok Ki. It was said that Tok Ki's father and my paternal grandfather were cousins; and when my father, who was a schoolteacher by then, married my mother, the A and B households became sealed again in marriage. This cluster consisted of a few households of Tok Ki's immediate and extended family: his mother, his siblings and their children. When I was growing up, Tok Ki was already divorced from my maternal grandmother. She left Kijal and moved to Kuala Terengganu with my uncle (mother's brother) who studied at an English school there. My grandmother married a new husband who worked with the government, while Tok Ki also remarried. She gave birth to a girl who became a sister to my mother. Both my mother and her new sister grew in Tok Ki's household until both got married and eventually left the household to lead their own family lives elsewhere. My mother's sister married another Che Wan, also a school teacher, who left to work and live in Cukai, Kemaman. After Tok Ki died, killed by a raging buffalo, she too left to live with her daughter, son-in-law and her grandchildren.

Tok Ki must have been a person of some standing as he was able to open a fish depot (*bangsal ikan*) and became an entrepreneur in the fishing industry in Kampung Che Wan. Next to his house, facing the shoreline, he built a depot where fish were processed. Outside the depot, in the open space on the beachfront, there was a raised wooden platform (*rang*) meant for drying fish processed at the depot. Next to Tok Ki's household cluster was another fish depot owned by a Chinese *taukeh*, who was Tok Ki's competitor. After Tok Ki's unexpected death, his younger brother took over the business and later went on to build a new house on the same ground.

Household cluster C is interesting as it belonged to the close kin of my father's first wife. She apparently died while still in marriage and left two boys, Che Wan Rashid and Che Wan Aziz, who became my two older brothers. They were close to these households which was headed by their grandmother, Che Wan Midah. The husband and wife, owners of the village sundry shop, were part of this cluster and adopted my second oldest brother, Azizi, as their

foster son (*anak angkat*). Both my brothers continued to live with our family after our parents moved out of Kijal.

Household cluster D consisted primarily of distant Che Wan relatives whose genealogy could only be detailed by the elders. As a young boy, I was always reminded that they were my relatives, but I never had the opportunity to meet them except on festive occasions.

Household cluster E, located inland, was headed by my father's oldest brother who had a reputation of being fierce (*bengis*). He was not a fisherman and his work was more land-based. Whenever he visited the *pantai*, he carried a long knife (*parang*). As children, we were scared of his presence and hid whenever he was around. All his children, my cousins, were males who grew up seeking jobs outside of fishing.

Overall most villagers would claim that all the Che Wans in the five household clusters were related by some form of kinship or affinal relations. But whilst members of different household clusters may interact or establish social relations between them, ultimately it would be their respective house cluster that would give them a sense of belonging, moral support, economic and emotional security. I was in a privileged position as I was part of two household clusters- that of Tok Wan (household cluster A) and Tok Ki (household cluster B). Theoretically, my two elder brothers could claim membership to the same two above household clusters, but I noted that they were more closely aligned to household cluster C of the late mother, headed by Tok Wan Midah.

Ethnographic Soundscapes and Visualscapes as Collected Memories

The concept of collective memory outlined earlier was initially developed in great depth by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. He advances the argument that in addition to individual memory there is also the phenomenon of group memory that exists beyond and outside the lives of the individual. As he puts it: 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (Halbwachs 1992: 38). This in turn helps to create what Halbwachs calls 'group consciousness' which offers the possibility of the 'commemoration of culture'. These insights have been expanded further by others. Because experiences are diverse, rather than speaking of 'collective memory', James E. Young (1993) proposes the idea of 'collected memory', the many discrete memories that are gathered together and given meaning socially. This speaks to the fact that memory is inherently fragmented and at the same time aggregated collectively. There is another legacy of Halbwachs's work that is relevant here: the recognition

that individuals, on the basis of their multiple identifications (such as family, nation or religion), are also be the carriers of multiple memories (Thaler 2013: 912). According to Thaler, then, there is a need to return to 'the centrality of the individual voice as a critical interpreter/interlocutor within … ongoing meaning-making about the past in the present' (ibid.: 915).

In attempting to recall and remember my early days in Kampung Che Wan, there was definitely a myriad of 'soundscapes' which were interwoven with their respective 'visualscapes'. This fusion then became embedded as part of my own personal, fragmented collected memories as an individual and as a member of the fishing community, and these in turn fuse with the memories of significant others who recall that particular social milieu.

