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The Sacred Canopy: Narratives, Stories and Culture in a Malaysian Organisation

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In the name of Allah,
The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful

Dedicated to my mother, my late father, my brothers, my sister, my in-laws, my extended family, Noor Hasnah, Siti Aisyah, Muhammad Idris, Muhammad `Ammar and Huda Sofiah for their love and patience.

The sacred canopy:
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Abstract

The starting point for this research is the importance of narrative in our life. Many scholars regard it as the organising principle by which people organise their experience in, knowledge about, and transaction in the social world. Indeed, authoring and co-authoring narratives have been cited as among the most important communicative actions in an organisation.

This study adapts Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm to explore how organisational members view their reality. Human beings in this view are seen as *homo narrans* --- both as storytellers and objects of storytelling. Narratives act as vehicles through which organisational members can offer definitions and explanations of their work life. They act as a metacode transmitting shared meaning. As a consequence, members establish definitional boundaries through which they judge and understand the situation at hand.

Recognising the limitations of this paradigm, the analysis in this research study adds Pacanowsky's (1983) application of Geertz's (1973) cultural insights to organisational life. To Pacanowsky, organisational culture is the residue of employees' performances. To Geertz, such performances are an ensemble of texts.

In summary, the following main perspectives informed this research:
a) Human beings are storytellers
b) Culture is the root metaphor of organisational life
c) Organisational culture is a text
d) A text must be read and interpreted in the meaning-making process.

To reflect this theoretical perspective, hermeneutics was used as the method of inquiry. A series of in-depth interviews were conducted over time to gather data on the use and content of narratives within a Malaysian organisation, Palmyra.

During a period of change, stories and narratives are often 'emotional' in nature. This is understandable as change brings a new arrangement of reality. At Palmyra, an organisation that deals primarily with language and literature, the narratives and stories revolved around what was called the 're-inventing programme'. Besides re-positioning staff and offices, management aimed to 'bring religion back to the workplace' and this became an important agenda in the whole planned change.

This approach to organisational change views change as a matter of body, mind and soul. The stability of nafs (the inner self) is regarded as important, and organisation is seen as a moral problem. This research shows how this approach can be understood in the light of the tawhidic paradigm.

The implementation of the change programme brought many important undercurrents (shadows) to the fore, and these were reflected in the narratives, which emerged. Tribalism or parochialism was one of them. The organisation members who felt displaced responded through various means. Among others, they utilised the power of literature and hidden transcripts. Many ancient and classical

texts were given new interpretations. Various forms of *halus* (refined and indirect) were identified as ways of communicating their unhappiness. While sharing many of the themes, which can be identified in European and American research on organisational change, these forms of resistance used methods and symbols, which were distinctively Malaysian.

This research study makes a number of important contributions to organisational communication studies. In particular:
1. It adds new knowledge to an understudied area in organisational communication, namely the analysis and significance of stories in the workplace.
2. It also contributes to another underrepresented area of study, namely the religious aspects of organisational communication culture.
3. It demonstrates the value of qualitative research methods in organisational communication studies in Malaysia, where previously quantitative methods have been dominant.

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Introduction

A tree that grows beyond your reach

springs from a tiny seed

a building more than nine stories high

begins with a small mounds of earth

a journey of a thousand li

begins with a single step

(Tao, 64)

PROLOGUE

This chapter is about locating myself in the construction of this research. I begin with the context that shaped this engagement. This text is an account of a Malay man in the process of a learning journey. I was once a caterpillar. I had no idea about butterflies. It is like fish not understanding what water is; they never talk about water but just swim in it. The familiarities of working in the Palmyra, a language and literature agency, for more than ten years bred 'fog in the bowl'. To use a phrase by Wallemacq (1998), I was under the 'charm' of Palmyra. The question of understanding the Sigmoid Curve was not in my mind.
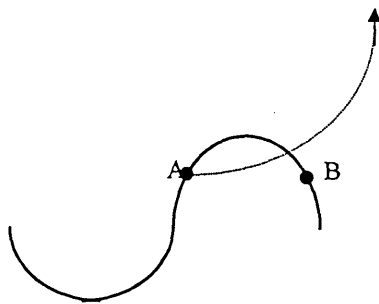
Figure 1. *Sigmoid Curve*

This curve, according to Handy (1994), sums up the story of life itself: "We start slowly, experimentally and falteringly, we wax and we wane" (p. 50). Handy argued that the secret of constant growth is to start a new curve before the first one peters out, and the right place to start is at point A where everything is going fine. But I had ignored this advice. For many years I followed the contour of the first curve mundanely even though it had shown signs to dip downwards toward B. I was becoming a 'wet leaf'. In the East, this metaphor means to stick around as if there is no other place to go.

Suddenly, one morning in 1992, I found myself not understanding and not finding a compassionate Palmyra. The 'magical circle', which seduced me for such a long time, was broken. At that time Palmyra was 'hot' with "new realities," to paraphrase Drucker (1989). In that new reality I could no more feel Palmyra's humanity, its aliveness, a situation which Weick (1999) describes as "the loss of the sense of living forwardness." This was a period of "emotional toxicity" (Frost, 1999, p.130). Following the wisdom of taking refuge in 'cold' places as Malays always do when it is 'hot,' I took the literal meaning of the metaphor by going to the West.

Now, on the basis of research as an engagement (Morgan, 1983), I am taking a return journey to Palmyra. Why should I choose Palmyra as my site of organisational communication engagement? Am I becoming another Lomax (i996) - the man who confronted his past at the Kwai River after being tortured by the Japanese during the World War II? Anyway why should I not return?

Perhaps, what Chuang Tzu said is very relevant here (as quoted by Siklos, 1988):

> A man was terrified of his shadows, and disliked his footprints. Intending to get rid of them, he started running, but the more often he raised his feet as he ran, the more number of footprints came and however fast he ran, his shadows still followed him... Foolish man, if he stayed in the shade, he would have no shadows; if he had been still, there would be no footprints. (p. 13)

In Jungian terms, this journey is best described as a journey to face a dragon. The animal is a symbol of shadows that rage our unconscious. According to Dreher (1997, p.256) the test of the dragon brings up all the unresolved anxieties, old hurts and fears. So facing the inner dragon is the ultimate test of confronting ourselves. In Malay culture,

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such a dragon is strongly related to *nafs* (the concupiscent self). When a bad *nafs* rage in humans, the body and the mind become chaotic and disordered.

In many ways a journey to Palmyra is like al Mustafa in <u>The Garden of the Prophet</u> (Gibran, 1933/1996) upon entering a harbour after years away.

> Yet, it is pain I make pilgrimage to the isle where I was born, even likes unto ghost of one slain come to kneel before those who have slain him. (p. 4-5)

At one level, this journey is to transform the Sigmoid Curve into the natural rhythm of self-learning. So the down curve is no more the faltering period but the rest and recovery period (Harrison, 1995, p. 47). Symbolically, this journey is a work of purifying the *hati*.[1] In Malay culture, *hati* is the "mysterious organ, which is believed to control the moods and the emotions, ... and to command more permanently human psyche and personality in both a psychological *(zahir)* and spiritual *(batin)* sense" (Wazir Karim, 1990, p.26). Metaphorically, *hati* is said to be a mirror of the soul. Thus, when one behaves badly, the ugly, dirty black dot sprinkles on the mirror. Simply, this journey is a personal therapeutic quest to 'clean my mirror; it is the quest for the cure of the body (Osterrith, 1997, p. 27).

This return journey on the other hand is implicitly a journey of learning. This journey can be best seen in the light of experiential learning: having an experience, reviewing an experience, concluding from experience and planning the next steps of action. Such understanding I believe is similar to Morgan's (1983): "In research we meet ourselves" (p. 405).

As an object of study, Palmyra is rich with meanings and a repository of many understandings. So how should I comprehend Palmyra? Which way to look? Palmyra is an organisation engaged in Malay literature and language, and most staff play and work with 'words.' In it reside many writers, editors, poets, dramatists and artists. Metaphorically and literally, Palmyra is a 'narratives avenue' where language and literature are fully utilised as a mode of knowing, as communicating mode, and product.

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[1] This Malay word is often (mis)translated into English as heart though heart is *jantung* in Malay. Indeed both *jantung* and *hati* are inter-related as seen in the proverb *jantung hati*. The proverb has a strong association with love and feelings.

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At this point I thank Pepper (1942) for giving me a departure point.

> A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension He letches
> upon some area of common-sense fact end tries to see if he can understand other areas in term of
> this one. (p. 91)

Thus I argue that it is most sensible to comprehend Palmyra through the narratives, specifically stories, performed by the staff and the management.

Also, I wish to explore the trust shown by contemporary human sciences in "tales" (Kreiswirth, 1992). A narrative is claimed to be a primary way through which humans organise their experiences into temporarily meaningful episodes, acting as both modes of reasoning and as mode of representation: "People can apprehend the world narratively and people can tell about the world narratively" (Richardson, 1990, p.118). Such centrality in our lives is best summarised by de Carteau (1984):

> Stories are the integral part of our recited society, and such claim can be clearly seen in three
> senses. It (the society) is defined by stories... by citations of stories, and by the interminable
> recitation of stories. (p. 186)

Both narrative and story are nearly equivalent terms (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.13). Ethnographically, at least to Van Maanen (1988), stories are defined as "tales of the field." Stories are, among others, the [researcher] self-reports, various documents, field notes, and the like (Czarniawska, 1997a, p. 78). Polkinghorne (1988) and Denzin (1997) on the other hand make a distinction between the two terms. To them, narrative is a performative process of making or telling a story. In other words, narrative is the form and story is the content, a point strongly supported by Fiese and Sameroff (1999, p.6). In this research, I view narratives as a general or inclusive term for stories or accounts of events or experiences: fact or fiction; long or short; detailed or plain.

One should note that a narrative related tradition is nothing new to the Malays. Such a tradition is well entrenched in the word *bahasa,* translated officially as language. However *bahasa* is more than a 'vehicle for conversation' as it is also intimately related to their way of life. This can be seen in the various phrases and proverbs Malays use to

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relate to *bahasa.*[2] Similarly, *homo narrans* (narrator) plays an important role in Malay culture, whether as a puppeteer, medicine man or story teller; a point clearly shown in many works in literature and language, or in sociological and anthropological related disciplines. However, research on narratives and *bahasa* in organisational communication studies remains underdeveloped. Thus, this research engagement is an attempt to develop interest, awareness and relevance of such usage.

THEORITICAL AND RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

My decision to embrace narrative in this organisational communication engagement is related to the spur of 'alarm' mentioned by Clarkson (1994) in a conference on change. According to her, old paradigms seem to have lost their usefulness, inspiration and sometimes values, and the present demands new ways of being, thinking and behaving. Ironically, it may seem that what is termed as new often ends up as the re-discovery of the lost. Indeed such 'looking back' is gaining importance lately (Cumming, 1996).

One such re-discovery is the importance of 'culture" in organisational communication studies. At present organisational communication culture is one of the important areas of studies and research, at least in North America, as shown in the following works, among others: Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1983); Borman (1983); Smircich and Calas (1987); Barnett (1988); Martin and Siehl (1990); Putnam and Cheney (1992); Streek (1994), Pepper (1995) and Carlone and Taylor (1998).

Indeed the profound effect of culture on the discipline of organisational communication has disrupted the discipline's long affiliation with practical [managerial] interests such as profit, efficiency, and control. With the widespread "culture revolution," attention is now being redirected towards the holistic, collaborative and contested construction of social realities in the workplace.

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[2] *Ada bahasa*   (Having a language) refers to the cultured behaviour.
Bunga bahasa (language flower) refers to flowery language, which includes metaphor.
Budi bahasa   refers to cultured, graceful behaviour.
Gila bahasa   refers to *crazy* behaviour.
Tikaman bahasa (language stabbing) refers to the indirect, implicit language as a result of *ada bahasa* or *budi bahasa.* It could also be due to certain constraints (for example, social or political) or just merely to show off.

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Carlone and Taylor (1998) describe this paradigm shift as follows:

> Organisational communication now shimmers and reappears as cultural communication as and about organisation. (p. 340)

Here, in this engagement I define organisational communication in terms of 'organising is communicating'. Organisational communication is seen as communication processes which organisational 'creatures' organise themselves around in order to get things done.

The rediscovery of culture in turn led to another rediscovery, that is, of narratives in communication studies (Fisher, 1984). Knowing the nature of anthropology, from where culture originated, such rediscovery was expected. As noted by Cooper (1995), anthropology is firmly entrenched in the communicative act of narratives.

> The use of narratives in anthropology is evidenced in two primary ways, namely as factual accounts of past events by informants, and as performed communication by storytellers and audience. (p. 131)

A narrative is more 'visible' and is seen as a type of communication that can be analysed to reveal the most important characteristics of the organisational structure, and to reveal the critical feelings and perceptions that the members of the organisation have about the nature and culture of the organisation. At present organisational communication narratives research comes under the family of "cultural perspective" (Putnam and Cheney, 1992, p. 83-84). Subsequently, stories, (the major concern of this engagement), were interwoven in that rubric (Kelly, 1985; Mumby, 1987; Kreps, 1989; Brown, 1990; Browning, 1992).

In an organisation, stories are regarded as a symbolic form by which groups and organisational members construct shared meanings, and even act on those meanings. Stories of experience often bring to light unresolved dilemmas and tensions. Stories also illustrate the stream of choices, problems, opportunities, and decisions that characterise organisational life. They can also suggest power and control, and a manifestation of ideology (Browning, 1992; Mumby, 1988), especially in a speech community. In such a case, stories are a form of knowledge. In similar vein, stories are signs of the multiplicity of voices of the various people in the organisation.

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Research has shown that stories and story telling can be a reliable instrument for understanding the dynamics of relationships in an organisation (as referred to in Feldman, 1990). They serve as a means of transmitting behavioural expectations. In some cases stories can be seen as tribal or cultural codes that help employees make sense of their workplace. To a practitioner, stories seem to be a powerful means of measuring various components of culture as the phenomena underwrite multifaceted reality construction and plurality of voices. In many cases, they are voices of the 'disordered' silenced (Gabriel, 1995; Höpfl, 1994).

Implicitly, stories can operate to provide order (Alvesson and Berg, 1992); and continuity in an organisation (Browning, 1992); and become a kind of third order control (Wilkins, 1983). Over the last years, stories have been recognised as an important 'container of emotions' (Gabriel, 1991; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996).

The use of narrative in this research engagement is also significantly related to growing dissatisfaction with the common explanation of organisational communication as a "linear chain" (such as in Clampit, 1991). I view communication as not simply the transfer of information that leads to action, nor as a message given, with a message and a receiver, but more as a process of making meaning. In this regard I define meaning-making as an activity that highlights the notion of agency, of constituting process, of personal involvement and purpose.

Meaning-making and the search for meaning are one of the important areas of concern in the organisational communication today. This is in line with the important idea that communication does not act like a "conduit". In organisations, meaning must be managed. Therefore meaning must be shaped. This involves manipulation, and it can be political in nature (Frost, 1987; Mumby, 1988; Stevenson and Bartunek, 1996). The concern with meaning, how it is expressed (often in the form of stories and the usage of metaphors), how it is understood, and the consequences for behaviour in organisations, in many ways extends the existing research literature (as discussed by Bate, 1994; Pepper, 1995) on the subject.

Yet, meaning-making often seems to be seen as more to do with 'mind work,' having little to do with the heart. We are left with an image that people in organisation are

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humans who think a lot, plan, plot and struggle to make order. Emotions such as anger, pain, and passion are often not heard in the centre, lust in the margins - a rather strange situation as they are 'there' in all communication practices. This omission is clearly visible in almost all organisational communication texts. "Emotions in organisational communication are understudied" (Waldron, 1994). They are like "stepchildren that stand at the periphery" (Guerrero, Andersen and Trost, 1998). This deficiency became a spurring point for me to explore issues on emotions further. My emphasis assumes that the organisation is an emotional arena (Fineman, 1993).

Summarily, research shown in published literature suggests that the narrative approach by which stories become the main data can reveal aspects of the organisational dynamics that are difficult to uncover using conventional methodologies. I share this belief that organisational stories reflect member's perception and knowledge.

In sum, the significance of this research engagement is based on the following concerns:

- Growing interest in organisational communication culture
- The need for a more complex view of communication in organisations
- The importance of stories in understanding organisation communication
- The importance of recognising the presence of emotion in the workplace

On a lighter note I hope this engagement will give readers more understanding about Malay emotions and culture, not merely about *amok* that has achieved a 'notorious' recognition in Western vocabularies.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Before taking the journey to the West, I was listening to and heard a lot of narratives in Palmyra. Most of the themes revolved around order and disorder in the workplace. Surprisingly, no staff were known to move out during the period. They stayed on, and they continued complaining about their sufferance, frustration, confusion, pain and despair. What was common among them was their hope for change.

Change is a word of multiple meanings and contradictory interpretations; I would like to mention several points related to it. Often, change is believed to be an act of "improvement and it is made due to "some benefits in mind" (Abrecht, 1983; French and Bell, *1990)*. However, change can bring not only positive and progressive developments, but also unintended and unanticipated changes such as ambiguity. To some theorists, ambiguity is an assault on unity and order, and it is characterised by uncertainty, contradiction, confusion and lack of rationality (Alvesson, 1993). Such a situation breeds fear of the unknown and loss of control over one's own destiny (Höpfl, 1994, p. 20-31). In other words, change can be threatening and stressful and can disrupt established social patterns, and can beget ethical dilemmas. Thus it is no coincidence that planned change can be perceived as tyrannical behaviour and/or as a controlling game played by the management (McKendall, 1993). In other words, change is Janusian in character.

With the nature of change mentioned above, people must make sense of it in order to repair' their "ruptures and discontinuities, shocks and interruptions" (Czarniawska Joerges¸ 1997b, p.114). It is an act of meaning-making (Clarkson 1994) in which people must find new directional markers. This type of sense making is best understood as "the process whereby (people) interactively creates social reality, (later] becomes organisational reality" (Boyce, 1995, p.109). Meaning is related to symbolic interaction. Indeed, meaning is what symbols stand for (Simms et. al., 1993). Work itself is a search for meaning (Terkel, 1974, p. 1).