This reflective exercise is not however simply a process of remembering as it also involves a sense of interpretation. It juxtaposes both my emic and etic perspectives, and blurs my insider-outsider boundaries as an anthropologist. So whilst the memory of an event maybe recalled from an insider's perspective, my interpretation of it is inevitably influenced by my own anthropological gaze and concepts drawn from anthropology. Hence the process of recall is at once a fusion of the above embeddedness and hybridity.

A particular unforgettable feature of this soundscape is surely the incessant and repetitive sound of the waves breaking against the shoreline of the South China Sea. In the daytime, with the hustle and bustle of village life, this sound became somewhat muted. But when night came, with high tide and Tok Wan's house being quite dark as it was only dimly lit by a kerosene lamp, the pounding waves unleashed the only sound audible anywhere in the village. As the shore was only 50 metres from Tok Wan's household cluster, in the darkness the breaking waves became both deafening and distant, even frightening, to a point of being anguished and sad. Sleeping in Tok Wan's house with the wind whistling through the *attap* roofing and windbreakers, both waves and winds combined forces to cast ghostly and wild boyhood imaginings in my mind. And during the monsoon, this soundscape climaxed in a crescendo of thunderstorms and heavy rains battering against the roof and timber walls, to the accompaniment of howling winds and waves pounding in all their glory.

On calmer nights, you could also hear relatives in nearby households conversing or arguing with each other before going to sleep. When it was time for night prayers, Maghrib and Isha, the village *surau* made the call with a repetitive beating of a large drum (*gedut*) followed by the *azan*, the recited call for prayers. Villagers either prayed in the privacy of their homes or at the *surau*, in which case they were led in prayer by an *imam.* Dawn was the time for Subuh prayers. But even before the call of the *azan*, in the still of the pre-dawn, you could already

hear the voices and movements of the fishermen's wives getting their husbands ready to start their daily routine. When they were ready, they went down to the shorefront to push their small boats into the water, and eventually out to the open sea to take advantage of the prevailing morning breeze.

There were also festive nights such as the celebration of Mauludul Nabi, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, when villagers gathered at the *surau* to process through the whole village while reciting verses in praise of the Prophet. In the month of Ramadan, the *surau* was a hive of night activities for the special *terawikh* prayers conducted by the *imam*. There was also expectation in the air for the eagerly awaited seven days before the end of fasting (or the beginning of Hari Raya at end of Ramadan). Days and nights were filled with various activities among household members, such as beautifying homes or fashioning lamps from tin cans to light up the compounds, or women getting together to prepare special dishes and cakes (*kueh*) for the impending festivity.

Once a year, as part of the fishing community's annual ritual, a ceremony of wooing and appeasing the spirits of the sea (*puja pantai*) was a meaningful occasion. This was both a visualscape and a soundscape, organised by Tok Ki. This ritual was a practice from pre-Islamic days, but Islamic elements such as prayers (*doa*) were also incorporated. It culminated in the launching of a colourful, decorated small *perahu*, built for the occasion, and laden with yellow rice (*nasi kunyit*) and cooked dishes. The *perahu*, accompanied by *gendang* drumbeats, chanting and prayers, then floated with the waves out to the open sea. Looking back at this visualscape as an anthropologist, I realise now how such a ritual was integral to the well-being of these fishing people. Their technology was rudimentary, so that their very economic existence depended heavily on the good fortune of fair winds and favourable weather conditions. While as Muslims they surrendered their sustenance (*rezeki*) to Allah's mercy, they still felt they had to appease and win the goodwill of the sea spirits in order to ensure good fortune whenever they were out fishing. I also noted that once the technological transition was over, and fishermen began to use outboard motors (*injin sangkut*) as a new technology, the *puja pantai* ritual slowly fell into oblivion. After my granduncle, Tok Chik, took over the fishing business from his departed brother, To Ki, the use of outboard motors became commonplace, and whenever I slept in his house I was awoken the next morning by the din coming from the whirring engines being tested by his fishermen congregating at the house compound.