In relation to the above, the quest for meaning often involves manipulation of symbols such as images. Such manipulation indeed enables meaning to be created, deconstructed, negotiated, elaborated and multiplied. The very nature of meaning therefore gives birth to meaning-making behaviours in an organisation. It is this that really excited and fascinated me to conduct a study in meaning-making behaviour in Palmyra, especially in the period of its "paradigm shift," a period which started with the coming of a new Chief Executive Officer in 1994. According to Capra (1982), a paradigm shift is a shift with "a profound change in the thoughts, perceptions, and values that form a particular vision of reality" (p.30).

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In the case of Palmyra, the workplace paradigm shift was largely about reclaiming religion and religiosity to the workplace. It was about putting spirituality back on its pedestal after years of being in the state of "colonialibility" (Barium, 1992). According to Simpson (1997), aspects of religion such as faith are not often referred to in recent management literature, except sometimes in passing (Bell and Taylor, 1999).

At present, work that discusses religion and organisation issues largely comes under the rubric of ethics, spirituality in the workplace and organisational learning. The Journal of Organizational Change Management (JOCM) has taken a special interest in these topics. (See Volumes 7/1,1994; 10/2,1997; 12/1,1999; 12/3,1999; 12/4,1999). However, analysis of religion and organisation remains undeveloped, especially with relation to organisational communication culture studies. Work concerning Muslim organisations, particularly in the context of Malaysia, are even rare (Abdul Rahim and Goddard, 1998).

I view the above paradigm shift at Palmyra, as an act of placing the organisation under the "sacred canopy," to paraphrase Berger (1990) - hence the title for this dissertation. However to cite Berger alone as my source of inspiration is not fair as the idea of being under a "canopy" is not alien to the people at Palmyra nor is the term sacred. Both terms are clearly spelled out in their official song though not in a single sentence.

PROPOSITION

This research engagement is quasi-ethnographic in nature (Bate, 1997). The case study, based on formal nine months fieldwork over the period of three years (July, 1997 - January, 1999), identifies the narratives in the form of stories, which Palmyra members use to represent the organisation, analysing underlying meanings associated with them On the basis of this study, an appropriate methodology to analyse the said narratives in Malaysian culture is developed.

Broadly speaking, qualitative research is employed in this engagement and the rich reservoir of Malay studies (in understanding the Malay culture) and social anthropology (borrowing its methodology and its terms) is tapped. As qualitative research embraces a

broad, interpretative and critical sensibility, as well as humanistic and naturalistic conception of human experiences with multiple methodologies, I see myself as a man trying to do a 'collage'. In performing my work, I have to use a large number of diverse tasks ranging from interviewing to observing, from interpreting personal or historical documents, to intensive self-reflection. So this research becomes a kind of interactive process whereby it is shaped by my personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and by those people in their setting.

This dissertation is a compilation of narratives about the world as experienced by my informants. Their narratives are couched and framed within specific story-telling traditions, which are often defined as paradigms. They reside in the interpretative square if one is referring to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) matrixes. Narratives presented in this work are collages: complex, dense and reflexive-like creations. Thus, this dissertation represents my comprehension, understandings and interpretations about the world under analysis.

In this study I adopt hermeneutics as the *tiang seri* (the main and mystique pillar of old Malay houses). Briefly, hermeneutics is about interpretation and understanding mutually between the researcher and the researched about facts within the context of meaningful actions (Bleicher, 1980; McAuley, 1985; Gummeson, 1991; Thachankary, 1992; Mercier, 1994; Allen, 1995; Healy, 1996; Butler, 1998; Hostetler, 1999).

My decision to adopt this hermeneutical perspective is fairly straightforward. Humans are interpretative beings. This position is widely held today by many, including for example, the scientist (Maturana and Varela, 1980), anthropologist (Geertz, 1973), and organisational communication scholar (Deetz, 1994). Inquiry in the hermeneutic style is governed by the hermeneutic cycle: questioning present experience, reflection/theorising upon those questions, opening up new areas of theory/practice, and the new hermeneutic is formed. The cycle begins with the historicality of understanding or pre-understanding. And without the above pre-understanding, there is no real understanding.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The heart of this engagement is to explore, to unravel and to investigate how Palmyra staff make sense, make meaning and demonstrate their understandings of organisational reality, in relation to the paradigm shift situation, through their storytelling, and how such action is reflected in the 'emotional' behaviour of Palmyra.

ENDNOTE

I would like to make several claims for this research. Personally it served a therapeutic function to myself. This continues the tradition of 'cooling' through texts as practised by my maternal great-grandparent. According to my mother, this man would read a classical text whenever he was 'hot.' His favourite was <u>Hikavat Bustamam</u>. The text is about wars between good and evil kings. Upon being 'consumed' by wars in the text, he became a 'normal' man again.

In terms of contribution of the body of knowledge, especially to organisational communication studies, I claim this work fulfils the following functions:

- To add new knowledge to the understudied area in organisational communication, specifically on the subject of stories.

- To contribute significantly to the underrepresented area of study concerning the religious/spirituality aspects of organisational communication culture.

- To demonstrate the value of qualitative research method in organisational communication studies in Malaysia where the quantitative method is almost hegemonic.

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

This thesis is organised as follows:

Introduction

Chapter 1 Organisational Communication Narrative: An Overview

Chapter 2 Organisational Stories: A Review

Chapter 3 Methodology of the Field

Chapter 4 Palmyra and Its People

Chapter 5 Tales from Palmyra

Chapter 6 Meanings under the Sacred Canopy

Chapter 7 Reflections and Conclusions

Appendices

Bibliography

Chapter 1

Organisational Communication Narratives: An Overview

This chapter is about the 'historicality of understanding' that is needed to situate the whole research engagement in context. Hermeneutically, this acts as my pre-understanding, working from the position that there is no understanding without pre-understanding. (See chapter 3 for further detailed discussion on hermeneutics). The main aim of this chapter is to put narrative in its place in organisational communication studies. This is important, as narratives seem to be the 'losing child' against the dominant 'quantitative' issues in organisational communication.

This chapter focuses on understanding organisational communication narratives (OCN). It also elaborates selected metaphors of communication, narrative as communication and various OCN characters. A short conclusion is given at the end.

UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is observed to be the very essence of human experience in an organisation. In organisations, 'organisational creatures' organise themselves around 'communication processes' in order to get things done, and such processes are referred to collectively as organisational communication (Daniels, Spiker and Papa, 1997, p. 3). Such generality is understandable, as there is no single accepted definition of what is organisational communication (Putnam and Cheney, 1995). Indeed communication is a fuzzy and contested term (Ellis and Beattie, 1986, p. 5; Dance, 1970/1977).

I take two definitions as my point of departure:

- Organisational communication is an "expression of people at work whose results combine as a system of actions --- an organisation..." (Bordow and More, 1991, p. 4).
- Organisational communication is the "the study of messages, information, meaning, and symbolic activity" in organisation (Putnam and Cheney, 1985, p. 131).

The position adopted in this research is to see organisational communication as not just a process of A somehow communicating to B, but instead as a continuous cycle of social engagements as well as a set of outcomes. This research also challenges the view that an organisation is a 'no-container' where communication happens. Rather, communication 'is' the organisation. Communicating (the communication behaviours of organisation members) is what constitutes the actual organisation; communicating is organising (Weick, 1979, 1995; Bantz, 1989). From this perspective, an organisation is the organising activities of its members.

In the context of organisational communication, Pepper (1995, p. 18) elaborates, "an organisation is truly a communication event, built on the communication behaviours of the memberships." In brief, organising is a set of processes, personal or collective, which provide an ordered reality, imagined and in action. Communicating in this sense is thus a social and meaning-making process. The raw materials of organising are people, beliefs, actions and meanings. According to Sims, Fineman and Gabriel (1993, p. 9) and Hosking and Morley (1991, p. 72) all of these materials are in constant motion and tension as order and disorder try to outdo one another.

On a lighter note, based on my observation of many organisational communication texts, I wonder why communication scholars are so reticent to claim that communicating is organising. In this regard, I salute Neher (1997, p. 19-20) for his courage in making the claim explicit.

With regards to organising, "authoring and co-authoring" narratives have been cited as one of the important communicating activities in an organisation (Czarniawska, 1997a, p. 28). The centrality of narratives can be seen clearly if we take a broader picture. Hardy (1968) writes:

> We dream in narrative,
> day-dream in narrative,
> remember, anticipate, hope, despair, and believe,
> doubt, plan, revises, criticise, gossip, learn, hate and love
> by narrative. (p. 5)

Such a claim is not an exaggeration according to some epithets used to describe the place of narrative in our society:

- Narrative is "the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11).
- Narrative is "the organising principle" by which "people organise their experience in, knowledge about, and transaction with the social world" (Bruner, 1990, p. 35).

I believe Fisher (1985), who promotes the narrative paradigm in communication studies, will be a happy person upon seeing the above claims. According to him, people are *homo narrans*. The narrative paradigm envisions that people "are always full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)". This special relationship between man and narrative is best summarised by MacIntyre (1981/1990) when he implicitly said that human beings are authors and social life is a narrative (p. 201-209).

As seen in the above epithets, there is no precise definition of what is narrative. Indeed the term itself is ambiguous and taken-for-granted. Simply, narrative is a general term for a story or account of events or experiences, fact of fiction, long or short, detailed or plain. This assumes that all narratives are stories about specific past events. And this intimacy of narrative to events is recognised by almost all theorists. A good description can be seen in Genette (1980, p. 25-26).

Meanwhile, story is said to be a 'story' or has 'storiness' if it has the story grammar. In this grammar, a protagonist and some type of causal sequences must be

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present. Mandler (1984) suggested that a story begins with a setting, followed by a series of episodes where the protagonist reacts to events, prior to achieving a goal.

To McLeod (1996, p. 174), the grammatical structure of a story should have at least six elements: 1) the setting, 2) the initiating events, 3) the internal reaction or response of the protagonist, 4) the attempt/action on the part of the protagonist to deal with the situation, 5) the consequence of this action, and 6) reactions to these events. This type of grammar is very visible in myths, legends, fairy tales or folklores.

However, the above formal and definitive grammar is not essential in the modernist formulation where narrative is seen as a performative process of making or telling a story (Fiese and Sameroff, 1999, p. 6; Denzin, 1997; Bauman, 1986). It is a performance, oral or written, that involves two or more people during which a past or anticipated experience is being experienced, recounted, interpreted or challenged, elaborates Boje (1991, p. 8).

NARRATIVE AS COMMUNICATION

To formulate narrative as communication, Genette's (1980) description of narrative is a very useful point of departure. According to this author, a narrative evolves around telling, relating and narrating a story. In narratology, all three actions are known as narration of a text. In the context of communication studies, they are acts of communication (Gasparov, 1978). In this regard, Barthes (1975, p. 260) is more explicit, as he suggests that a narrative cannot take place without a giver of narrative and a recipient of narrative.

From this perspective, a narrative is a 'message' and a mode, a fundamental element in the communication process. A message is narrative not because of the way in which it is conveyed but because it actualises a message as bearing narrative meaning (Coste, 1989, p. 4-5). The narrative message is therefore not a 'content' but the 'meaningfulness' interpreted by the participants of communication.

To comprehend the 'message behaviour' of narrative in the above context, a journey into the realm of human communication is necessary. Furthermore, human communication is the foundation of organisational communication. We must examine metaphors of communication as transmission, transaction and production and exchanges of messages (Fisher, 1978). These metaphors form the basis of most discussion in communication research (Fiske, 1982).

As Transmission

As transmission, narrative communication is a 'sender-does-something-to-a-receiver' activity. It is an act of A sending a message to B where X is the resultant, behaving like a conveyor belt (Wofford, Gerloff and Cummins, 1977, p. 23), or a transportation problem (Carey, 1989, p. 15). The sender in this perspective assumes that meaning is embodied in the narratives. This act is as if someone puts ideas into words that act like a container, and sends them along a conduit to the receiver who takes the idea out of the container. As a container, language at this point functions like a conduit, that is transferring thought and feelings from one person to another (Reddy, 1979). To Hartley and Bruckmann (forthcoming) such a process is like firing a magic bullet into the receiver's head.[3]

In this type of communication, the sender becomes powerful and the receiver is powerless. There is a notion of control in this approach.

As Transaction

In this metaphor of transaction, narratives upon being received are encoded, interpreted, and decoded (e/i/d) by the receiver, before being sent back as the new narrative to the sender. The new receiver, previously the first sender, repeats the same e/i/d process. Both the sender and the receiver will pursue their dynamic interplay until the desired narrative based upon agreement between the two is achieved. Meaning therefore is explicitly not imposed on the receiver though

implicitly the new desired message as context-free is questionable especially if the initiator of the first narrative is the management.

Openness is assumed in this approach. There is no toleration of ambiguity, and breakdown in narration is viewed as a matter of 'unconnectedness', that is of not 'understanding each other'. Thus in achieving the desired message, differences are glossed over in the name of understanding, the primary aim of communication in this approach.

As Production and Exchange of Meaning

From this perspective, messages are a construction of signs, which through interacting with the receivers produce meaning. A message in this view is not merely an act of transmission from A to B, but acts as an element in a relationship between the sender/producer and reader/receiver. The place of meaning as it comes to be produced in the social world is emphasised. Different understandings of the same message are presumably due to different views of the world. Interestingly, this is not necessarily evidence of communication failure --- a fearful thing to happen in the transmission model.

As meaning is never given and natural but always constructed and arbitrary, meaning in this view is seen as an inherent property of the message. Thus the sender is no more the sole creator of meaning. Therefore, if the sender's message does not get across, this is not a failure of the communications resulting from noise or misinterpretation/misunderstanding, but due to active participation of the receiver in the construction of the meaning. Even when there is some correspondence in meanings constructed on both sides, such correspondence is not natural but itself constructed, through the imposition of constraints and limits of preferred readings.

In recent years, contributions from other fields question some assumptions relating to the above three metaphors. For example, according to Lesurf (1992), too much feedback could lead to resistance or a chaotic situation. People also communicate as the result of disorder or as way of survival. Shehrazad demonstrated the point

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3 The magic bullet theory resides in the effect tradition where individuals are believed to be directly and heavily influenced by messages. This theory is also known as hypodermic needle theory.

clearly in the <u>One Thousand Night Stories</u>. In some cases, communicating is done with the intention of deception or to create disorder as a way to control people. Furthermore, as shown by Morgan (1986/1997), an organisation is a place of 'many faces'. With that in mind, I shall discuss organisational communication narratives (OCN) features or characters. Here, I am following a lead given by Rasberry and Lemoine (1986) who look for features in explaining what is communication.

ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION NARRATIVES MOSAIC

All three narrative communication models show, implicitly and explicitly, many characters of themselves. They are 'pieces' that form a mosaic of communication. Although the following description fall short of giving concrete examples, I believe by adopting "imaginization" in the light of Morgan's (1993) writing, one can see the picture. They are as a process, relationship, dialogical, sense-making, voice, emotional and shadowy. Implicitly, the above characters are embodied in the 'message': Communication is message related, which at the same time acts as the generation of meaning processes.

As Message Related Process

The concept of message is variable as it signifies different things to different people. Fisher (1978) listed six variations: as transmitted signal, as structural form, as social influence, as interpretation, as reflection of self and as commonality.

As portrayed in the mechanistic transmission model, a message is seen a phenomenon that connects the sender and the receiver via the channel. A signal is the message in its physical form.

Structurally, a message is seen as composed of three principal factors: verbal (for example words or linguistic symbols), physical (such as gestures, facial expression) and vocal (including conversation rate, accent, and loudness). Implicitly, human behaviour is a message when it elicits response from the other. Since a message consists of behaviours to which people may respond, there is a possibility of producing it unknowingly or unintentionally in due process. Indeed, this conscious-

unconscious, intentional-unintentional behaviour relationship in producing messages has become a basis for some theorists, such as Mohan (1993), to formulate a description of what is communication:

> Communication [is a] performance. [It] involves interpretation of actions and thoughts, even imagined ideas and intentions. (p. 9-12)

Intimately related to this view is the view that communication is a means of social influence.

> Our basic purpose in communication is to become an effecting agent, to effect others, our physical environment, and ourselves... we communicate to influence --- to effect with intent. Thus, messages do have an effect (Berlo, 1960, p. 11-12).

A message is also seen as interpretation of symbols or stimuli. It is symbolic behaviour in the sense that it occurs in the mind. A message in this view is conceived as interpretation. Simply, it means the same message could render different interpretations to different interpreters. Another view of message is that it reflects the internalised states of the individual. Here, a message is seen as an outward manifestation of the 'black box' concepts such as attitude, belief, perception, values, images and emotions.

In summary, a message implies linkage between players of communication. It behaves like a coupling system where it binds source and receiver.

As Generation of Meaning Process

Communication is also about the action of creating messages or displays, and the action of interpreting messages or displays. A display consists of information not necessarily intended as a message but from which one can derive meaning. In seeing communication as a 'generation of meaning' process, theorists always fall back on the Latin etymological root of communication, *communis*, as their starting point. The word is defined as "common" in the Oxford dictionaries.

As a communication concept, meaning relates to its social context and the vicarious sharing of experiences of communicators. In other word there must be some

commonality of meaning (Goyer, 1970, p. 7) as each sender and receiver brings their own general personal construct system (Kelly, 1955) into the communication process. The system is based on their personal system of meanings (a personality, values, opinions and attitudes) and organised knowledge (about the past, events, goals) (Duck, 1994, p. 8). It is in the consensus of agreement that commonality resides, and in that social process meaning is 'born' (Fisher, 1978, p. 253).

This notion of commonality/consensus/sharedness of meaning however differs with each perspective. In the mechanistic perspective, meaning is said to reside in the messages that transform at all stages of the process. The shared meaning is then simply the result of that transformation.

The psychological meaning meanwhile is based largely on stimulus-organism-response explanations. Central to this conceptualisation is the biological concept of isomorphism, similarity of organisms of different ancestry. In the context of communication, it refers to the similarity of meaning in two people as a function of their similarity of past experiences and hence similarity of perceptual sets. Here, meaning-sharedness refers to the isomorphism of the internalised conceptual filters of the communicators. A point to note though is the relativity of the isomorphism. What counts here is the maximal numbers of experiences in common.