After the day ceremony, night entertainment (*hiburan*) ensued. A stage was erected in a public space in front of To Ki's house for *ronggeng*, a traditional dance performed by an entourage of dancing girls (*perempuan joget*) and their accompanying musical band, which was especially brought in from the state capital to entertain the villagers. As the show began, young men from the village and other parts of Kijal took turns to buy tickets and queue up to dance with their partners onstage. There were also the traditional *mak yong* and *rodat* performances, also brought in from elsewhere, to provide the night's popular culture for the villagers.

I also remember some other nights when, out of the blue, the silence was punctuated by the sound of anxious voices and even the shouting of people bearing torches and walking hurriedly through the village. Those familiar with the village goings-on were immediately able to guess what was really happening. A child was either 'lost' or 'taken away' by the spirits, and the din was made by the village search party of close relatives or volunteers who had joined hands to help look for the lost child. There was a strong belief that beyond the Kuala Kijal estuary spirits and ghosts roamed freely. As a young boy, I was always cautioned by the elders not to play (*main-main*) in that stretch of uninhabited land, and that children were often 'hidden by ghosts' (*kena susut hantu*) or the guardians (*penunggu*) of the estuary.

Just behind Tok Wan's house was the house of Wok Siti, my father's older sister, who was a renowned healer and traditional midwife. Her unique skill was that she could induce herself in a trance and enter the body of someone 'disturbed' by the supernatural and speak to the spirits. In the process, she was able to diagnose the cause of an ailment or disturbance and normalise the patient. Of course, when such occasions arose, visitors came unannounced at any time of the night. There was a sudden burst of activity, noise or voices breaking the night's silence, and before long the place was buzzing with neighbours, passers-by and visitors. It was the memory of those strange nights of my childhood that prompted me recently to pen the following poem.

Night Song

There is a stirring of familiar spirits
triumphant among dead fields, hushed
movements of something from beyond,
chilling and curious with the moon.
And when the wind blows, it too grows—
the presence of past souls returning
to avenge with misdeeds in the morning.
Far away and only so few in night watch
they lament us with their night song.

One of the most memorable visualscapes I grew up with was the well compound facing Tok Wan's house. As is to be expected, the area around the well was always a hive of activity and traffic. Apart from the normal everyday use of the well, the compound was also a social site for exchanging daily gossip and news, especially among women. Some evenings saw them congregating on To Wan's kitchen porch or the steps fronting the well, laughing and telling stories while brushing each other's hair to get rid of lice. After Tok Wan's husband died, one of her divorced daughters, my aunt Che Sar, lived in the house to take care of Tok Wan. I was Tok Wan's favourite grandson and my early memory of the village was mostly from the experience of living in her house. So the well was the visualscape to which I woke up every morning as I joined the throng to take a bath. Every morning, too, Che Sar went about her usual routine of taking Tok Wan's goat and cow, which were kept under the house for the night, to another part of the village where they could graze. At dusk, Che Sar diligently fetched them back to the house. She also lit a small fire using dry coconut husks to smoke out the insects and mosquitoes.

When the weather was good and fishermen were able to go out to sea, the late afternoons were a source of joy. Women and children, carrying their own baskets, headed over to the beach. The sea breeze brought home the fishermen and their boats laden with the catch. We all sat on the sand to wait for any sign of the returning boats. As soon as we spotted them nearing the shore we rushed to greet them, getting wet in the process. Then by arranging the wooden steps systematically under the boats, all those who came helped push the boats from the water's edge to the dry shorefront. I normally went with Che Sar or my older female cousin whose father was coming home in his boat. Her mother was my father's older sister and her husband was a seasoned fisherman whom we called Ayah Tokol. When the fish was distributed, no money was involved, and usually everyone accepted what was put in their basket without haggling or complaint. There were a few times that I did notice the Chinese *taukeh* coming to the boat to buy fish, but at that age I felt there was nothing curious about that. I was content to bring the fish home for Che Sar to cook for Tok Wan and all of us.

On the subject of fish, one of my pastimes as a young boy was to visit Tok Ki's fish depot, the *bangsal*. This is another vivid memory I have of the village. The term *bangsal*, which literally translates as 'shack', does not really do justice to Tok Ki's fish depot as it was spacious, equipped with an office, and had rooms for resting or sleeping. It had a large open section for cleaning and boiling the incoming fish, work that involved some women as paid labour. It also had a storage compartment for keeping dry fish, including anchovies (*ikan bilis*), in boxes. There was a wide indoor walkway that started at the main beachfront entrance to facilitate the

carrying of incoming baskets of fish for processing inside. Once inside, the fish were cleaned and boiled, and then dried in the sun on the platform outside. Every time I visited the *bangsal*, I simply sat and watched in total fascination as these activities unfolded in front of me. There were also times when I bypassed the *bangsal* and simply climbed up to the platform to pick some of the cooked anchovies drying in the sun and ate them as a snack while walking back to Tok Wan's house.