In the interaction perspective, sharedness of meaning emphasises the commonality of social experiences. There is a strong mutuality in coming to understand terms as shared. This view suggests that the location of meaning in this perspective is external to the individual, but it resides in the behaviour or the gesture of communication. On this point, Fisher (1978) writes,

> [The] individual is a product as well as participant in the social situation --- the dialogue of the communicative process. (p. 261)

Again, the description of mutual and common meaning prevails when one talks about what should be in a successful communication where participants presumably achieve communication satisfaction (Hecht, 1978). Many of the meaning issues stay on with the players of communication. Some are being 'shown' to the other, that is, as meaning-in-use within a context. It is in this light of social context that

Wittgenstein (1956) illustrates his famous analogy: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (p. 223).

In arriving at the above commonality of meaning, participants undergo repression and control, selecting and competition of information (Barber, 1988, p. 24; Evans, 1994, p. 28). Undoubtedly, some conflicting desires arise, even if one is not immediately aware of the problems. This tension is liable to occur in all relationships (Hinde, 1997, p. 92). Bilig (1997, p. 140) suggests that interaction is not only the mode of expression but is also a mode of repression. Claims about remembering and forgetting in his work reiterate this point.

Indeed, I view such 'deception' in a 'smooth' communication as part of complex comprehension. I take comprehension as defined by Badzinski and Gill (1993):

> Comprehension, involving a set of cognitive processes, is the product of constructing meaning by implementing a set of strategies for selecting, retrieving, and integrating a number of information sources (for example, background knowledge, textual features, memories and emotions) to form mental representation of the discourse that sufficiently captures the gist of the sources' intent. (p. 303)

To Wilson and Sperber (1998, p. 8-9) such comprehension is made in the process of searching for what is relevant for the other's attention. In arriving at the common meaning, one must negotiate various constraints and act creatively. A lot of accommodation, bargaining (making offers and counter-offers), reconciliation and compromising, usually in good faith, must be made. A good graphic illustration about this complexity could be seen clearly in Winograd and Flores's (1986/1990) "conversational dance".

Clearly, one must achieve sensemaking out of the anarchic state. This sensemaking is a process that people use to impose or derive structure or meaning upon experiencing complex, ambiguous situations. It usually replaces programmed cognition or scripts when situations are experienced as out-of-the-ordinary. The other player's interpretations form one of the principal inputs to this sensemaking process. There is an evolution of cognitive scripts. Thus the other person serves as resource, reference and social reinforcement (Volkema, Farquhar, Bergmann, 1996, p. 1441). Therefore, 'reading' attempts must be made in order to create

appropriateness into the situation's patterns of significant meaning. In so doing, there must be a lot of grafting and pruning, to use metaphors for artificial selection, on various data in the script (Weick, 1995, p. 176).

In sum, this account shows many reminiscences of Berlo's (1960) statements about the nature of meanings. According to him, meanings are in people and not in messages; meanings are in message users; words do not mean at all as only people mean; meanings are never fixed; and meanings change as people's experience changes.

As a Relationship

A relationship is a basic ingredient of human communication (Brown and Keller, 1973, p. 186; Hargie and Tourish, 1997), even with the presence of new technology between humans. Wilson, Goodall and Waagen (1986) give a good illustration.

> Communication is ... important in relationships you develop with present and emerging technologies...You develop an attitude toward it and a relationship with it...Thus, communication is a process that creates and constitutes human and technological relationships. (p. 7)

In the context of communication, a relationship is born once there is two players, the sender and the receiver of message, at least. To some, it is an act of exchange that is intertwined with feedback and rewards. There is intent or desire in that process, for example, to reduce uncertainty. Enveloped in the action are the expectations of players (Machin, 1980). When the confident expectation of a player is not fulfilled, a relationship may be destructive, harmful or destroyed. Often, fantasies and imagination about the relationship nurture expectation in a relationship. Simply, there are emotions in a relationship. In its extremity, communication consumes the players though in an ordinary relationship players are expected to consume the messages (Berlo, 1960, p. 18-19).

Issues of status often affect a relationship. Burgoon and Hale (1987) offered a typology of relevant themes, including: submission-dominance; formality-informality; task-social; affection-hostility and trust-distrust. Later, Burgoon et.al (1994) refined

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and simplified such themes into "dimensions of control". It is a three-dimensional model of interpersonal control (Hargie and Tourish, 1997, p. 365) within relationships that highlights the differing communicative patterns of relational interaction: complementary, symmetrical and parallel. The relationship has its own rules, scripts and regulations to follow if one wants to have a successful affair --- in our context, an efficient and effective communication (p. 366).

Regarding the above idea on control, one should notes that it is very much related to order and disorder in a relationship. To some, a situation of order is equated with 'machine-like-order' (Stacey, 1991, p. 128). In this perspective, order means putting things and people in their place, defining and enforcing rules, and keeping chaos out. As such, messiness and disorder are not welcome. However, others view disorder as a path towards an order agreed by both players involve in a relationship. For them, chaos gives birth to "newness in the interactions of things" (Byers, 1997, p. 246).

With reference to the an issue on order, one may asks a question, 'whose order?' As mentioned by Alvesson (1996), a relationship is largely a result of relationships between actors involved in asymmetrical power relationship (p. 62). In turn, such interaction is fill with certain interests (Deetz and Mumby, 1986, p. 376).

The above issue of status opens for me the gate of unconscious communication phenomena known as transference and counter-transference (Thomas, 1996). These are messages from the past. Transference is the unconscious repeating of an earlier relationship in a current setting developed towards the other, especially where difference in power is an issue (Cairns, 1994). The senders usually transfer memories or past experiences unconsciously to the other in that act of transference. It is an act of displacement of emotions from an earlier situation, usually childhood experiences with the parents, to the other. Often, these are unresolved conflicts. The other player usually finds him/herself in a situation of experiencing feelings and behaviours toward the other (Watkins, 1989, p. 86). It is the mirror image of transference. The receiver may respond on the basis of his/her own unresolved emotional conflicts to the sender's feelings. Indeed, memories of the unresolved conflicts are part of the personal system of meaning and organised knowledge of players (Duck, 1994, p. 2).

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Given the above, relationships are in some respect like games (Argyle and Henderson, 1985, p. 36). They are miniature social systems, producing co-operative behaviour that leads to the attainment of goals, by playing within the rules. Indeed, there is a model called the communication game model, initially proposed by Higgins (1981). The model was developed in reaction to limitations evident in the transmission approach that failed to promote the active role played by participants in the process of communication. In this model, 'game-like' features of communication are emphasised, and communication is considered to be a form of purposeful social interaction that occurs within a socially defined context. In addition, the approach underscores the importance of considering rule-oriented aspects.

McCann and Higgins (1992) in their review of this communication game, imply that the model rests on four assumptions:

- Communication is a multipurpose activity that functions, among other things, to develop, maintain, and strengthen relationships, and not merely transmit information
- Communication is a process in which participants collaboratively define the meaning or social reality of the interchange;
- An effective and efficient communication entails a continuous process of co-orientation and monitoring between participants alongside accurate appraisals of each other's characteristic and intentions;
- Communication is a normatively based activity involving patterns of rules and conventions regarding appropriate language use and forms for distinct social roles and contexts.

As the communicative interaction involves rule-following behaviour, participants in a similar set of rules must adhere to the normative prescriptions for action that are assumed to be available for use. On the other hand, the recipients in the above game have a set of rules of their own.

The list of rules mentioned above, however, is not meant to imply that effective and efficient communication necessitates following all rules. Furthermore in interaction, communicator and recipient are performing social roles with a lot of contextual adaptations and cognitive tunings to deal with, for example, the role of personal goals and the nature of relationship. In other words, participants in most occasions mediate the rules of the game in doing their performances.

As Dialogue

The word dialogue comes from two Greek roots. *dia* and *logos*, suggesting 'meaning flowing through.' Often, people tend to think of dialogue as a mechanistic and unproductive debate between people seeking to defend their views against one another. In my view a dialogue is a communication process where people learn to negotiate and mediate with themselves in front of others; and to suspend their defensive exchanges, sustained assumptions and certainties that compose everyday experience between players of communication. Simply, whether spoken or silent in dialogue in each of the participant's minds there are other or others' presence. Bakhtin (1984) goes further:

> Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly ... with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. (p. 293)

In essence, dialogue is about simultaneous differentiation yet fusion with the other player. In this light, Isaacs (1993) formulated his initial guidelines for dialogue: suspend assumptions and certainties; observe the observer; listen to your listening; slow down the inquiry; be aware of thought; and befriend polarisation (p. 25-33). Dialogue to Isaacs is a 'container' where meeting and inquiry take place.

To Cissna and Anderson (1998), dialogical moments can summarised as follows:

- An awareness that others are unique and whole persons, encouraging a turning towards the other and imagining the reality of the other;

- A genuineness or authenticity that does not mandate full disclosure, but suggests that dialogic partners are not pretending and are not holding back what needs to be said;
- Respect for the other that inclines one not to impose but help the reality and possibility of other unfold. It is in line with the dialogue's purpose to create a setting where conscious collective mindfulness can be maintained, and consensual meaning is promoted.

In light of the above, I view dialogue as a dynamic 'container' with contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies: the centripetal (that is, centralising, unifying forces) and the centrifugal (that is, decentralising, diversifying) forces. It is polysemous and fluid with meaning constructed in the ongoing negotiated interaction between players. In other word, dialogue is related intimately with struggle over meanings (Lahteenmaki, 1998, p. 91). By contrast, the monologic lens rests on assumption of unity that is the exclusive focus on the centripetal to the neglect of the centrifugal-centripetal dynamics. Using traditional terms of communication, the encoder and decoder cease to be the prime house where 'intentions' are located. Instead, 'intentions' are in the interactive practices and negotiated meanings of the players.

The dynamics of a dialogue perpetually produce the flux of struggle: crisis of suspension, instability and creativity in the container, pain, construction of collective remembering, that is before arriving at metalogue (meaning moving with the players) (Isaacs, 1993, p. 34). In other words, a dialogic perspective on communication emphasises that meaning emerges from the encounter between self and other. It also posits that self is continually emerging in and through the relationships with the other rather than anchored in individualism. Last but not least, in this perspective there can be no isolated utterances as all talk presupposes an ongoing conversation in which one participates for a time.

As a dynamic 'container', dialogue is less likely to be tidy, predictable, orderly and sustained. Such 'disorder' provides rooms for 'shadows' to thrive. Besides, the word in the language of a speaker is half someone else's, notes Bakhtin (1981).

[The word] becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he/she appropriates the word, adapting it to his/her semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his/her words!), but rather exists in other people's contexts, serving other people intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and makes it one's own. (p. 293 – 294)

King (1992, p. 2) makes the above claim more significant by pointing to the issue of voices in the dialogue. In the moments of dialogic surprise and uncertainty, more small and silent voices that are struggling to speak emerge to the surface. In the words of Rogers (1980), being in a relationship with the Other "[is] not merely ... listening to information ...[but one must be] ... sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person; sensing the meanings of which he/she is scarcely unaware; communicating your sensing of the person's world, [and at times] checking with the person the accuracy of your sensing (p. 142).

In sum, dialogue is a place of struggle to put mutuality on course. It is crucial as mutuality has meaning only in relation to another (Holquist, 1990, p. 20-37). It is also a struggle to come to term with editing "surplus of seeing". This is an aspect of the situation where "you see, but I do not... those things that I see but you cannot". Thus one must find order by reducing the possible catalogue of happenings, which at any moment is possibly endless, to a restricted number that perception can then process as occurring in understandable relations. Besides, a participant in dialogic relationship as in any other is in a display (Goodwin, 1981, p. 95). Thus, one should not be a 'private, absent and disengaged' person in such engagement especially if one wants the dialogue to be successful.

Indeed, in dialogue communicators are performing a balancing act between creativity (for example, in formulating new ways of understanding relationships) and constraint (for example, rules and procedures). In this light, Eisenberg and Goodall (1993, p. 30) come up with their definition of communication:

Communication is the moment-to-moment working out of the tension between creativity and constraint. (p. 30)

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As Voice

Closely related to the dialogical approach is voice. As Denzin (1997) notes, there are many understandings of the sound and the meaning of voice.

> Voice ... is a complex matter. It refers to many things at the same time; utterances that announce or report, sounds made through the mouth ... a quality of vocal sound... a characteristic speech connected to a particular person; a right to express one's opinion; the expression of a wish or opinion; the person or agency by which something is expressed --- for example, the press being the voice of the people; the quality of being voiceful or voiceless --- having no voice; silence. (p. 40)

The above explanation implies that sound and voice include silence. Silence is a part of the interactional sequence that is in the path of our construction of meaning, and it is a message as others interpret it. Simply, silence is more than just an antonym of 'sound'.

As Hermeneutical Understanding

In the traditional functionalist model of communication, the sender encodes a message in symbols, words or signs to communicate to the receiver some meaning that the sender feels the receiver should know. This assumption is based on the information theory developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949). The receiver must unlock or interpret the message so as to attribute the 'correct' meaning to the communicated symbols, words, or signs. The process of unlocking is subject to many disturbances such as the unlimited set of symbols to which both the sender and the receiver could attach to the same meaning; a time lapse between sending and receiving; a changing (evolving) set of relationships between words, symbols, or signs (the text) and meaning they refer to; or different frames of reference or contexts used by the players in the communication process.

As noted by Hartley and Bruckmann (forthcoming) the communication process is not an act of firing a magic bullet from one to another head. Therefore, in order to understand the message, the other must interpret it. To separate interpretation from

the act of understanding is an act of artificiality (Gadamer, 1989, p. 350). In this regard, among the main purposes of interpretation in the communication process is to recover the 'disturbed' meaning that was transmitted from the sender.

In other words, interpretation is confined to the situation and temporal in nature. Hermeneutically, the recovered meaning could be different for different people, and to a Gadamerian, there is no 'one right interpretation'. Before an understanding is achieved (or in hermeneutical discourse as arriving at the moment where the recovery is complete), the receiver would be submerged in the hermeneutic circle. The circle starts in a heuristic manner where the interpreter uses his/her fore understanding and prejudice to establish the initial meaning of the text. The word prejudice in the Gadamerian vocabulary, as explained briefly in the Introduction, must not be seen in its normal negative sense as it is merely to describe 'the first stab of understanding' that the interpreter must necessarily make due to lack of sufficient context. The negativity of the term returns once the interpreter is not continually open to the potentiality of new understanding that may emerge. After relating the initial or pre-understanding as called by Gummeson (1991) to the current situation, a new understanding is projected back to the text. The new understanding then is projected back to the context. This to and fro movement between text and context creates possibilities for understanding.

Implicitly it is assumed that the more the interpreter opens him/herself to the text the more comprehensible he/her will be, and the greater the interpreter`s understanding of the text becomes. In the course of the movement, a lot of mediations must be made. Among others, one must bridge between the alien and the known 'facts'; search for common lexicon; listen to the text and not jump prematurely to conclusions thereby closing oneself off from the possibilities of understanding; prepare to use prejudices and fore-understanding in the process of facilitating understanding, and not to be dominated by them; and to open oneself to fuse past, present and future into the process

When the recovery of meaning has happened, a person may claim understanding. In this way of thinking understanding is merely a matter of linking the signifiers (words or pointers) to the signified (things or ideas of things) in a way

commensurate to that of the speaker or the sender. In effect, interpretation in this context would be a process of correcting any muddled signifier to signified relationship (Introna, 1997, p. 74).

As Reading Text

The players of communication are authors (senders) and readers (receivers), and their action of understanding the message (the text) is as reading. Both receivers and senders at one time will be both readers. According to Ricouer (1978, p. 160-161), the notion of text is a good paradigm for human action because human action is in many ways a quasi text. It is exteriorised in a manner comparable to the fixed characteristic of writing. In becoming detached from its agent, the action acquires autonomy similar to the semantic autonomy of a text; it leaves a trace, a mark. It is inscribed in the course of things and becomes an archive and document. Even more like a text, where the meaning is freed from the initial conditions of its production, human action has stature that is not limited to its importance for the situation in which it initially occurs, but allows it to be re-inscribed in new social contexts. Finally actions, like a text, are an open work addressed to an indefinite series of possible readers.

Although the term text is derived from literary theory, text in this view covers discourses and actions (Bourgeouis, 1998) between players of communication. In addition, various artefacts that have connections with players of communication, such as body language, or room arrangement must be included in the term. In this light, Kets de Vries and Miller (1987) see organisation as text. Reading text in this view means one needs to 'break the body' of the text itself in order to understand the whole text (Höpfl, 1999).

Reading is a textual activity. This conception of textuality is based on the imagination that texts have 'active' life. Before reading, the active 'life' is assumed to be concealed in the text (Iser, 1988). Thus by reading one is revealing the concealment of the text. To some the notion of concealment or blindness in the text is translatable into the vocabulary of repression and sublimation. The later view creates a fertile ground for critical-way-of-reading, as practised by Marxist theorists and psychoanalysts.

Different people reading the same text could produce different understandings due to the existence of the reader's field. This field, among others, is the different kinds of beliefs that the reader brings to the reading. These include beliefs about their ability to read effectively, text structure, the credibility of the author's message, personal ideologies, self-concept and intentions. Readers bring general sets of beliefs to the reading process. Thus a reader from a critical perspective, for example, will see the text with suspicion rather than the less critical reader. Presumably, to the former there are subtexts in the text that need to be processed and engaged with. The latter simply overlooks or does not know how to seek features designed to shape their perceptions or make them view events in a particular way (Schraw and Burning, 1996).

At this juncture it is worthwhile to note that a text is usually authored from certain points of view and certain kind of vocabularies. As such in reading one must not discard several fundamental questions that colour the presentation, such as who speaks to who, who speaks when, who speaks what language, who speaks with what authority (Culler, 1997, p. 87-89). Presumably, a reader with similar vocabularies could comprehend the text much easier compared to one without. Again, the author on certain occasion intentionally presents the text in incomprehensible vocabularies. It could be a way of authors controlling readers from reading.

The role taken by the reader in the process of reading is acknowledged by many as the crucial factor in determining the outcomes of the reading. According to Appleyard (1990) a reader can be a player, hero and heroine, thinker, interpreter or a pragmatist. As a player, a reader is not yet a reader but a listener to the text. He/she "becomes a confident player in a fantasy world that images realities, fears, and desires" (p. 14). The text in this situation is on the boundary between fantasy and actuality – exciting, but confusing and often scary. In becoming a hero, a reader is in the romantic state, where text is seen as less ambiguous and constantly being rewritten. Meanwhile, the "thinker reader" is an adolescent reader who looks to texts to discover insights into the meaning of life, values and beliefs worthy of commitments, ideal images, and role models for imitation. To the "interpreter reader," the text is seen as an organised body of knowledge with its own principles

of inquiry and working, and rules of evidence. The "pragmatic reader," however, sees the text in a combination of all ways mentioned. He/she then read the text as "to escape, to judge the truth of experience, to gratify the sense of beauty, to challenge oneself with new experiences, to comfort oneself with images of wisdom" (p. 14-15).

Following my reading of Appleyard, it came as no surprise to me when Bennet (1995, p. 6) claimed that reading is an act of the politics of desire. Indeed, reading is never a 'private' thing as it is full of interests (Mailloux, 1990, p. 127). A point to add is that reading is very much related to sense-making. "What sense-making does is address how the text is constructed as well how it is read", said Weick (1995, p. 7).

As Shadow

To Tao followers, shadow is on the side of the hill that does not receive sunlight. It is part of the yin-yang phenomena. For Jungians, the term refers to unrecognised or unwanted drives and desires, the other side of conscious ego. It is a kind of submerged opposite that at the same time strives for completeness with the ego. Many scholars see a shadow as the 'other within'. For Jungians, a repressed shadow could be both constructive and destructive.

In relation to communication, deception is the main shadow that lurks in any process. At the heart of this issue is the assumption that people are controlling the information that they present in their messages. As such an important consideration in this process is whether to send information that is entirely honest or to modify it in some way that departs from the truth as the source knows it. In actual practice, though, communicators frequently deceive others in order to suit personal, pragmatic ends (Buller and Burgoon, 1994, p. 191), for example, for social control purposes, be it strategic or not (Eisenberg and Goodall, 1993, p. 25). In the wider context, deception is not merely lying (Knapp, Hart and Dennis, 1974, p. 16) but includes, among others, being ambiguous or vague, varying the truthful information through exaggeration and minimisation.

Hopper and Bell (1984) provide the most exhausting list of deceptive acts. They identified six clusters:

1) Fictions (make-believing, exaggeration, myth, irony, tall tale, white lie);

2) Playings (joking, teasing, kidding, tricking, bluffing, hoax);

3) Lies (dishonesty, fibbing, lie, untruth, cheating);

4) Crimes (con, conspiracy, entrapment, spying, disguise, counterfeit, cover-up, forgery);

5) Masks (hypocrisy, two-faced, back-stabbing, evasion, masking, concealment); and

6) 'Unlies' (distortion, misleading, false implication, and misrepresentation).

They concluded that the first two constitute benign deceptive acts while the rest are exploitative deception acts. In normal circumstances, deception is associated with a dominant moral value: honesty is the best policy.

However, some scholars like Buller and Burgoon (1994) see Hopper and Bell's perspective as too narrow and orthodox as deception is seen to provide instrumental or functional functions.

> It is the motivation behind deception, not the deceptive act itself, whose morality should be judged. (p. 193)

Implicitly, such a statement brings the idea that deception is an act of motive(s). In sum, motives in deception can be divided in three classes: instrumental (to control, avoidance of dissonance, to acquire and protect sources, to harm for self-gain, for entertainment), interpersonal (to maintain, maximise or terminate relationship, to avoid tension and conflict, fear, obligatory acceptance, redirecting conversation, avoiding self-disclosure, to protect from punishment, to provide deniability) and identity objectives (to save face). In practice, however, motives could be multiple instead of one in a single deceptive act.

Shadow in the communication process prevails explicitly in miscommunication. In this view, it starts with the working assumptions of communicators at the beginning of any interaction where communicators hide the presence of some tacit, covert, or

implicit traces of sensory activation. Thus a person with cognitive distortion tends to do the following: misleading, misapplied, fabricated or misinterpreted information. Sometimes, such distortion arises out of defensive filters that become salient during complex episodes of interaction, and it slowly diminishes one's capacity to appreciate the intrinsic value of what transpires. Indeed, scholars do say that it is possible to avoid "mental contamination" by doing "mental corrections" (Wilson and Brekke, 1994, p. 122), but interactants are not always in a position to see things clearly or distinctly. Using interpersonal communication as an example, Mortenson (1997) describes this:

> Deficiencies in visual acuity may diminish the vibrancy and luminosity of the world around us. Distractions make us prone to ignore salient aspects of other's lives, as if they did not exist, and they also make us prone to self-absorption and even selfishness. Without visual acuity, we miss the rich detail in facial expressions and body language of others. Even small losses of acuity can camouflage a subtle look of pain or a sudden blush of embarrassment. This can happen if the light strikes the periphery of our visual field rather than the centre. (p. 48)

As Emotions

The discussion on the issue of shadow is incomplete without viewing the position of emotion in communication process. What is defined as an emotion is a question that fascinates many scholars. To some, emotion is a construction (Lupton, 1998, p. 15). Whatever, emotion is 'in' all communication processes (Buck, 1984). Charon (1998) writes,

> [Emotions] are generally ... reflective and emotional experiences that become objects to define, consider, and to use in situations. The human actor recognises something happening internally, defines what it is (anger, depression, frustration, happiness) judges it as positive or negative, or expresses it, represses it, or manages it; the actor may store it and in the future recall it. (p. 146)

Conventionally, emotional communication is seen as a two-step process where emotion is first experienced and then transmitted into the interpersonal world. However, some scholars argued that emotions are not always intact and immediate private experiences. As such emotion is viewed as something that develops over time and is constructed out of several channels and modes of response. Parkinson (1995, p. 170) in this regard believes that the central function of many emotional

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states is social. Emotions indeed characterise our relationships with one another in a particular situation, again in terms of contempt, love, sympathy, fear, lust, and so on. The effect of such situations without doubt shape the communication process, whether it is 'hot' (like fear and anger) or 'cold' (like withdrawal), wanted (like passion) or unwanted (like hate) ones (Fineman, 1997, p. 15).

It is important to note here that emotion is often followed by displays. In communication practice, it could be facial expressions, changes in tonal voices or mood of vocabularies. However, not all 'true' emotional state is shown in displays, and some displays are for 'showing' (Parkinson, 1995, p. 175). A good example can be seen in the case of Suriati of Bali. As Balinese, she must keep a 'bright face' at all times and 'hide' her true feelings from one another (Wilkan, 1990). This type of 'showing' is part of Balinese culture. Such displays are more understandable if one sees emotion as a phenomenon arises in the evolving context of communicative interaction where one co-ordinates oneself to what the other does and somewhere along the line emotion occurs.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the nature of organisation communication narrative was discussed with the help of metaphors. Regardless of its limitations, metaphor as a tool of exploring is believed to be able to tie parts into a meaningful whole (Kendal and Kendal, 1993). The metaphors, communication as transmission, as reading text, and as transaction, were borrowed from human communication theory. In elaborating the three metaphors of human communication, several OCN characteristics came to the fore. These OCN characteristics were discussed using the following sub-metaphors:

- Narrative communication as a relationship,
- Narrative communication as a dialogue,
- Narrative communication as reading and understanding text,
- Narrative communication as a process (message related and generation of meaning).

In my explanation, issues like hermeneutical importance, transference and counter-transference in relationships, and emotions in communicating were highlighted. Many theorists agree that these issues do present in the communication process, but they find it difficult to pinpoint where. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the above issues only present in the 'in passing' in most communication texts. Thus emotion, psycho-dynamics and unconscious issues are almost forgotten words in communication indexes. One must be content with only a few mentions under personal influence, persuasion or 'effect of message' topics. To counteract this, I discussed communication 'shadows'. Lately, several attempts to address the above issues had been made (See for example Melts and Bowers, 1994; and Andersen and Guerrero, 1997). These works however are still at the periphery of the discipline.

Also in this chapter, I pointed out that narrative communication is not merely sending or transmitting but also about consuming narratives. It is a 'hot' activity because communicators are never free from motives and values. Kakabadse et. al (1988), as quoted by Baguley (1994, p. 5) are right when they report that communication is about facts, feelings, value and opinions. Thus, an organisational communication narrative is a 'hot-communication-activity' in which actors organise themselves via narratives.

Chapter 2

Organisational Stories: A Review

This chapter is about 'dancing' with organisational stories (OS) as told by scholars.[4] It is about understanding a 'version' of world-making (Scheffler, 1997, p.189)[5] through the eyes of organisational communication culture. I start by examining how stories relate to organisation communication and culture. This is followed by discussions of various definitions of OS, and then specific issues related to OS. In the course of this 'story-telling', issues associated with emotion and displays are raised. I conclude this chapter by reflecting about stories in the context of Malay society.

ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

As mentioned in the Introduction, organisational stories are a relatively new topic of research in organisational communication studies. Perhaps their importance arises with the re-discovery of 'culture' in the discipline. With the recent widespread attention given to this 'culture revolution', organisation communication now 'shimmers and re-appears' as cultural communication as and about organisation (Carlone and Taylor, 1998, p. 340).

In relation to the above, it is important to note that culture is a concept borrowed from anthropology.[6] An organisation in this view is a 'cultural site' (McLeod and

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[4] I use the metaphor of dancing in the light of learning. In recent times this metaphor seems popular among writers like Senge et. al. (1999).

[5] Metaphorically he sees worlds as "versions." As an illustration, he mentions "versions" of Renaissance, where one explanation excludes the battles but emphasises the art, while the other excludes the arts but stresses the battles. The difference, he says, is a difference in weighting that gives two different Renaissance worlds.

[6] Although culture is a central concept in anthropology, many anthropologists are divided over the concept, especially as culture is now no longer exclusive to the discipline. Now, anthropologists are

Wilson, 1994; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1992, p. 102; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 62; Barfield, 1997, p. 17-23).

Stories for a long time have played an important role in anthropological work. Indeed, as suggested by Cooper (1995, p. 131), this discipline depends on accounts of informants and on performed communication by storytellers. Without stories there could be no anthropology. This idea is not alien to organisational communication scholars: "Cultures do not exist separately from what people communicate" (Conrad, 1994, p. 27). Borman (1983) is more explicit in linking culture with communication:

> Culture in the communicative context means the sum total ways of living, organising, and communing built up in a group of human beings ... Important components of an organisation's culture include shared norms, reminiscences, stories, rites, and rituals that provide members with unique symbolic common ground. (p. 100)

This view in many ways revisits Hall's (1959) suggestion, quoted by Frank and Fahrbach (1999, p. 254), that the pattern of communication defines the culture of an organisation. Pepper (1995), a leading scholar on organisational communication culture, nicely summarises the idea in the following words:

> Through communication individuals co-ordinate their perceptions and their behaviour with others, resulting in pockets of people with a common understanding of the same event. The importance of this line ... is that communication creates the organisation, through the construction of cultures. (p. 36)

As a point of reference, I need to describe what is culture in the context of this chapter. According to Clifford (1986, p. 19), culture is a created and re-created construct. Thus, it is not strange to note that it has many so many definitions.[7] However, almost all scholars in the area of interest agree that the central point in culture is the concept of sharing. Hatch, (1997a) however, notes that sharing does

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revisiting the concept. See Current Anthropology (Supplement), 40, 1999, for details. Also Kristmundsdotter (1996, p. 61-73). However, most anthropologists agree that the term culture is referring to the way of life, including people's behaviour, the things that they make, and their ideas (Rosman and Rubel, 1992, p. 5-6); Schultz and Lavenda, 1995).

[7] A good inventory of definitions of [organisational] culture may be found in Bates (1994).

not always mean to be in "commonness" as it also suggests separateness. She gives sharecropping as an example. Thus, culture as a concept could be a mix of similarities and differences, convergence and divergence, fragmentation and consensus. In this regard, culture is not always a monolithic entity and a well-integrated whole as sub-cultures based on occupation, class, region and others prevail in most cases. Some call such sub-cultures 'small cultures' (Holliday, 1999). In these terms, Martin's (1992) suggestion about how to look at organisational culture theory makes a lot of sense. To her, there are three streams available for such endeavour: integration, differentiation and fragmentation.

There are those who see culture as a root metaphor that promotes the view of organisation as expressive form, manifestation of human consciousness. Basically, it is also seen as a reflection of underlying values and motives (Smircich, 1983, p. 347). Culture in this view is an expression of unconscious psychological processes. Writers such as Stapley (1996) drive a similar point home when he sees the organisation as a personality. To writers such as Mumby (1988, p. 7), culture is a vehicle of production, maintenance and reproduction, not variable, through which reality is constituted in the organisational context.

From the organisational communication point of view, understanding culture is more related to how organisational life is accomplished communicatively. An organisation in this context is defined as broadly as possible, that is as an "interlocked action" (Pacanoswky and O'Donnel-Trujillo, 1982, p. 122). By taking this stance, I believe that Geertz's (1973) 'soft' pronouncement on culture is relevant:

> Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, ... culture [is] those webs, and the analysis of it [is] therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. (p. 5)

Briefly, by adopting the above definition, the range of movement of culture in this engagement is confined to a particular slice of universe traversed by the web. The reality here is only 'a particular reality', as experienced by informants at Palmyra, not all realities with the avoidance of evaluating one organisational culture in light of

others. In a similar vein, culture here is more about the construction and display of reality (for example meetings, organisation social knowledge, practices, vocabulary and metaphors used, stories, rites and rituals) of those 'caught' in the webs spun. Accordingly in this view, culture and spiders' webs are ' contexts'. As context, "it is amenable not to causal analysis but to interpretation that reveals the nuances of sense-making displayed in the discourse of cultural members" (Pacanowsky and O`Donnel-Trujillo, 1982, p. 123).

With reference to Geertz (1973), an organisation at this point is best seen as a cultural text where human action is an open work (Mangham, 1996; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1987; Mangham, 1978).[8] It is a 'writing', an emergent outcome of a process of production (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992, p. 331) derived from cultural members understandings (McAuley, 1994, p. 418), which is "opened to anybody who can read" (Ricouer, 1978, p. 208). Implicitly this says that 'materials for reading' abound in an organisation.

DEFINING ORGANISATIONAL STORIES (OS)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I follow the experience of Rasberry and Lemoine (1986) in defining OS. This approach is taken as OS like communication is a 'contested' term. As such OS is best understood by examining its elements and characteristics. Scholars like Brown (1990) believe good and powerful organisational stories must have a sense of temporality, a story grammar, and relevance for members and truthfulness.

- *Sense of temporality.*

In this sense, the linearity of time is often not observed. As such, past and present is mixed as the past is thrust into the present. The actual event is 're-done' although the presentation of order of events may change through the process of narration. It is a re-ordered view of reality.

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[8] Mangham (1996, p. 22) introduced the notion of organisations as texts and the idea of reading them in 1978, that is much earlier than the most quoted article by Ket de Vries and Miller (1987). Brown and McMillan (1991) elaborate the notion. According to both authors, rich and revealing texts about organisation reside at the lower reaches of the organisational hierarchy.

- *Story grammars.*

Structurally a story has a preface, recounting sequence and closing sequence. The preface provides the orientation to the significance of the account. In the recounting sequences, various events are presented. As the recounting ends, the teller provides some indication that the story has been completed. A good grammar leads to greater comprehension and retention among listeners.[9]

- *Relevance.*

The relevance of the story is determined by listeners/readers even though a storyteller is responsible for framing it in an appropriate way. Storytellers often express themselves through words of importance, significance, and relevance in a way that a listener will appreciate·

- *Ring of truth.*

Organisational stories should ring true to members. As such it is very rare for listeners to ask whether the story is absolutely true or false. Members who interpret the story therefore hold the power to determine if the story rings true or not.

Some researchers however see the above classification as too defining, too disciplined, formal and restrictive, and with a strong structural flavour. The following are 'new' definitions.

- A story is, not only oral but also written, performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience (Boje, 1991).

- "Stories are referenced with a nod of the head, a brief, "You know the full story," or " with a code word or two: His way!" (Boje, 1995, p. 1000).

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[9] See Agar (1980, p. 223-239). Mandler (1984, p. 18) uses other terms, story scheme and schemata, to reflect the same idea of story grammar. They act as structures consisting of 'sets of expectations' about the way in which stories unfold, involving typical plots (including beginning, episodes and endings), characters, settings and so on.

The above idea is not far from the 'grammar of motives' where the structure is composed minimally of the pentad of an Agent, an Action, a Goal, a Setting, and an Instrument --- Trouble. A similar idea is seen in Bruner (1987, p. 18):" Stories are about the vicissitudes of human intention."

- Stories do not require beginnings, middles, or endings (Bruner, 1990, p. 43-59).

- Poetic licence is the prerogative of storytelling as accuracy lies in the story's meaning (Gabriel, 1998, p. 136).

I take the best of both views though it is no secret that I have a strong inclination towards the 'new' definitions. To elaborate, I would like to situate organisational stories in a wider perspective, not restricting them to the above definitions. As a way forward, I use metaphors.[10]

Stories as Fictions

Lately, ideas on fiction and fictionality gain ground in organisational studies (Phillips, 1995). Indeed, what used to be call 'empirical' research is now seen as 'fiction', and said to be just another 'form of storytelling'.[11] To some the term storytelling refers to the creation of stories. By seeing things in terms of fiction, stories present the 'availability' of a state of contradictory affairs such as inconsistencies or impossibilities.[12] In a similar vein, by viewing stories as fiction, open-endedness or ambiguities are considered as merits, not to be remedied (Ronen, 1994, p. 93). Indeed, such features provide exciting opportunities for imagination and creativity and for being critical towards the phenomena (Czarniawska-Joerges and Gullet de Monthoux, 1994).