I also remember the relative freedom I had growing up in the village. Wandering around the village to different landmarks was our main preoccupation as children and parents did not seem to be so controlling. One of the children's pastimes was *main sungai*, playing in the river. Normally kids did this in a group, unescorted by parents, although older brothers were supposed to look after their younger siblings. In many respects, this was how children learned to swim. But when they spent too many long hours in the river, and especially in the hot sun, parents or elders came to chase them home. The estuary was another favourite spot for the children to play in the daytime. Sometimes they went fishing there with their elders, using a casting net (*jala*). The sea was not so popular for swimming as the undercurrent was strong and dangerous. But children also played on the beach in the evening, either making sandcastles or chasing the breaking waves.

When Tok Wan was alive, she provided free Qur'an reading lessons for the children in the whole village, using the open section of her house which faced the other houses in household cluster A as a makeshift classroom. The lessons were normally conducted in the early evening before the fishermen came back to shore. After the lessons, some children played games or played house (*main rumah*) on the sandy ground. As a boy I used to join the girls playing house, cooking and other games as well the traditional game of *congok*. There was no gender taboo or elders policing us as we went about freely playing with each other.

Wedding festivities too were always occasions to be cherished and remembered. I recall a big wedding organised by Tok Ki to marry off the daughter from his second marriage, who then became my mother's new sister. She was therefore related to me as a young aunt whom I called Che Yom. As a small boy I was very close to her. She was fond of me and was caring about my welfare. She used to take me around, sometimes carrying me in her arms (*dukung*) to go for walks. On the night of the wedding, when she was the bride and had to sit on the ceremonial stage (*pelamin*) with the groom as part of the wedding ceremony (*bersanding*), the elders and my parents also decided to put me on the *pelamin* with them so as to 'ritualise' me before my future circumcision (*bersunat*). This, I learned much later, was a pre-Islamic practice which is seldom done today. During the wedding, the place thronged with numerous guests—

almost everybody in the village came and many friends of Tok Ki from outside the village graced the occasion as he was a popular figure. He was also a generous personality and highly regarded as a leader in the community. I also noticed many of my relatives helping in the cooking and preparation days before the wedding itself. In such a situation, the traditional style of mutual help or *gotong royong* was the norm: cooperation, assistance and labour based on kinship ties and obligation.

Death in any community is always a tragic event. And so it was when my favourite grandfather, Tok Ki, succumbed to the injury caused by a rampaging buffalo which attacked him in the upland area of Kijal. Apparently the buffalo had lost a contest against another buffalo and was sulking after the defeat. It seems that Tok Ki just happened to in the wrong place at the wrong time. My father was then working in Bukit Payong when news of the accident came to us via a telegram. At that time, Kijal was almost a day's journey away by land. My mother's brother, Ayah Ngah, who was then working as an assistant district officer in Besut, the northern district of Terengganu, came to fetch my whole family in his car and drove to Kijal. Upon arrival, we learned that Tok Ki had already gone to meet his Creator. So we waited for the ambulance to bring him home from Kemaman hospital. That night we all stayed awake in vigil, reading the chapter 'Ya-Sin' from the Qur'an or quietly praying for him. I remember the rising smoke from the incense (*kemenyan*) by his body, now fully covered with a special cloth. The next day, all the male family members and kinsmen walked together carrying the coffin (*jenazah*) along the road towards the burial ground (*kubur*), located to the southwest of Batu Penunjuk. Situated outside Kampung Che Wan proper, it catered for all the Malay communities in the area. The *kubur* held a special place for all Che Wans and those whose loved ones had been laid to rest there.

Hari Raya, at the end of Ramadan, was the day when most relatives in the villages visited the graveyard. This was normally in the morning just after the Hari Raya prayers in the mosque. They would arrive with their family members to clean the graves of their departed kin, read 'Ya-Sin' and say prayers. This homage was normally conducted in a family group rather than alone. It is interesting to note that some Che Wans had vowed that when their time came they wanted to be buried in Kijal even if they were working or residing elsewhere. I know of a cousin who lived in Kuala Lumpur, and after his death his relatives paid for him to be transported back by van to be buried in Kijal. Hence individual memories and the collected memories of a place could very well be aggregated to be transformed into a collective memory.