In line with the notion of fiction, organisational stories therefore inherit fictional properties. Of interest here is *imaginativa* and *fantasia*, the dimension of creativity that makes imagination and fantasies realism. Their realities are part of the

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[10] The list of metaphors is long as one could see from the organisational communication narratives in the previous chapter. In this chapter only some are highlighted.

[11] Astley and Zammuto (1992, p. 449) explain this as follows: Empirical research is essentially a form of storytelling, albeit an esoteric variety of storytelling. Like all storytellers we need stimulus materials around which to construct our stories and this is where empirical observation serves its role. We do not invent theories in vacuum; observing managerial activity is a catalyst that galvanises creative thought. Empirical observation serves as an excuse for theoretical work, but the theory so produced is essentially fiction.

[12] The situation is best seen in the light of storytelling as an act of selecting meaningful events and creating meaningful sequences.

"secondary world", the world that has a considerable common ground with the "primary world" of ours (Swinfen, 1984).

Mair (1988) writes,

> Every story speaks of a world... The world is hidden in the folds of the story and, to a degree, becomes available as the story unfolds. The self/world is difficult to read since the story speaks from it and through it and generally about it. Stories assume and speak from their worlds. The facts — kinds of facts — they allow are woven in their particular and mostly unspecified webs. (p. 217)

Stories as Accounts

Viewing the organisation as a cultural text, member's accounts are 'reading materials'.[13] In accounts, members define and simplify their reality. March and Simon (1958) refer to this as bounded reality. It is a reality with a specified frame of reference and point of view. Accounts in this view are thus particular definitions of the situation (Taylor, 1993, p. 8). They are considered symbolic, as they are not events themselves, but representations of them constructed by the narrators and audience through a process of communication (Jones, 1996; Gabriel, 1991c; Mahler, 1988).

According to Fulop and Rifkin (1999), accounts thrive in two forms: local or popular. Often, local accounts take the form of stories we can hear in various 'meeting places' such as in corridors, toilets or car parks. The popular accounts on the other hand are stories that attract or hold a considerable attention, and are remarkable enough to be published.[14]

Accounts in the form of stories, noted White (1981), are a dominant narrative in an organisation. Perhaps this supremacy is intimately related to Fisher's (1984)

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[13] To Gabriel (1991b) accounts of each story are recitals.

[14] I sense that both authors refer the term/word popular as something related to a wider audience especially outside the organisation, and being printed for popular consumption. They see stories more from the 'creativity of the mouth'. In my opinion they fail to mention the written form of local accounts, either original (such as *surat layang*) or taken from published texts (for example an excerpt from a *hikayat*).

narrative paradigm where human beings are seen as *homo narrans*. Weick (1995, p. 217) claims that individuals think narratively and make sense in narrative form, a view shared by Bruner (1987), Polkinghorne (1988) and Czarniawska (1997a). I believe this sheds a light on why members in organisations hear and tell stories most of the time (Martin, 1982; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996).

Stories as Voices

Closely related to the notion of accounts is the idea of voice (Genette, 1980, 1988; Aczel, 1998, p. 482; Brown, 1998). As a concept, voice exists at least at two levels in organisations. First, it refers to statements or actions of organisation members. It is an enactment. Secondly, it refers to a product or a service, and it is better known as the organisation's voice. To some people, organisational voice is closely related to what people refer to as the 'party line'. To members, organisational voice is regarded as positive if the voice creates positive relationship with themselves or vice versa.

To Grant, Keenoy and Oswick (1998, p. 7), voices can also be seen in terms of monologues and dialogues. In the former, accounts tend to contain a coherent story of the organisation and usually represent the perspective of one actor or group of actors. In the latter, a multitude of voices exists. In that form of polyphonic situation, struggles for dialogic dominance are acknowledged. Pope (1995) makes things clearer:

> It is important to recognise that all texts --- our own included --- move dialectically between monologue and dialogue. ... They are subject to the variable display of centripetal (monologic) and centrifugal (dialogic) pressures...and an apparent polyphony of voices always turns out to have a dominant harmony or melody. (p. 197-198)

A point to note is that silence in this view is also a part of voice.

Stories as Performances

In simple terms, a performance is an enactment (Browning, 1991). It is about events presented in a certain fashion (Todorov, 1981, p. 33-39). Indeed, a performance is

often seen as synonymous with theatricality (Heath, 1994, p. 6). With this understanding, I view performances as associated closely with 'dramatism', full of motives.[15] Indeed, some scholars like Baumeister and Newman (1994, p. 680) and Murray (1997, p. 12) discuss these issues in their explanations of stories.

From this perspective, story-telling becomes an issue of choice. It is an act of selecting significant events and arranging them into a significant sequence. Selection also means a deletion of the 'irrelevant' to the text (Alasuutari, 1995, p. 72). However, in making the choice, "logical appropriateness" (Browning, 1992, p. 287) must be taken into account, such as the context and historicality of the performance.

Stories as Language Activities

I define activities as the engagement of a subject toward a certain goal, objective or motives. In this light language is brought to the centre stage, that is to be "an active world-making" tool not merely to transmit information but to perform acts as well (Culler, 1997, p. 98 -100),[16] a point which Boden (1994) argues as central in the business of talk in organisations.

> Organisations are constantly created and re-created through the unfolding of dynamism of talk.[17] (p. 202)

Stories as Anthromorphism

Implicitly, by taking the above metaphorical formulation, stories have the 'attributes of human form.' Indeed, I sense such anthropomorphism is in the air upon reading the title of Frye's (1990/1957), The Anatomy of Criticism. As such, "descriptions

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[15] This idea is in line with Burke (1945, p. xv) who views dramatism as an enactment of motives.

[16] See Pitt (1998) for a reading on how language is utilised as personal theories of action. Here a narrative is seen as an activity whereby, among others, a metaphor is used as a strategy for action. The author calls this script approach.

[17] Musson and Cohen (1999) elaborate in detail how language, through a variety of linguistic forms, creates organisational realities by providing a framework for sense-making and collective meaning through stories.

exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). It is a kind of "form of life" (Phillips, 1995, p. 635). Thus stories have behaviour and personality of their own although in reality they need an author to give them life. Therefore stories have, among others, moods, emotions, desires and voices (Genette, 1980; 1988; Morgan and Dennehy, 1997, p. 494; Van Bushkirk and McGrath, 1992). More often than not such 'feelings' are cloaked in symbols and glazes of language such as metaphors (Czarniawska, 1997a). The above properties are in line with the nature of telling a story where the requirements of accuracy and veracity are relaxed in the interest of making points.[18]

STORIES CONFIGURATIONS

Stories in general can be seen in four 'master' configurations (Frye, 1990/1957). They are: comedy, romance, tragedy and satire. Such a division however lacks dynamism if it is taken too simply. In reality, stories are known to 'bleed over their boundaries' and interweave (Van Maanen, 1988). In my view the above classification, if seen holistically, provides interesting points. Stories can be understood in terms of opposition: heroes and victims, happiness and sadness, compliance and resistance, winning and losing, honesty and deception, and superior and subordinates.[19] Furthermore, stories, unlike logic, are not stopped dead by contradiction as they thrive on it (Bruner, 1990, p. 350).[20]

In 'practice', Frye's types of stories are very popular, at least to those who make the effort of classifying them. A good example can be seen in Gabriel's (1997a) work.[21]

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[18] To a great extent poetic licence and flexibility are the privileges of story telling. Often such narrative creativity is intentional in order to evade censorship.

[19] See <http: www.capcollege.bc.ca. /dept/magic/cmns/symbolism.html> (29/8/1997).

[20] Take for example a description on what is plot in a narrative. "The plot of a narrative usually means the tensions which are the fuel of the story. This might often involve some kind of conflict." See "Interpretation of Fiction - Keywords" at <http://www.saltdal.vgs.no/engfict.htm> (17/12/1997).

[21] In 1991a and 1991b he presented his 'stories' in term of comic, tragic and epic. In 1995, he 'narrated' his stories in term of tragic or romantic. Whilst, in 1996, he told his 'stories' in the form of tragedy (winning and losing, survival and injuries).

He shows that tragedy, comedy, and romance cover the great majority of stories in organisations.[22]

ORGANISATIONAL STORIES (OS) AND EMOTION

Stories in organisations have been studied in terms of functions. So far, a comprehensive list has been compiled by Boyce (1996) and extended by Gabriel (1997a, 1998a, 1998b). Based on those lists, OS are seen to provide the following functions: as tools for sense-making (Weick, 1995); as a map or guidelines to comprehend activities that go around them (Wilkins, 1983; Wilkins and Thompson, 1991); as survival mechanisms by providing lessons regarding appropriate strategies in the face of complexities (Kelly, 1985); as a vehicle to express organisational values (Brown, 1986); as managerial tools to influence, manipulate and control organisational members (Wilkins, 1983); as bonding and identification (Brown, 1985; Hafferty, 1988); as an ideological force that articulates a system of meaning which gives privileges to certain interests over others (Mumby, 1987); as repositories of organisational intelligence (Kreps, 1989); and as a medium of sharing culture (Kelly, 1985).

In this section I would like to focus my attention on the subject of emotion. This responds to Van Buskirk and McGrath's (1992) 'appeal' for a more explicit deal on the "emotional side of storytelling."

> [The] growing literature on organisational storytelling has been limited by a primary emphasis on the cognitive functions of stories. Their role in shaping emotional experience in organisational setting is less well documented. (p. 9)

I assume this neglect is intimately related to views that organisations are rational entities, whilst emotions on the other hand often equate with 'irrationality', signs of

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22 According to this author, most stories in organisations revolve around the following rubrics: computer, leader or director, person trauma or emotional injury, accident, special characters in the organisation, crisis, practical jokes, cock-up, nostalgia, sex and love, sackings and redundancies and death. Skoldberg (1994) also utilised Frye's classification in his research work on change in Sweden. In addition to tragic, romantic and comic, he also talks of satirical tales.

weakness and 'not in control'[23] behaviour. Yet, as noted by Nichol (1997) organisations are places that steam with emotions; excitement, anger, anxiety and fear, affection and hate, envy and jealousy..." (p. 353).

Stories and emotions indeed are not strange bedfellows. They intertwine with each other. On this point, Rosaldo (1989, 1993) notes that stories shape human conduct as they embody motives, feelings, aspirations, intentions and goals. Greco (1996) writes, "Narrative logic is concerned with capturing complex experiences that combine sense, reason, emotion, and imagination" (p. 47). Pragmatically, the view that stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives (Gabriel, 1997, p. 136) is now being utilised by many in scientific circles, for example in understanding illness holistically (Mattingly, 1991; McKay and Ryan, 1995; Vangelisti, Crumley and Baker, 1999).

Here, I take Fineman's (1996) definition of emotion as my point of departure. According to this author, emotions are personal displays of affect, or "moved" and "agitated" states, such as joy, love, fear, anger, sadness, shame, embarrassment (p. 9-35). In that definition, however, I see traces of the physiological theory of emotion. This theory postulates that emotions are feelings that accompany bodily changes as a response to an environmental stimulus.

Another version of this definition sees emotions as associated with activity and functions where rules and conventions are observed, for example in performing social acts where one is expected to follow certain scripts. As such 'real' emotional displays are curtailed and hidden in response to certain cultural persuasion. A good example of "unmoved" displays, at least in the public gaze, could be seen in Bali (Geertz, 1973; Wikan, 1990). In certain organisations, 'distorted' emotional displays are highly valued especially in industries that place "emotional labour" as their assets (Fineman, 1997, p. 18). A good example of this performance can be seen in

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[23] Allbrow (1992) cynically asked, "Do organisations have feelings?" In this regard, he proposes that people re-read Weber. Traditionally many relate Weber with bureaucracy, in turn translated as being rational whereby emotions are not in favour. However, the author notes that Weber also gives equal weight to irrationality in his interpretative sociology.

the smiling worlds of Disneyland and flight attendants (Wouters, 1989; Hochschild, 1993).

In brief, emotions are not limited to an individual's sensation alone, but also emerge from processes whereby people give meanings to their social condition. With that understanding, I take a stand similar to Denzin's (1984). He notes:

> Emotional terms carry a double referent: they reflect feelings felt by the self and they reference feelings the person ...directs towards others, including social objects ...this appears to be the case for the following emotional terms: being angry, resentful, sad, joyful, depressed, hostile, enraged, ashamed, proud, affectionate, friendly, embarrassed, rejected, guilty, shameful, in pain or in love. (p. 50)

Perhaps it is important to note at this stage what constitutes emotions, as embedded in over 400 stories 'heard' by Gabriel (1997a, p. 151).[24] They are as follows: amusement, disparagement, pride, disapproval, relief, anger, pity, reproach, sadness, satisfaction, affection, approval, frustration, nostalgia, derision, worry, bitterness, horror, admiration, disappointment, diversion, panic, irony, mockery, anxiety, fun, guilt, scornfulness and self-disparagement.[25]

How to 'arrest' emotions in OS?   Besides using my own heuristic capabilities (seeing and hearing in particular), I take help from metaphors for three main reasons. First, I am 'seduced by the charm of metaphors' whose magic permeates many scholars today (Morgan, 1986/1997; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Oswick and Grant, 1996).[26] Secondly, I am a Malay man doing research on Malay stories. (See

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[24] In coming to this list, he used a special version of a computer database package, Cardbox Plus Version 4.

[25] According to Gabriel, the package failed to list certain important emotions, such as embarrassment, happiness and hate, although those emotions were numerous in those stories. To him, this failure illustrates the shortcomings of using quantitative techniques in analysing *en masse* what is highly subjective, delicate material.

[26] According to Grant and Oswick (1996, p. 3), metaphors possess a generative capacity of liberating existing pre-conceptions about a particular phenomenon Such liberation in turn prevents one from falling into the trap of believing that the social system which surrounds us is inevitable, rigid and unchanging. In due course of this liberating, a metaphor is assumed to give a complete new experience and new understanding about the already "taken-for-granted" known phenomena (Petrie and Oshlag, 1993), relaxing from the dominant presuppositions, and giving the advantage of familiarity from strangeness (Hawkes, 1972). Putnam, Phillips and Chapman (1996) meanwhile show that

my explanation at the end of this chapter). Thirdly, metaphors and emotions are inseparable as the former is the 'container' of the latter (Jones, 1996, p. 114). With reference to this, I take the metaphor of drama as my point of departure in discussing further issues on OS emotions.

OS Emotions and the Drama Metaphor

Drama is an umbrella metaphor; it encompasses many smaller metaphors such as enactment, performance and plays (Czarniawska, 1997a, p. 29; Fineman, 1993, p. 5). The choice of this metaphor is governed largely by my vorurteil: life is a *sandiwara*.[27] Indeed, according to MacIntyre (1990, p. 5), theatricality is now fast becoming a 'natural feature' of our time. In organisation studies, it is common to see words like actors and players being used to describe organisational members.

Simply, the metaphor of drama treats life in general and organisations as play or theatre. Organisational members are therefore seen as players (creators and enactors) of the scripts and themes. Mangham and Overington (1987) summarise these ideas as follows:

> [The activity] allows us to use all that theatre, as a performing art, implies. It allows us to
> think about creativity, to consider the craft of actors playing characterisations, it provides
> considerations of tragedy and comedy, it suggests all the constraints of situation and history
> which affect any live performance, it allows for inquiry about the link between performance
> and what goes behind the backstage. (p. 3)

As in drama, a lot of enactment takes place in this metaphor. Here, I define enactment as a sense-making action in relation to contexts (Manning, 1997). Often,

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metaphors suggest a "mental imagery" break from the mechanistic view of organisational communication to a view of organisational communication as situationally relative and variable.

[27] A Malay theatre. I assume Höpfl and Linstead (1993, p. 76) were writing from Western experiences when they mentioned the metaphor, "Life is a theatre." If that is so, perhaps, the metaphor at some point is universal in nature.

this is scripted in the form of lists[28]. Scripts for example prescribe a persona, the enactment of character, how they want others to perceive them. The script is assumed to be relevant and unique to the role.

However the enactment is also subject to negotiation. In this regard therefore the scripted scripts can change, be contested, re-shaped, re-ordered, re-designed or re-organised. The 'instability' of the script arises maybe as the result of a new presumption of logical order such as the need for improvisation (Weick, 1998, p. 543-555). Sometimes it happens due to the "absence of meaning" or "confused meaning" (Weick, 1979, p. 174; Bantz, 1989, p. 235).

To Cohen and Stewart (1994) a script could be in the state of 'disorder' simply due to "ignorance of understanding simplicity" (Cohen and Stewart, 1994). Perhaps the best example is in 'unplanned' conversations where the speaker is making the script heuristically. Nevertheless, script changes produce certain outcomes as individuals mediate new relationships that constitute an organisation where they seek to define new limits, rewards, costs, constraints and obligations (Heath, 1994, p. 40).

If we take Borman's (1983) view into account, creating new scripts means creating new fantasies, which is shifting the social reality shared by members with similar experiences. The outcomes of such shifting are varied. However if we take organisational change as an example of enactment, it creates a lot of ramifications: dislocations and disruption of normal routines, the creation of a new state of unfamiliarity, anxieties, tension and disorder, besides hope of a new dawn. These phenomena are shown clearly in Armenakis and Bedeian (1999).[29]

By doing enactment organisations are 'not containers'. At the same time this implies that organising is a dynamic activity. It also illustrates the presence of multiplicity of meanings and voices in which reside issues such as control, power and politics.

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[28] See Browning (1992) for the discussion on lists as organisation communication. Rules and procedures, among others, are seen as lists.

[29] Both authors provide a comprehensive review on theory and research on organisational change in the 1990s.

With reference to this, as Morgan (1986, p. 131) points out, enactments are, in essence, socially constructed realities that rest as much in the heads and minds of members as they do in concrete sets of rules and relations.