Social Change through Education and Politics

Let me return here to Dahlan's analysis of Firth's ethnography. While the dependency framework Dahlan used has been subject to various theoretical critiques and debates (Zawawi 2014), there is no denying the worth of the essential empirical findings of Firth's research. According to Dahlan (1976: 106), Firth 'observes that in the wake of greater penetration of capitalism in these areas, the ordinary fishermen were close to poverty line'. Firth (1966: 335), for his part, goes on to assert that such a situation of poverty 'is not a matter of being unable to afford luxuries, but of having to worry where the next meal is coming from'. Dahlan then proceeds to interrogate in detail Firth's four household income samples and concludes:

> Each of the … samples shows a meagre balance over ordinary household routine expenditure, excluding expenditure on items like clothing, contribution to feasts, travel expenses in visiting relatives, education and health. The margin for saving is then too small and restricted, and when subject to 'extraordinary expenditure', like … on marriage, funeral and other unforeseen contingencies, it is hardly sufficient to meet the needs of the situation. Many have to resort to financial borrowing, which once entered into, has caused, to a great majority, a vicious spiral of rising credit indebtedness. (Dahlan 1976: 108)

Dahlan further affirms that 'Firth's analysis clearly shows that the process of greater differentiation in levels of wealth had already begun by 1940. This differentiation had produced a large proportion of the ordinary fishermen finding difficulties to exist at subsistence level' (ibid.). Raymond Firth's findings also find support in Rosemary Firth's (1966) research which focused on gender and housekeeping in Perupok. In relation to the approach pioneered by peasant studies, the picture observed by both Firths, and critically reviewed by Dahlan, demonstrates the inability of ordinary peasant households in Perupok to realise what Henry Bernstein (1977, 1979) calls 'simple household social reproduction'.

From this perspective, we learn that a 'penetration' model shows how capital dictates the conditions of production and reproduction of peasant household through commoditisation. By integrating peasants into its process of exchange, through circulation, capital regulates and controls the conditions of peasant production and reproduction without itself being directly involved in its organisation. Peasant households under capitalist domination have no option but to chase adequate exchange values through the production and sale of commodities in order to underwrite their social reproduction. In times of a 'reproduction squeeze' (due to economic inflation, or price fluctuations of their commodities in the market, or when households experience loss of income because of natural calamities or other forms of exploitation), household members have to extend their hours of work in order to chase extra exchange values or experience reduction of subsistence and 'ceremonial funds', indebtedness, even loss of land.

Failure to maintain simple peasant household social reproduction through commoditisation eventually leads to poverty and further marginalisation of the peasantry, including proletarianisation through the release of younger household members for wage labour outside village society (see Zawawi 2014; Bernstein 1977, 1979).

Even though I was obviously not in a position to collect household income levels among fishermen when growing up in Kijal, from other visible indicators I had a fair idea that the majority of the Che Wans in the village were poor. Expressions by kinsmen of their economic situation varied from 'we lead a hard life' (*kita orang susah*), 'we are poor people' (*kita orang miskin*) to 'we don't have much' (*kita tak ada benda*), 'we don't have wealth' (*kita tak ada harta*) or simply 'we're not rich people' (*kita bukan orang kaya*). For instance, they regarded my two grandfathers (my paternal grandfather, who died before I was born, and Tok Ki, my maternal grandfather) as community elders of economic substance. By their reckoning, their assessment included to some extent Tok Ki's younger brother and my father's eldest brother, who would, under Islamic Law, be eligible to inherit the largest share of the landed property from their late father. The majority of the households in the community subsisted mainly at the level of 'simple household reproduction', to use Bernstein again.

In the early 1970s, when I came back to Malaysia from Australia to undertake research in a palm oil plantation in Kemaman, my data showed that a majority of the proletarianised population was drawn from the Kelantan and Terengganu peasantry. Many of the young workers were school leavers who could not find work in the village. My analysis of the data at that time revealed that conditions in rural east Malaysia were worsening, beset by all kinds of unsustainable symptoms of economic underdevelopment, with a majority of the population looking for opportunities outside the village (Zawawi 1998: 9–45).