It is worth pointing out that enactment overlaps with the social construction of reality (Hatch, 1997a, p. 41). Such overlap is common if one follows the discussions of activity theory. Briefly, this theory posits that man functions not only in a certain relationship with nature but also to other people.[30] In this regard, Conville (1997, p. 373) notes that relationships only 'exist' in one of two places, that is in the minds or the behaviour enacted. In this light, the following claims made by Heath (1994) offer new insight: "Stories supply organisational attitudes, beliefs and values, describe its practices and operations, and portray characters and action of its members" (p. 61).

I view enactment as very much related to the notion of performance. This intimacy is best seen in the idea that the performance is a sense-making action enacted by organisation members about the reality of their life-world (Putnam, Philips and Chapman, 1996). Literally speaking performance has two major connotations. First, it relates to theatricality and play as suggested by Goffman (1959), and secondly it is something associated with 'bringing to completion' or 'accomplishing.'

Regarding the theatricality of performance, organisational members are choice-making individuals.[31] They can perform according to the 'organisational scripts' but at the same time such scripts do not bind them. Members therefore could display differently in different roles or situations. As performances are 'authored' by individuals, an organisation in this view is a stage or explicitly a theatre (Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Bryant, 1997; Czarniawska, 1997a; Bolman and Deal, 1994;

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[30] See 'What is activity theory' at http://www.cudenver.edu~myder.itc_data/act_diff.html for multiple points of view on the theory.

[31] A point to note: in recent years, a distinction between actors and performers has been made. Actors serve directors whom in turn serve playwrights. Performers on the other hand do act but do not hide their own personalities. See Pelias and Vanoosting (1987) for details.

Mangham and Overington, 1987;Turner, 1974).[32] From this perspective, Vail (1989) posits the idea that managing is performing art.

Generally, performances are actions that constitute reality, and through such performances members make meaningful sense of and bring "to life" the said reality. Indeed, in this vein, Putnam, Philips and Chapman (1996) explain organisational communication as social interaction performance. This is clear if one subscribes to Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo's (1992/1983) ideas[33]. These authors explain performance phenomena through several categories: ritual (personal, task, social, and organisational), passion (storytelling, special vocabularies and metaphors about their jobs); sociality (courtesies, pleasantries, gossips and privacies); politics (power, control, influence, bargaining); and enculturation (learning roles and ropes of organisational culture).[34] Both authors also suggest that through performances, 'secrets' of workplaces are revealed.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnel-Trujillo (1992/1983) says:

> As members perform rituals of the culture, they reveal the particular temporality of the place. As they perform the passions of the culture, they reveal the particular drama of the place. As they perform the socialities of culture, they reveal the particular smoothness of the place. And as they perform the politics of the culture, they reveal the particular strategies of the place. (p. 117)

Performances as above are indeed exemplars-in-action[35] or displays. Implicitly, a performance is also a play. Often, the term play is related to recreation, having fun,

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[32] This is very much related to the idea pursued by scholars who see life as a drama and humans as actors. Kenneth Burke is among the scholars at the forefront of this idea. For a brief summary of his works, the following sites are very helpful: http://www.sil.org/humanities/rhetoric/GRAMMOTI.HTML http://www.sil.org/humanities/rethoric/KBPAR.HTML

[33] This framework is the most quoted and very influential in organisational communication culture, especially in dealing with the notion that organisational communication is a cultural performance.

[34] The framework is the most quoted and very influential in organisational communication culture, especially in dealing with the notion that organisational communication is a cultural performance.

[35] Shakespeare suggests that there is no clear cut distinction between the various forms of performance. As such to the famous literary figure, there is no distinction between performing work, performing an office, or playing a role in politics. See States (1996).

pleasure and nothing serious. However, in recent years play has been connected with something more serious, like playing football.

Whatever the perception, plays are creative constructions and productions that give many possibilities for emotional relationships to grow.[36] They provide a stage for humour, passion, pathos, or tragedy, for example, to germinate (Fine and Martin, 1995, p. 166). Such outcomes are not strange as people take their 'body to work'. Indeed, as Van Buskirk and McGrath (1992) argue, stories shape emotionality in organisations, primarily through actors perceiving and responding to events. According to Müller (1992), in telling stories, narrators do not just say what happened, but play and produce 'little shows' through scenic narration, outbursts, expressive evaluations accompanied by mimicry, and gesticulation, and interjections.

The play could also mean a way out to reclaim the 'loss of innocence' in the workplace.[37] In reclaiming the 'flight', players could end up in the realm of dreams and 'fantasy'. In that situation of cognitive contextualisation, one has the ability to enter a 'disordered world' where one experiences loss of sense of the physical body.[38] In this regard, change is a rich period for seeing such contextualisation. In that time, fear of the unknown, uncertainty of the future, ruptures and displacement of "normalities", among others, are sources of play. Such a claim is not far from what was observed by Kets de Vries (1999).

> The dynamics of creativity of playing could also slide into collusion that is largely as the result of the meshing of fantasies. (p. 747)

Intrinsically, in such types of fantasies, ordinary plays could easily turn into plays of resistance, which at the same time act as a release valve for pain (Gabriel, 1995). To 'deprived' members, fantasy is the vehicle by which they could enjoy the

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[36] To Caillois (1962) such relationships could be forbidden, contingencies, parallel or complementary.

[37] Stories are not value-free. They have motives. See Baumeister and Neuman (1994).

[38] In a study in Malaysia, Ong (1987) described how rural female factory workers 'turned' themselves into 'disordered' humans due to tensions arising from reworking their cultural and religious values in Japanese factories.

pleasure of 'inflicting' pain, and set up tensions for the people in power. Such actions of symbolic order[39] include giving nicknames, writing graffiti, private jokes, rumours, and gossips or playing dumb (Scott, 1990).

In Bakhtinian term, the above 'suspension' actions are part of the carnivalisque (Coulter, 1999, p. 9-10; Vice, 1997, p. 183-184). In that carnivalsque, a temporary liberation from the established order is celebrated. They are intimately related to discontent and function as mechanisms of psychological survival (Gabriel, 1991, p. 327). One also must note that in fantasy people are the 'master' and could fulfil their unfilled expectations, wishes and desires about the organisation (Brown, 1986). Gabriel (1991) writes,

> Stories, gossips, myths, and jokes may represent attempts to humanise the impersonal spaces of bureaucratic organisations, to mark them as human territory in a similar way to the vase of flowers or the family picture on the executive desk. (p. 873)

In other words, in fantasy, members have the abilities to liberate themselves from victimisation to empowerment, making the unheard voice audible, and at the same time have the opportunity to enjoy them as an effective therapeutic tool (Divinyi, 1995). The above actions indeed are "offstage" behaviours, which Scott (1990) includes in his description about "hidden transcripts." He regards them as weapons of resistance employed by the people of the weak (Scott, 1985; Conquergood, 1992, p. 89; Foreman, 1996; Ahmad and Hartley, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, plays have become a very serious business. Seriousness indeed provides 'opportunities' for plays to become shadowy, hostile and phoney,[40] that is as behind-the-scene activities (Deal and Jenkins, 1994).[41] I reckon in plays

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[39] See Carl Rhodes, "Playing With Words: Multiple Representations of Organisational Learning Stories" at < http://dweb.waikato.ac.nz/depts/sml/journal/vol3_1/carl.htm> 20/9/99.

[40] The notion of "dark play" comes to my attention upon reading Stronach (1999). According to this author, in that type of play there are inversions and displacements. Moreover, my impression of the dark play related to my 'experiences' in reading the state of football in Malaysia where so many players were caught doing unprofessional things.

[41] As shown in Caillois (1962) there are many behind-the-scene plays. Such plays could be displayed in many forms such as masking and trance, clowning and pranking. He notes that in India there is a term relates to play, *kredati*. In *kredati* there is capricious movements provoked by overabundance of gaiety and vitality. It is often used to describe illicit or forbidden sexual relationships, or rise and fall of

there are many secrets, motives, and concealment. Most of the time, the 'true' meanings of plays are 'hidden,' as they are full of symbolism. (At this point I remembered *Noh*, a Japanese type of drama, where human beings at certain stages appear disguised, such as in the form of a ghost). For me this is masking.[42]

Another point closely related to the idea of play is the game metaphor. According to Browning (1992), stories are language games[43] in organisations (p. 291). As games, he asserts that stories feed on differences as a way to thrive although at certain times they can operate to provide order. This notion, stories as games, indeed emphasises the presence of many kinds of utterances or multiplicity of voices. At the same time one must note that in a game, there are movements. It involves work of dynamics (Thatchenkery and Uphadaya, 1996, p. 308-330)[44] and alignments (Harris, 1988, p. 97). The dynamism however is a source of conflicts that are often related to issues of influence, power, politics and control. Stories in this sort of atmosphere often take the colour of the folk tales in which there are heroes and victims, love and hatred, domination and opposition. Fineman and Gabriel (1996) in their recent works highlight such 'folkloric' situations in modern organisational life. As an illustration, the following articles on stories, among others, should be consulted: Gabriel (1997a, 1995), Helmer (1993) and Jordan (1996).

REFLECTIONS

Upon 'dancing' various 'stories' told by scholars (mostly Western) about stories and storytelling, it is worth reflecting on them in the context of a Malay man. Malays for a long time have honoured verbal manifestations in their life. In their written literature, such verbality is clearly visible (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1997). Such love for

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waves. A point that I would like to make is that in plays there are 'turbulence, dizziness and disorder, chance, competitions.'

[42] According to Park (1950) as quoted by Goffman (1959, p. 30), it is probably no mere historical accident that the word "person," in its first meaning, is a mask.

[43] A language game is a Wittgensteinian idea. It is similar to Bakhtin's notion of speech genre. According to Bakhtin, the wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless as human activities are inexhaustible and provide various possibilities. See also Hoenisch (1998).

[44] In this article the authors introduced a concept derived from an Indian philosophy, *maya-leela* in describing the nature of play. *Maya* signifies the multiplicity of forms and processes while *leela* associates with the exuberance of cosmic play.

'sounds' can be seen in Malay classical romances and in Malay conversations where words and sentences are often rhythmic.

Pertinent to this love for sounds, among others, is the notion of *halus*, an integral part of Malay culture. The *halus* way of speaking is indeed universally admired among Malays. It is seen as *patut* (right and proper) and *sesuai* (appropriate) behaviour. Malay in general places great emphasis upon 'proper conduct' or *ada bahasa*[45] in their life. As such, norms of refined (*halus*) speech are accepted as the proper way.

On the contrary doing otherwise is considered as 'improper' or on the extreme as *kurang ajar* (uncouth). In elaboration Goddard (1998) writes,

> The linguistic features of *halus* speech include the use of elegant phrases instead of mundane vocabulary, careful attention to forms of personal reference (for example by avoiding direct address and self-reference), and recourse to the large inventory of traditional sayings (*peribahasa*) to allude to any potentially sensitive matters. (p. 346)

Thus, if one is not addressing others properly, one could be labelled as rude, a person without *bahasa*, or 'not knowing *bahasa*' (*tidak mengerti bahasa*), an injurious remark in the opinion of Malays.

At this point, an insight from the ethnography of communication is useful. As shown by Asmah (1992), Malays must follow certain 'rules of speaking' when they want to express their desires, opinions, emotions or making stories. To Goddard and Wierzbicka (1997) such rules are known as "cultural scripts," and they are intimately linked with the concept of social emotion.

In relation to the above, *malu* is considered by many as the fundamental social emotion concept in Malay interaction. In its literal meaning, *malu* is glossed as 'ashamed, shy or embarrassed.' These translations however do not convey the fact that Malay regards *malu* as social good, akin to a sense of propriety (Goddard,

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[45] This Malay word is translated into English as language. In Malay language the word *bahasa* has a secondary meaning of 'courtesy or manners.'

1996, p. 432). It is common to hear among native speakers that a person with no *malu* is construed as an animal.[46]

In addition, there are two other concepts related to *malu*, which are *maruah* (dignity, honour) and *harga diri* (self-esteem). In this light, Malays are expected to think 'appropriately' before they speak. It is not merely about saving face but to avoid bad perception by the speaker. Your mouth is your tiger, says a proverb. Most important of all, Malays who practise Islam believe words are do'a (prayers).[47]

However, if Hofstede's (1980) perspective is brought into this picture the Malay 'reserved' discourse style is closely intertwined with the idea of "power distance." Such an attitude is seen by some writers as growing out of conditions of being unfree and in sufferance. Yet, it is not right to assume the above 'restraint' results in conformity and passivity. As shown by Dailie (1990) Malays often do their *tikaman* (stabbing) implicitly. One of their main weapons is *bahasa*. Often they use *bunga bahasa* (figurative language), such as metaphors and *peribahasa* (proverbs) as their mode of presentation.

To summarise, in order to understand Malay stories, one must deviate from McCloskey's (1990) suggestion of how to understand things. According to this author, there are only two ways of understanding things, either by way of a metaphor or by way of a story (p. 5). Indeed, in this engagement one must combine both.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that research on stories in organisations is still in its infancy. Thus there is no clear way of doing it. There are many ways of perceiving stories. They can be discussed as elements of organisational culture, as manifestations of symptoms of unconscious processes, and as a vehicle for organisational communication and learning, which may reveal various interests and multiplicity of

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[46] Some commentators see *malu* as a negative behaviour. For me it is more related to behaviour appropriateness. As such being malu in learning is considered bad.

[47] In brief, in this concept, every word is accountable in the eyes of God.

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voices. A point to note is that every story is told and framed from a certain perspective. Thus, it provides a means of constructing a world. According to Bruner (1990, p. 64), people frame events and sentences in larger structures. As to how a personal story may look, it is not an individual production alone. It derives from larger group, culture, ideology and history contexts. Thus, a story therefore could arise out of certain script, schema or story lines (Ulich, 1998; Gioia, 1986, p. 49-74), which are already 'there' in the society. After all, the stories in organisations provide means for ordering.

> The ordering process operates by linking diverse happenings along a temporal dimension and by identifying the effect one event has on another, and it serves to cohere human actions and events that affect human life into a temporary gestalt. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 18)

As seen above, OS have moved beyond their traditional function from 'superficially' entertaining and amusing listeners to becoming an organising agent. In this regard, one must not be misled by stories woven by chaotic creativity where illogicalities and ambiguities, inconsistencies and, imprecision prevail. Indeed, in that instability lies the story's meaning. In other words, the truth of stories lies not in their 'accuracy' but in the 'acceptance of truth' by listeners or readers. Every organisational member then can be a story-teller, which in turn makes them meaning-makers; there are polyphony of voices and realities in an organisation where each voice is trying to 'overpower the other.' In other words, language games are rife in storytelling.

In sum, this chapter shows that, in a sense, the organisational actors are the organisation, and story telling is a communicative event by which organisational reality is created, modified and revised.

Chapter 3

Methodology of the Field

I view research as a mode of engagement. In essence, this view suggests that research is a personalised process, not removing responsibility for what the researcher does, nor reducing the researcher role to that of an agent who crumbles to the institutionalised system's demands. Research from this perspective reiterates that the researcher and the researched must be part of the whole. In this light, research is not merely an epistemological or technical activity but more about ways of gaining knowledge of the social reality and humanity in the fullest sense (Morgan, 1983, p. 405-407). By viewing research as an engagement I emphasise that the research is never independent and value-free from the researcher. In this dynamic way, this research became experiential learning to me.

This engagement is qualitative in nature. This choice is made not to deny the importance of quantitative approach, but rather due to the nature of this research where the purpose is to understand meaning-making. It is not about searching for law or theory testing as espoused by the quantitative approach. I view the qualitative method as an umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which is more concerned with emergent themes and ideographic descriptions. "It is a method that emphasises 'getting inside' situations and involving oneself in the everyday flow of life" (Gill and Johnson, 1997, p. 37). The flexibility within the method provides an advantage in organisational research, which always has to be responsive to the organisational circumstances and complexities. As additional flexibility, the method makes it possible for other sources of data to be used in the interpretation process.

As a way of situating myself in this engagement, I would like to place myself within the interpretative paradigm, where one understands the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Realities of the social world in this paradigm are best understood from the viewpoint of the participant-in-action, where they are created, sustained and changed. In the words of Kamoche (1991, p. 9) actors in this social world are involved in the social process of constructing meaning, and enacting their social realities. Reality is multiple, sustained and changed in this process.

HERMENEUTICS AS MODE OF INQUIRY

A research study should reconstruct the world, and it must be done only at the point at which it exists, that is in the mind of the constructors (Frey, 1994, p. 588). I suggest hermeneutics as one of the appropriate vehicles for this reconstruction. Such appropriateness in my opinion relates to the Greek word, *hermeneia,* from where the term was derived. The word suggests that it brings to understanding particulars where the process involves language. It also suggests the process of bringing a thing, a situation or a concept from unintelligibility to intelligibility; rendering what is unclear clear in order to allow readers to make sense and understand (Leonard, 1994, p. 55; Palmer, 1969, p. 13; Introna, 1997, p. 55; Robertson-Malt, 1999). Philosophically, hermeneutics is an attempt to foster understanding in this way, as opposed to describing cause and effect when attempting to make sense of and comprehend phenomena.

Briefly, in this hermeneutical reconstruction there is x and y mediation. Both x and y mediate each other where x is the researcher and y is the tradition/culture/group. To Gadamer (1988), this whole creative process means one is entering others' form of life. In my case, it is about entering the life of the people in Palmyra.

In its literal meaning hermeneutics is associated closely with personal interpretation. But in particular, the term denotes an exegetical method for identifying and explicating meanings (Schwandt, 1994, p. 121). In interpreting human traces, hermeneutics often tries to go beyond the observable in order to read the invisible text. As the paradigm becomes trans-phenomenal, present events are seen in the light of previous events, private experiences and whatever is pertinent to the situation under study. Such insights lead the way to the understanding of reality.

Regardless of differences of schools of thought, hermeneutic proponents agree that text is pivotal in hermeneutic understanding (Kvale, 1996, p. 38). As an analogy, I take the position that texts are not merely referring to the humanities but also to objects of social science such as meaningful actions, and represent a system or a world (Ricouer, 1971;Thompson, 1990, p. 272-291; Jervolino, 1996, p. 63-80). It is in this light that organisations (Ket de Vries, 1987) and human subjects (Moore, 1990, p. 88; Greenhalgh, 1998, p. 257-259; Flick, 1998) are seen like texts.

There are two important leitmotifs that govern hermeneutic understanding --- language and history. To Gadamer (1989a) (in Truth and Method, henceforth TM), language allows humans to dwell in the house of being (Gadamer, 1989a, p. 443). It is the medium of human experience. Humans in this view understand the world only through the use of words. *World* (a Heideggerian term), in this context of linguistic phenomena, is a meaningful set of relationships and practices that we have by virtue of being born in a "social uterus" (Tachankary, 1992, p. 201). A person in this world realm is a being for whom things have significance and value, self-interpreting, and embodied rather than merely 'having a body.' As a human being-in-time, one finds oneself in a particular nexus of cultural, familial and situational practices and meanings. Thus, to have a world in this context is to have a language, and language in this sense is the universal medium in which understanding of the world is realised. And the mode of realisation of understanding is interpretation.Leonard (1994) 'interprets' the above Gadamerian thoughts as follows:

> Language sets up the world; it both articulates and makes things show up for us, a vocabulary, or the kinds of metaphors that one use can name things into being and change the sensibility of age... It creates the possibility for particular ways of feelings and of relating that make sense within a culture).[48] (p. 46-47)

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[48] To Habermas, Gadamer succumbs to linguistic idealism and cannot deal with systematically distorted communication. As such, issues of language as the medium of domination and power are not addressed. Gadamer rejects this argument by repeating his slogan that "*Being* that understood is language", and "the mirror of language reflects everything that is".

A point to note: Being in the above context should be seen in the light of Heideggerian term, *Dasein*. According to Heidegger, *Dasein* is what we think of as being human, in the sense of being able to be aware of our own existence in a world where others exist. See Introna (1997) for a brief journey into the realm of *Dasein*.

It is important to note that Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas on language greatly influenced Gadamer. To Humboldt, language is not simply the thoughts, moods, or even the self of the expresser, but a shared worldview. He recognises that the living act of speech, verbal *energia*, is the essence of language. As such language is seen as an activity of expression. Therefore, according to this author, when we are engaged in dialogue, we are engaged in a shared activity of bringing our worlds and ourselves into words.

Humboldt's idea of equated language and thought is better known as the *weltanshauung* hypothesis, an extreme version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.[49] This is Humboldt's philosophy of language as activity, maintaining that language is not only a means of communication but also a means of cognition (that is through one's formulation of one's thoughts).[50] Simply, to Gadamerian language view is a worldview.[51]

Broadly speaking, Gadamer posits that the object of all conversation is understanding, and all understanding is interpretation, that is, through the medium of language. As language 'speaks', it enables speakers and hearers to extend the horizon of understanding beyond the limits of the initial socialisation. Thus, instead of leaving x (researcher) and y (culture/tradition/group) as prisoners of a fixed view of the world, it encourages x and y to escape from the limitations of historical situation and tradition.

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[49] See "The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis" at
http://venus.va.com.au.suggestion/sapir.html,(24/8/99)

[50]Bakhtin in turn recasted 'language as an activity' as dialogism. See
http://kathleen.slavic.pitt.edu/~...ations/linguistic/bushnellsk.html, (24/8/99)

[51] See also Gadamer (1989a, p. 443). Davidow uses another expression: To have a language is to have a worldview. See Adam Davidow in "Gadamer: The Possibility of Interpretation" at http://www.sbc.net/academic/phil/stoal/Davidow.html (28/7/99)

See "Gadamer's Expressive Dialogism" at
http://www.beloit.edu/~philorel/DVSEPIII.html(28/7/99).

See Palmer (1969, p. 9)

With the above idea of *world*, Gadamer argues that understanding is always a historical act, and it is connected to the present. As such the past and the present become merged together in the process. This aspect of "historicality" is a product that is situated in specific times and places, belonging to and participating in a particular social tradition. Thus, an understanding from this point of view is an understanding rooted deeply in history. In other words, there is no stable understanding, only historical understanding, as every understanding is an engagement of the historicity of the reader with the historicity of the text.

It is important to realise that by entering other "forms of life" through the medium of language, one is moving into each other's horizon. And in coming to understanding one must immerse in the "fusion of horizons." This fusion, where one must adjust one's interpretation in light of the interpretation of others, is an act of positioning in text[52] reading, and in this regard, one is confronting the language-game[53] (The game related intimately with linguistic interchange where human agreement is pertinent). In this reading, effective historical consciousness is lurking behind a 'reader' under the disguise of contexts. Reading is thus tied to the text and its historicity. Consequently the interpretation that results is a fusion of the text and its context (Allen, 1995, p. 179).

It is relevant to note that, as part of the forms of life, the language-game can break down. Such a possibility is not remote as text as such provides such possibility. Besides, in understanding the other/text there is always an issue about "relation" to "distanciation" (Young and Collin, 1988, p.155).[54] In addition, through such acknowledgement of distance, a researcher is able to re-state or re-symbolise the

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[52] According to Bakhtin (1981) language lies on the borderline between oneself and the other, as such words are always half some one else's.

[53] It is a game, in which language and action are fused together. Wittgenstein coined the term. Although both hermeneutics and the later philosophy of Wittgenstein posit that meaning resides in the conventions and practices of ordinary social life, that is negotiated, conditioned, practical, and fluid, Wittgenstein believed there is no structure common for all language games, and is used to mediate between life forms. Gadamer on the other hand believed that mediation between life forms is possible.

[54] This distanciation refers to the distance in dialogue, conversation and play activities by x and y (the knower and the known) in the fusion of horizons, rather than antagonism and clash of opposites.

relation into something that gives a new understanding of the situation. In that position of distanciation, language will become an occurrence and requires clarification. On this point, Introna (1997) writes,

> At the moment of breakdown, language becomes a text, and consequently it needs an interpretation. (p. 61)

The historical situatedness of *x* and *y* indeed has a positive importance in hermeneutical understanding as it opens us to growth by being incomplete (understanding). In Gadamer's (1989a) words:

> The historical movement of human life in is never absolutely bound to any standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is rather something into which we move and move with us...thus the horizon of the past, out of all human lives that exist in the form of tradition, be always in motion. (p. 304)

Implicitly, the horizon of the present cannot be formed at all without the past. Thus *erlebnisse* or "having an experience" is highly emphasised in hermeneutics. It forms the centre around which the meaning of a particular life history unfolds (Introna, 1997, p. 67-68). And this *erlebnisse* constitutes the basis upon which one understands one's life as a whole, which is in relation to the various experiences one has had. Interestingly the concept is compatible with the idea of a learning experience.

As shown by Warnke (1987, p. 29), new experiences revise the way in which the past is understood and the future anticipated. A point to note those experiences is interpreted in the context of an understanding of past and future. One must also note that understanding through the fusion of the horizons, or fusion of the 'worlds', is also an act of dialogue. In that sense, one may either consent to or repair the tradition in which one horizon is embedded. Interpretation is therefore cultivation (*ausbildung*) of the understanding, not something given but arising out of mediation.

An interpretative researcher must understand that an organisational reality not only exists in the mind of actors but is also dispersed throughout the organisation in various forms. I believe it is the duty of a researcher to assemble a 'collage' of realities in order to get the whole picture.

With this view of the 'activity' in mind, I take the position of complementing the interpretative paradigm with others, a position known as inter-paradigmatic borrowing:

> Researchers taking this [borrowing] position listen carefully to what others say, read research from other paradigms and integrate some concerns or issues into their own research...[while]...still fundamentally committed to research within a particular paradigm. (Martin and Nakayama, 1999, p. 11-12)

In relation to the above, Addison (1992, p. 113) makes a good contribution by suggesting a 'marriage' between hermeneutics and grounded theory. I view grounded theory, as does Dexter (1998), in the sense that explanation of phenomena, events, and understandings originates within the data. In this 'marriage,' Addison gives a list of practices to be followed by researchers:

- Immersing oneself in the participants' world in order to understand and interpret the participants' everyday practices.
- Looking beyond individuals' actions, events, and behaviours to a larger background context and its relationship to the individual events.
- Entering into an active dialogue with the research participants, research colleagues, research critics, the account itself, and his/her own values, assumptions, interpretations, and understandings.
- Maintaining a constantly questioning attitude in looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper understandings, alternative explanations, and changes with time and context.
- Analysing in a circular progression between parts and whole, foreground and background, understanding and interpretation, and researcher and narrative accounts.

- Offering a narrative account of the participants' everyday practices that opens up new possibilities for self-reflection and changed practices.
- Addressing the practical concerns of the researcher and the research participants against a larger social, cultural, historical, political, and economic background.

The above idea follows the notion of the hermeneutic circle, where at least four main movements take place.

1. *Questioning present experience.* In a heuristic manner, x (the researcher) uses his/her 'fore-understanding' to establish initial meaning with the assumption that it is coherent and understandable.
2. *Reflection/theorising upon those experiences.* At this point x relates the meaning to the current situation, tradition and form of life.
3. *Opening up new areas of theory/practice.* With the new understanding, new meanings open up.
4. *A new hermeneutics is formed.* With the birth of the new form, a new cycle begins.

Addison's (1992) ideas have strong parallels with Guba's (1985) axioms on a naturalistic paradigm, that can be simplified as follows: realities are multiple, constructed and holistic; the knower and known are interacted and inseparable, and the inquiry is inherently value-bound. Indeed, in my opinion the above paradigm intertwines beautifully with the hermeneutic circle of understanding.

At this juncture, I would like to address the issue of biases in research. Where a researcher is in the research itself, many see such involvement as promoting biases that could undermine the credibility and objectivity of the interpretations. To me such worry is a positivist anxiety as biases, acknowledged or not, are prevalent at all levels of the research process. Even in the so-called 'objective' research, concepts and methods are held a priori (Deetz, 1996, p. 194). Indeed by falling back on understanding what are *vorurteils* (hermeneutics prejudices), the above question should not become an issue.

The term *vorurteil* refers to the existence of pre-understanding that is seen as necessary condition of all human understanding (Gadamer, 1989a, p. 227). In this sense, *vorurteil* is the prior knowledge, or the knowledge that we bring along to any experience. It is part of the historical reality of being. Indeed, the failure to recognise the role of vorurteil in the process of understanding is the prejudice against prejudices itself (Hekman, 1984, p. 359). Furthermore neutrality is always problematic. McAuley (1985) noted that it is 'incredibly-difficult-to-achieve' if one says in dealing with meaning one must and can suspend one's own memory, desire, understanding and sense impression

To Gadamer, *vorurteil* is the first stab, or initial understanding or interpretation that must take place due to the lack of sufficient context or dialogue. It would only turn negative if the interpreter is not continually open to the potentiality of new understanding that may emerge. In other words in *vorurteil* there is an anticipation of a new meaning. The point is that anything new can only be understood in terms of what is already known or familiar. What is important to a person is to be aware of one's own biases, so that the text may present itself in all its newness, and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings (Gadamer, 1989a, p. 299). Simply, text newness could not be gained without the admission of our own fore-meaning and prejudices as "filtering" – we need these for a genuine understanding to emerge clearly as such.

In relation to the above filtering, Gadamer (1989,a) points to the need to distinguish between positive (enabling) and negative (distorting) preconceptions, and he insists that prejudices should be only the basis of the former, where they are firmly grounded in the thing itself.

> All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by the imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze on the things themselves (meaningful texts). (p. 266-267)

To some, such idea of *vorurteil* is like being trapped by one's prejudice and entombed within one's own particular historical tradition. In my opinion this is not the case, at least for two reasons. First, one is always open to risking and testing of one's prejudices in one's dialogical encounter with others. Second, traditions are

'living' or are always in the process of being reshaped through re-interpretation as the result of encounters.

In sum, I adopt the following hermeneutic assumptions as the philosophy that underpins this research.

- *Pre-understanding*. There is no 'pre-suppositionless' knowledge. Thus, in interpreting one must conform to the 'actuality' of the experience of the interpreter. The interpreter and the interpreted in other words are recognised to have their own conception about the world where validity is always assumed. A fusion of horizon makes understanding between the two possible.

- *Hermeneutic autonomy*. In order to understand others, one must understand them in their own light. Human beings in this position are social and dialogical. The meaning of expressions is brought into being through the encounter of the interpreter and the interpreted, and these meanings are constantly shaped and re-shaped as they go along.

- *Meaningful coherence*. Hermeneutics 'captures' the spirit that expresses itself in and through monuments of intellectual and artistic creation, as well as public life. In this tradition, the objectification of sense is important. Thus, the 'spirit' can only be grasped through material, concrete, and structural elements like buildings, organisational structure and physical arrangement.

- Hermeneutics is the continuing involvement with history and history is at the centre of the understanding process.

- In understanding, a circular movement from the part to the whole and back again from the whole to its parts must be made. Hermeneutics ties together two elements that do not at first appear related but they really are: a whole part of a relationship, for example, text and context; utterance and historical context; inner meanings and its outside expression.

This research uses field studies. Briefly, field research is the systematic study of ordinary events and activities in their natural environment. The primary goal of this type of research is to understand what these events and activities mean to those who engage in them. The research, as the term implies, is conducted in the setting of the phenomenon of interest --- 'in the field' --- where researchers have no control over events and activities. And it is in the 'field' where the Other lives.

Who is the Other? To a large majority, the Other refers to 'the exotic outsider.' Often in this view, the Other resides in a pristine, encapsulated cultural island whose tradition persists outside the contemporary world. To Czarniawska-Joerges (1992, p. 50-51) this exoticism is an anthropological sin due to its long association with imperialism and colonialism. However in recent years, more and more field research is being done in one's own backyard. Barley (1989) received vindication in this regard when he studied his own culture. To me, the Other is none other than us, a point that I share with Van Maanen (1995, p. 20). Perhaps, some does not happily receive such coming-back-home, as it is a 'difficult' venture compared to the study of 'primitive people.'

Leach (1982) acknowledged the above point in the following words.

> [Fieldwork] in a cultural context of which you already have intimate first-hand experience seems to be much more difficult than fieldwork which is approached from the naïve viewpoint of a total stranger. When anthropologists study facets of their own society their visions seem to become distorted by prejudices that derive from private rather than public experience. (p. 124)

I presume the above statement is more related to the author's own fear of findings his own 'primitivism' rather than concern for scholarship. My claim rests on the argument that even total strangers carry with them a complete inscription of their own acculturation process. In this view, it seems 'right' to impose one's own culture on exotic ones, not on one's own, a hegemonic attitude, I suppose. On this issue Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) writes,

Blindness of a native ethnographer must be weighted against an outsider's clumsy ignorance. (p. 48)

In this engagement, my research takes the form of quasi-ethnography. This term is in line with a distinction mentioned in Marcus and Cushman (1982). According to these authors, "total ethnography" is about the complete description of another culture or society" while the "part ethnography" only takes "parts of the total." In the latter, a researcher acknowledges the presence of "missing parts", and assumes that the vacuum is to be filled out by later studies.

What is meant by ethnography is open to debate as there are many explanations attached to the term, as seen in many qualitative research methodology texts. I suggest that the issue revolves around whether it refers to a philosophical paradigm or whether it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate. Atkinson and Hammersley (1998, p. 110-111)[55] suggest a 'practical' solution out of both extremes. To them, ethnography usually refers to forms of social research that has a substantial number of the following features:

- A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomena rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them.
- A tendency to work primarily with "unstructured" data, that is, data that has not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories.
- Investigations of a small number of cases, or perhaps just one case, in detail.
- Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretations of meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.

Van Maanen (1995) meanwhile sees ethnography in relation to the study of culture, which is as method of study and as a result of such study.

When used to indicate method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork conducted by a single investigator who "lives with and lives like" those who are studied for a lengthy period of

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[55] For reference purposes, I am using the 1998 impression.

time (usually a year or more). When used to indicate a result, ethnography ordinarily refers to the written representation of culture. (p. 4-5)

Agar (1997) makes a similar gesture to the above three authors in his overview of the research mode. Briefly he notes that doing an ethnographic work means being in the field ("I was there"), encounters ("something happened") at first hand ("participant observation") of activities of the place.

Why field study?

Some of the answers are implicit in the above paragraphs. However, to emphasise the point, this methodology makes claims, with reference to organisational culture, that are seen in various organisational ethnographic studies:[56]

- This approach permits a deep and thick understanding of an organisation. Their data are often much richer than those collected by quantitative measures. Situational particulars add verisimilitude to narrative accounts. The emphasis on "depth" permits researchers to examine the details of expressive culture.

- In this ethnographic way, participants' views of their social world are highly valued. As such it implies that there are many 'realities' in an organisation and, not one, as held by positivists.

- It attempts to examine how organisations operate as ongoing concerns. Researchers therefore examine not only the effects of organisational culture but also how such culture and its effects evolve through interaction --- the doing of organisational culture.

In relation to the above I find notes made by Yun (1999, p. 998-999) worth mentioning on the 'revealing power' of qualitative methods. Based on a study about the implementation of automation in the electronics industry in Singapore, the author showed that the data from the survey results was "hiding" an important point, by showing little evidence of labour resistance to the program. On the contrary,

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evidence about the resistance was revealed by the in-depth-interview, which in turn 'scared' the sponsor. As a result, the report was not made public.

DATA AND DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES

Primarily, my main data is derived from 'stories' told by my participants (Phillips, 1995; Phillips and Zyglidopoulos, 1999): staff from the management and professional group. They are an interesting group at Palmyra. In Palmyra, they are staff from the K and VIP categories. (See Chapter Four for details).

With regard to the action of telling stories, Malays often tell 'side' stores in their main story. Often they take the form of folk tales or historical anecdotes. To some, side stories are by-products but in my opinion they are 'real stories.' These types of stories are not complete as they may only be 'visible' in a sentence or a few words. Indeed it is the task of the listener to complete such stories. Besides stories, other organisational sub-texts such as pamphlets, in-house bulletins, notice board circulars, artefacts, among others, are my other resources of data.

In this engagement, two main techniques of gathering data were employed: interviews and observations. The choice of interviews and observation however does not mean that I am ignoring the importance of other techniques. Thus other techniques are considered whenever appropriate.