So the logical question to ask is: were all the children of fishermen in Perupok doomed to become fishermen? I am not sure whether Firth was even asking this question as a major concern. From my reading of *Malay fishermen*, it appears that he was searching for solutions from within the framework of improving the industry itself. In contrast to Firth, whose time in observing and following the fishing community in Perupok was limited, I was able to pursue a longer-term understanding of Kampung Che Wan.

In this context, I feel that the most significant aspect of my memory of my village which differs from Firth's is the significance of education as a catalyst of social mobility. In *Malay fishermen*, First does touch very briefly on education, but this is as part of a general chapter on his observations of social change that had taken place in Perupok since the earlier fieldwork.

He never really focuses on education as something substantive that would change the lives of the villagers.

With regard to education for the Malays, the British introduced a dualistic education system, one in English and one in Malay (Roff 1967). By 1909 an English-medium school, Malay College at Kuala Kangsar, was founded primarily as an institution for the sons of the Malay aristocracy. A second notable educational initiative was the founding of Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Tanjung Malim, Perak, in 1922. Clearly, for the British the establishment of these two institutions was deeply ideological. The products of Malay College were trained for entry into the English-speaking world of government and administration and occasionally the professions. SITC, for its part, aimed to train Malay schoolteachers to return to the Malay-speaking world of the rural village school, to teach the children to be 'good peasants'. The more literate and thoughtful Malay parents did not put much hope in these schools in bringing about the required social mobility to prepare Malays for modern society. Indeed from the point of view of the British, Malay education as an agent of change was irrelevant (Tan 2013). It would only be the phenomenon of rising Malay nationalism and implemention of the findings of the Razak Report (1956) to reform the education system in Malaya in the 1950s that the situation began to change substantively.

Thus, some 17 years before Firth's first fieldwork in 1939–1940 SITC was already in place to receive rural Malays after the completion of their primary school education. In 1947, by the time I was born, my father was already a full-fledged primary schoolteacher, working in a school situated in another village in Kijal. While Malay education as an agent of change might have been 'irrelevant' as far as British policy was concerned, on the ground in Kampung Che Wan something stirred. As the story was told and retold, communicated by cousins, other relatives and elders, including non-Che Wans, the good deeds (*jasa*) and exploits of my father as a teacher (*che gu*) have now become legendary. My father was the youngest in his family and most of his kin were fishermen, including many of the husbands of his sisters. Already at a young age, when most villagers were still unenlightened about the value of education (*pelajaran*) as the new knowledge (*ilmu*) for a new world, he already had a vision and a unflinching desire to pursue such a quest. Among his siblings, he was the only one who wanted to go to school and he was steadfast in his stand despite receiving little encouragement and even some resistance from his people. Tok Wan used to tell me how my father would jump from the window to run to school in order to escape from home. In the end, he became the first school pupil (*anak murid*) from Kijal to make it to SITC, until he qualified and came home as a *che gu*.

It should be noted that in this early phase of 'modernisation' of Malay society, there was prestige and high social value accorded by ordinary villagers to Malays who were able to join the salaried class, as civil servants or as teachers (Swift 1965; Syed Husin, 1964, 1975). Growing up in an east coast Malay society, I was constantly made aware of how the term *che gu* always carried a strong connotation of respect and deference (*hormat*) in the context of everyday social perceptions and interactions. So as the story of his exploits grew, he was described as *bekeng* (a vernacular Terengganu term which means 'fierce'), apparently a trait that my kin always associated with the Che Wans, supposedly inherited from their warrior (*pahlawan*) ancestors. However 'rudimentary' an education he received in SITC, he came back home relentless (and *bekeng*) in his pursuit of ensuring that the children of Che Wans went to school to embrace this new knowledge.

He apparently 'forced' (*paksa*) all my cousins, the children of his siblings, to attend the school where he was the *che gu*. He was not shy to use the cane (*rotan*) in school and showed no favours to children of his own kin. Through time, he began to acquire a reputation as a teacher who was fierce but highly principled, and with a strong sense of discipline. Throughout Kijal he was known by the nickname Che Gu Che Wan, and as I followed him to his different postings outside Kijal the same reputation persisted among outsiders. In Bukit Payong, for instance, I remember the fraternity of the villagers and townspeople who supported his tenacity and commitment to educating their children and raising the quality of the school despite his reputation of being *bekeng*. On the last few days before he left for his new posting in Cukai Kemaman, I remember the constant stream of villagers and his former *anak murid* who came to bid farewell to him in our house which was located in the school compound. There was also a final night of entertainment and celebration in the school field, attended by the whole village, which was organised by his former students as a way of showing their gratitude to him.

I could name those among my Che Wan kin who were mobilised by my father's persistent efforts to offer an alternative to the life of a fisherman. My mother's brother, for instance, spent his early schooling being taught by my father before he moved with his mother (my maternal grandmother) to Kuala Terengganu to continue his studies in an English-medium school. He completed his Senior Cambridge exams, then became an assistant district officer and was later promoted to district officer in the Terengganu state civil service. Eventually he competed his law degree at Lincoln's Inn in London, and returned home to head the Terengganu civil service as the secretary of state. He continued to serve under several chief ministers (*menteri besar*). But my uncle could not see eye to eye with one particular chief minister, over the latter's constant attempts to subjugate the bureaucracy to his personal politics. My uncle took the

honourable way out by resigning from the highest-ranking post in the state bureaucracy. Most Che Wans applauded his decision as they felt that he was maintaining the integrity of the kin as warriors (*pahlawan*). One of his daughters studied in Britain, married an Iraqi engineer and now lives in Cardiff with four children. There they are British citizens, but are also part of a flourishing Muslim community in Cardiff.

From household cluster A, my father's older sister who was married to Ayah Tokol, a fisherman, had three boys. The eldest, Che Wan Wahab, went to school and became a teacher. At a young age, he excelled in Malay literary writing. His two younger brothers schooled with me at Sultan Ismail School, the English-medium school in Cukai Kemaman. The elder of the two graduated in Britain and came back to join politics; his younger brother became a police officer of a special branch unit in Kuala Lumpur. In this context, the multiplier effects of this social mobility for the next generation of Che Wans should also be noted. Che Wan Wahab's children, both girls and boys, all qualified for university education. The eldest, for instance, specialised in skills relating to the oil industry and has had international postings in Canada and Brunei.

My father's nephew, who married my aunt, Tok Ki's daughter Che Yom, was also a teacher. He left to head a Malay primary school in Kuala Kemaman after Tok Ki died and the family started a new home in Cukai Kemaman. His eldest son successfully graduated in engineering from a British university and came home to start a successful company of his own in Kuala Lumpur.

From household cluster E, my father's eldest brother had three boys. After schooling in Kijal, one joined the army and another the police force, while another cousin, Che Wan Chik, pursued further studies in Anderson School, a private English school in Perak. He became a temporary teacher for a while. He was very close to me and our immediate family. He often came to visit and stayed with us after we left Kijal for Bukit Payong and Cukai Kemaman. He was always generous with his time and was always around to help the family. When I was undertaking my PhD fieldwork in an oil palm plantation in Kemaman, he was working in the same plantation as a cadet officer and facilitated my fieldwork there. At the end of my research, he accompanied me all the way to Singapore by car laden with a chest full of my fieldnotes, to catch my Greek passenger ship, *Patris*, back to Melbourne.

As far as our own family is concerned, Che Wan Aziz became a close brother to me as we went to school together, from an initial Malay primary school to an English primary and secondary school, until I left for my higher secondary education in Kota Bharu and eventually to Melbourne. He became a teacher in an English secondary school in Cukai. In the case of my

oldest brother Che Wan Rashid, by standard four he had already been admitted to Malay College, after the school was opened up for ordinary Malays. He went on to become a teacher in a secondary school, and later went overseas for his PhD majoring in English at a US university. He came back to join Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Apart from me, my mother also gave birth to three younger siblings. My younger brother went to art school and did art and design for a private company. My sister was admitted to a Malay girls' college, the counterpart to Malay College. She proceeded to do a master's degree in New Zealand following her husband who was pursuing his PhD there. She returned home to work at Bank Negara and later with Maybank. My youngest brother ended up a teacher after finishing his English secondary education and qualified as a teacher at the Teachers' Training College in Kuala Lumpur. He later joined the Terengganu state administration to manage aspects of state education.

All my own children received a university education. The oldest, Johan, born an Australian graduated in engineering in the University of New South Wales and became an engineer in Sydney. My second oldest, Rendra, graduated from Berklee College of Music in Boston and now works as a composer-cum-producer in Los Angeles. His younger brother, Hameer, majored in game development at an international university in Kuala Lumpur, and then decided to become a singer-songwriter after making a name for himself on the Kuala Lumpur indie circuit. He spent a year touring and playing in Europe and the United States, finally making New York his home base and forming a band there. My youngest, Kaisha, graduated in vocals from an institute of modern music in Brighton, Britain, with a degree conferred by Sussex University. After graduation she stayed on in Brighton to pursue her dreams in music, through composing, singing with a band and releasing records.

These empirical details clearly demonstrate and reflect the multiplier effects of my father's pioneering move in seizing upon education as a means for advancing social mobility, albeit in its incipient form. The impact on the Che Wans across generations, not only those who were born in the village but also those of the newer generation who have moved to live elsewhere, has been tremendous.

Apart from education, another field of empowerment for the Che Wans was politics. On the nation's road to independence in 1957, Tok Ki's younger brother, my granduncle, who took over the fishing business after Tok Ki's demise, joined the political party led by the first prime minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and successfully contested as a people's representative (*wakil rakyat*). He held the post for two terms and was also appointed as the first speaker of the Terengganu state legislative assembly. In this campaign, he had the full force of

support not only the Che Wans in general but especially Che Wan teachers who rallied to campaign for him. Unlike the 'money politics' which tarnished Malay political aspirations by the 1980s (Shamsul 1986), this initial phase was driven by a kind of idealism. Teachers were inspired by the positive role models of nation-building, wanting to contribute to their people through political empowerment under the banner of the multiracial Alliance coalition banner, comprising the United Malays National Organisation, Malaysian Chinese Association and Malaysian Indian Congress. Remembering the village from today's vantage point is to recall these two powerful episodes of empowerment—of education and politics—as a brand-new chapter to the narrative and memory of a small fishing village named Kampung Che Wan.

Conclusion

History, it has been said, is the prerogative is of civilisation, especially Western civilisation. As Uli Linke (2015: 181) cogently puts it:

> The prerogative to know and control the past, by defining it as 'history' (an order of chronological or linear time), was an entitlement of civilization. The social worlds outside of Europe came to be marked as timeless: a closed symbolic universe inhabited by the 'people without history' … The past as history became a way to construct schemes of classification that differentiated Europeans from others. (see also Wolf 1982)

It was the British social anthropologist E.E. Evans Pritchard (1962: 177–178) who suggested that memory could be part of a valuable ethnographic toolkit since the past was always 'encapsulated in a context of present thought'. Hence the past, as memory, was embedded in material, ritual and narrative practices that were accessible as 'part of the social life which the anthropologist can directly observe'. In this way, an understanding of collective memory would become a major goal of ethnographic practice. However, this pursuit of memories was not without its own problems. For example, according to John and Jean Comaroff (1992: 21), in the colonising imagination of Western anthropologists, memory, and the other's means of remembering 'were always seen to reinforce the system in place, never to transform it', so as to keep alive the myth and the anthropological fascination with 'unchanging' societies. The use of memory as an ethnographic practice, then, can and has been used in a profoundly ahistorical manner.

In contrast, my own research on storytelling—which is a form of memory and remembering—I have been inspired by the notion of remembering and memory as a historical and political project, ultimately, an indigenising research project -an approach espoused by

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) Remembering becomes a way of symbolising resistance , of reclaiming identity, a sense of place, territory and stewardship , in the context of social change and transformation (Zawawi 1996, Richards and Zawawi 2011; Zawawi and NoorShah 2012; Zawawi 2015b; Zawawi 2016; Zawawi and Lin 2021). Memory becomes a part of the community's creative imaginings and agency, of linking collective memory and fragmented collected memories (including various everyday soundscapes and visualscapes) to empower people with a sense of place and identity in coming to terms with a changing society, and to move forward or even to look back, proud and dignified. As Roediger and Abel (2015) remind us, the kind of collective memory I have presented manifests itself as a form recall, as a self-image of a people and as a process of reshaping the past from different vantage points. In contrasting the memory-based ethnographic representation of my fishing village to that of Firth's fieldwork-based ethnography, my perspective goes beyond the economism of the latter, to move ethnography as a more humanising and indigenising discourse. In doing so, it provides an alternative, complementary narrative to *Malay fishermen*.

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