> An interesting question when working with qualitative techniques is whether techniques that do not lead to objective, may be not even inter-subjective, but to very personal, subjective, interpretations can be considered acceptable to science and [research]. (Gummeson, 1991, p. 109)

In this relation I view, interviewing as a conversation with purpose, and as a 'talk-as-data'.

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[56] In my opinion works by Morril and Fine (1997) and Bate (1997) should be of primary reference in searching for "deep" understanding on organisational ethnographic studies. Both works offer impressive detail.

Indeed, an interview is not relationship-free (King, 1994, p. 15). It is different from an ordinary conversation in the sense that theories and paradigms underpin such an interview. As such it acts as a gateway for the researcher to gain first insight into the constructed realities that are wrapped up in the idiolect of the researched. Through observations during interviews, a researcher can gain a partially independent view of experience through the language construction. It suggests, probes, enriches both the knower and the known, and provides a basis for analysis that would be impossible with only one source (Frey, 1994, p. 599).

Following Geertz (1973), interviews in this engagement took the form of in-depth unstructured interviews. An interview guide with a list of topics acted as a guideline, but the rest of the interaction employed 'formal-informal in-out' style. Questions that flow may look rather formal but latitude was allowed in responding to the questions. This is called 'total freedom to change form', if we paraphrase Gummeson (1991, p. 110).

However at every point one must not forget that the researched are human beings. Thus they have their own personal histories and idiosyncrasies. Therefore the ethics of the interviewing must be observed. Most of the issues related to this revolved around informed consent, and the right to privacy and confidentiality (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 371). Common sense and moral responsibility must be the act of the day. In conducting interviews, the above authors even used the following as their motto: Our subjects first, to the study next, and to ourselves last. Crapanzano (1980), as quoted by both authors, put forward another practical recipe: 'Learning about the other, we learn about the self...Treat the other as human being, we can no longer remain as ... faceless interviewer.' Thus, in a very modest way, I see an interview as an outcome of social interaction of the participating.

The importance of non-verbal text during the interview is acknowledged as it stores a huge amount of tacit knowledge. Thus looks, body postures, long silences, the way one dresses, the various texts in the room, among others, are significant aspects that must be taken into account. This point in many ways overlaps with

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what one does in observation. Simply, in interviewing one talks to and 'reads' the researched.

In relation to the issue of enlarging the meaning of observation, one should be aware of conscious and the unconscious emotions that prevail during interviews. Looking and reading the visible signs is not enough if one wants to unearth what is really going on in an organisation (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, observation/reading should look into other texts besides the body 'text'. One such text is emptiness. Reading emptiness is not alien in the East. An example is how to 'read' and describe a bowl? A bowl is a common utensil, and its 'common sense' character makes it uncommonly impervious to questioning. Often, descriptions neglect the hollow that is carved into the clay, the unseen space, as part of the bowl.

In addition, the literature on observation should add a few lines on semiotic observation and the importance of 'small things.' My own experience showed the 'smallest thing' tends to be the sign of the 'biggest thing' (Ahmad, 1995). In my above experience, the 'smallest things' were a soiled cup on a table, a dustbin near the entrance door and scribbles on the calendar. Later, I found that the organisation under my observation was indeed in a chaotic mess. In many ways, observing and looking for small things are underpinned by Goffman's (1959) ideas on dramaturgy. To Goffman, people construct their self-presentation and carry them out in front of others. He suggests that there is intentionality behind the planning and execution of the performances.

As an endnote to the mode of gathering data, I would like emphasise again the issue of a researcher as an instrument of research. [57] In this light, to use a phrase by Steier (199, p. 2), I am 'in' my own research. Indeed, the use of self in this engagement goes much deeper as I construed myself at one point to be 'an insider.' Although I am no more of Palmyra physically, I share many similarities with my informants: culturally, in terms of working knowledge, and to a certain point in their experiences.

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[57] A researcher is the research instrument. See http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~marylynn/person.html (18/5/1999).

I believed some people would see myself as a researcher who wanted to take an easy ride by "being there" among 'friends.' Worse still, to my research methodology, this situation is not attractive, as I would be blinded by my own familiarity. However one should note the issue of 'blindness' does not necessarily reside 'at home' alone but can be anywhere in the field. According to Agar (1980), it is clear that the ethnographer's culture, personality, background, though increasingly acknowledged as critical, is the greatest unknown in ethnographic research. To make things worse, he said, it is not clear how to integrate it into discussions of ethnographic methodology. Thus in his opinion, conflicts in cultural rules can make an ethnographer uncomfortable, or blind him/her to what is really going on.

AS MODE OF LEARNING

On a personal level, in taking hermeneutics as my methodology of engagement, I am more a 'learner' than an expert. As a learner, I was looking to discover the learning cycle model[58] as a way forward. According to many authors, experiential learning happens when one is engaged in some activity, looks back at the activity critically, abstract useful insights from the analysis, and puts it to work (Vogt, 1995, p. 298).

I note that the learning cycle is often overlapped with other cycles like Gestalt's cycle of experience[59], which in turn show a strong link with the hermeneutic cycle (Ahmad, 1995). Francis (1994) makes my claim more explicit in his description of *telos*, the good will of the interpreting subject, and a desire for what Gadamer called genuine or authentic understanding. To Gadamer, the condition of true understanding is the same as that of genuine conversation: recognition of one's own lack of knowledge, and willingness to learn. This is an act of understanding oneself in front of the text, says Hekman (1984, p. 348).

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[58] Summarily, there are four steps in this cycle. They are as follows: Observe, Reflect, Abstract and Experiment. Reflect and Abstract is said to be in the realm of mental while the other two happen in the realm of physical.

[59] According to Nevis (1987) there are seven points in Gestalt's Cycle of Experience. They are Sensation, Awareness, Energy Mobilisation, Action, Contact, Resolution Closure and Withdrawal of Attention.

With the above idea, I see myself as a learner, gestaltist and hermeneuticist at the same time, at one point or another. Such overlapping in many ways provides a strong remedy for positivist doubters about *vorurteil* as mentioned earlier.

HERMENEUTICS THEORETICAL RELEVANCY

Besides giving me an opportunity to nourish my learning growth, hermeneutics gave me an opportunity to break from the Cartesian dualism where mind and body are not seen as a unified whole. Theoretically the idea of the whole (mind and body) is compatible with the Malay belief, which my informants and I adopt. Thus, there is a reciprocal involvement between the knower and the known in dealing with the data. As such the reconstruction of the reality is not my own making alone. It is relevant to note that in this research I am not acting as an expert (McAuley, 1985, p. 297) in the situation or becoming the owner of local knowledge.

In fact, through 'locals', I managed to have greater depth in my understanding of the ways in which they shape up and give meaning to their lives. In the long run such collaboration should reduce the possibility of doing 'damage' on the "natives" as some researchers do. Watson (1992, p. 135) notes such a situation in Indonesia when Indonesians were 'able' to read Geertz work.[60] Being 'local,' my position is more precarious than Geertz, an outsider.

Secondly, I was comfortable with another important concept in hermeneutics --- historicity. "Being there" (in Palmyra) for more than a decade, I believed I shared a great deal of similarity in history and language, metaphorically and literally, with my informants. Furthermore, hermeneutic understanding cannot be applied from outside totally. Rowan and Reason (1981) explains,

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[60] Geertz was criticised as failing to understand the nature of Islam in Java.

The interpreter must know to some degree the phenomena he/she seeks to understand", and if possible with "the greatest possible familiarity" with the phenomenon.[61] (p. 131)

Implicitly in mediation between *x* and *y*, I was mediating myself with my [past] emotions and deeply held assumptions about people in Palmyra. As such I could 'shower myself with the principle of charity' in achieving new knowledge about them, which in turn enabled me to re-focus the past with a new present situation understanding. It is about awareness of my past that involves"openness to the other." It is a recognition that, to paraphrase Gadamer (1989a) in Truth and Method, "I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so." Simply in that mediation, knowing and recognising, which is inescapable in the fusion of horizons, prevails. In due process of my awareness with the text, I hoped my own thoughts, which I bring to the horizon, could provide possibilities of re-awakening the text's meaning, a point that Gadamer drives home in describing the "fusion of horizons."

In relation to the hermeneutic circle, the process gave me the possibility of gaining knowledge and understanding of what was going on which I could not understand and took for granted all these years (while in Palmyra). This is not a mere matter of "going round the circle" but a circular and spiral relationship between whole and parts, between what is known and what is unknown, between the knower and that which is known. To Davidow, the above action of 'circling' is an act of "maturing" which carries the idea of betterment.[62]

The most important of all, the circle, brought to fore my prejudices. In turn the circle provided a space for exploring possible questions such as the following: How should certain practices and conventions at Palmyra be understood? What are their hidden meanings? How might certain phenomena be interpreted in a broader context?

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[61] Indeed familiarity with the phenomenon is important, as it has been accepted that no understanding is possible between totally strange, unconnected worlds.

[62] See Adam Davidow "Gadamer: The Possibility of Interpretation" at http://www.sbcc.net/academic/phil/stoal/Davidow.html. (10/8/1999). Maturing is a Heideiger term.

Answers to those questions, given through interpretations, I believe enriched my understanding of the subject.

Thirdly, hermeneutics gave me an opportunity to follow the footsteps of Geertz[63] (1973) in doing "thick description"[64] which I regard as a 'practical' and meaningful action in studying a text. To Geertz, doing ethnography is like trying to "read a manuscript" (p. 10). "The culture of the people is seen as an ensemble of texts[65], and the [researcher] strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (p. 448-52). The field in this sense is the "social discourse".[66] A researcher's task, according to Geertz, then is to trace the discourse curves, fixing it into inspectable forms. This is done by "inscribing the said" of that discourse text.[67]

Now, how does Geertz do the thick description? It is through the [hermeneutic] circle of understanding as he is continuously tacking between the most local of the local details and the most global structure in such a way to bring both into view simultaneously, notes Tachankary (1992, p. 220).[68] In order to unravel "hidden" meaning, which arises out of the public significance of an event or value, reading of the text, must be done in a "deep" manner. At this juncture it is worth to see clearly what Geertz (1983) sees as texts:

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[63] Clifford Geertz is intimately related to interpretative-symbolic anthropology.

[64] A good commentary on Geertz's works can be seen in "Post-Geertzian, Postmodern Trends" at http://www.anu.edu.au/AandA/courses/2053lect_20.html (10/8/99)

[65] Indeed in this light Geertz treats a cockfight in Bali as a text. Perhaps it is interesting to connect the event with Gadamer's description about interpretation. To Gadamer, interpreting a text is very much like a festival process where past and present merges into a new creative moment, a meaning and effect over and above both past and present.

[66] The term is seen through Ricouer's eyes. As such, discourse is an event and is realised in the 'here and now,' and not virtual and outside time; refers back to the speaker through a variety of indicators including personal pronouns. Discourse is therefore self-referential because the event of saying is linked to the person who speaks. In this regard, discourse says something about something not within a closed system but it refers to a world outside the language system. Lastly, Ricouer claims it is through discourse that messages are actually exchanged. In other words, discourse has an interlocutor, another person to whom it is addressed.

[67] Nine years after the publication of Geertz's The Interpretation of Culture, Marcus and Cushman published "Ethnographies as Texts." See Annual Review Anthropology, 1982.

[68] See Chapter 3 for full elaboration.

The great virtue of the extension of the notion of text beyond things written on paper or carved into stone is that it trains attention on precisely this phenomenon: on how the inscription of action brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on what fixation of meaning from the flow of events --- history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behaviour --- implies for sociological interpretation. (p. 31)

Above all "what does this mean" is a strategy Geertz used as a way to understand the "natives" with a constant "intervention" from his own understanding --- drawn from prior experience, historical knowledge, logical assumptions. The intervention is important as no experience can simply be 'used' as naked data.

My attraction to hermeneutics is also related to the explicit call made by Deetz (1978) and my anxiety towards the under-usage of hermeneutics in the texts , analysing organisational communication (Phillips and Brown, 1993,p. 549).[69] Deetz (1978, p. 12) noted that only a few communication researchers understood hermeneutics or the significance of assuming a hermeneutic stance. He believes such 'ignorance' perhaps is largely related to the notion of understanding itself. In his view, many communication scholars see understanding through the lens of "how to produce understanding" and the reproduction of meaning, rather than exploring how it takes place or how to reach mutual understanding (Deetz, 1990, p. 230).

Indeed the above point is emphasised by Gadamer when he defends the idea that meaning is not out there awaiting discovery, but is brought into being through the act of understanding (Smith, 1993, p. 195). This is a reversal in emphasis from most communication studies, where people and empathy are emphasised. To Gadamer, the issue is about the problem of understanding messages rather than the people.

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[69] With the exception of Littlejohn (1992) almost all communication texts do not discuss hermeneutics. Deetz (1978) summarised the situation as follows: The problem for the study of communication is not the existence of the prejudices but the unawareness of their presence and subsequent inability to separate appropriate from inappropriate ones (p.14). For a recent omission that came to my attention see the text written by Miller (1999).

ENDNOTE

As a point to ponder, more to me who employs hermeneutics as my guiding light in this research than to others, I quote a passage from Rumi, the famous Persian poet:

When you eventually see

through the veils to how things really are

you will saying again and again

"This is certainly not like

we thought it was".

Chapter 4
The Organisation: Palmyra

Palmyra, a force of nation soul

A name from one history

A fire from one era

A magical power of people voice

Palmyra, you are the torch of the people

A gift of warrior's soul

Burning the spirit of the people

You are everlasting and hallow

Protected by the sky of the nation

Embracing by the breeze of the gentle sea

Canopying by the woods green

Praise by the land where our loyalty lies

Palmyra, a force of the nation soul

A name from one history

A fire from one era

A torch of everlasting spirit

Palmyra's official song. d=110 March.

BACKGROUND

In 1956, the Ministry of Education in British Malaya, supported by scores of Malay intellectuals, established an autonomous agency --- the Palm. It was later renamed Palmyra. The agency's main business is related to the development of Malay language and literature. The headquarters is housed mainly in two six-story blocks with a large annexe in the city of Kuala Lumpur. There are two subsidiaries of the agency in the Borneo Island, and three regional offices in the Peninsular Malaysia.

In the early years of Palmyra (1956-1967), most work revolved around promoting, enriching the Malay language, promoting literary talents, and printing, publishing books, and magazines. Other priorities centred on coining terminologies and the

standardisation of spelling and pronunciation. In 1968, the period of establishing aspects of the Malay language began. This was the year when 'the flexibility' in using Malay language as mentioned in the Constitution ended. The government of the day was seen as not taking the issue of making the Malay language as the official language seriously. Several "language demonstrations" took place during that period. The most famous one was the Coffin 152 demonstration. The number denotes the clause in the constitution regarding the special position of the Malays. The coffin implied "the death of the Malays" in their motherland. To many staff this was the period of *perjuangan*.[70] Malays from all occupations joined this struggle earnestly. Then, the image of the agency was at the highest. The language struggle reached its climax with the establishment of a university using the Malay language as its medium of instruction in 1972. Publishing academic texts and coining new terminologies then became a priority in Palmyra.

On the organisational level, there was a reorganisation in 1971. The aim of the new structure, according to the official publication, was "to make Palmyra more effective" especially in "promoting and popularising Malay language and literature." During this period a new spelling system agreement was signed between Malaysia and Indonesia.

The third epoch in the history of Palmyra began in 1977. This period was known as the period of making 'finishing touches' to the various aspects of Malay language work. As such, most work was related to standardisation --- spelling system, grammar, common phrases, terminologies, language style, as well as the quality of verbal and written language.

With the end of 1989, a new era of 'language spreading' came to the scene. In this phase, activities were centred around establishing higher learning language corpus, with effort to make the language spread and develop fully in various sectors especially in law, banking, private and corporate realms. During this period, the vision to make Malay language as one of the world languages was suggested.

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[70] I view the term as an umbrella term for many meanings related to 'struggle.'

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Malaysia experienced a period of economic 'miracle'. The locals called it the period of 'corporatism'. Many corporate men then saw the Malay language as having less commercial value, and English became the 'saltiest talk' of the day. [To Malays, a 'salty talk' means your talk has influence]. By now, Malay teachers and rural based members ceased to be the 'elite' in the Malay politics. Consequently, the Malay language was no more the main agenda in Malay political conferences, and issues such as shares, stock exchanges and economic problems were the talk in hall lobbies. Some ministers, a score of Malay intellectuals, and Palmyra denied that such phenomena existed, but the undercurrent of anxiety among many Malays said otherwise. The politics of Malay language lost its appeal. Against that background, Palmyra celebrated her 40th birthday in 1996.

Recently, there has been a considerable turn in the economic fortune of the country, and its behaviour has affected Palmyra. Perhaps tired of talking about the economic crisis or the agenda of the forthcoming general election, there was a rejuvenation of interest in the Malay language among politicians in the middle of 1998. The cabinet passed a resolution asking ministers to deliver their official speeches in Malay. However, many still believe that the Malay language issue remains at the periphery of political mainstream discussions.

THE PICTURE

The main mission of Palmyra is to build and to develop Malay language and literature in line with the policy of the nation and the will of the people. In recent years, the management has refined this mission. So now the mission reads: "to establish the Malay language as an authoritative language of knowledge in the construction of national civilisation". In relation to this, Palmyra has a written organisational philosophy, vision, aims, corporate cultural values, core values and a customer charter. As published, the philosophy of Palmyra is to construct a Malaysian nation-state through the Malay language. The above statement, according to various official documents, is the manifestation of the task and a way of implementing the planned program and activity. It acts to emphasise the identity and reaffirmation of the Malay language's status as a vehicle of thought and

communication, and as a tool to construct the modern civilisation of the Malaysian nation-state.

This philosophy is further strengthened through the vision of making the Malay language one of the world languages. The vision is supported strongly by the following organisational aims:

- To establish, to enrich and to develop Malay language as the national language and as a language of all knowledge
- To publish or help to publish books, magazines, bulletins and other forms of publication in Malay and other languages
- To establish, to enrich and to develop national literature and writing
- To standardise spelling and pronunciations, to coin terms, and to code vocabularies in Malay language
- To promote usage of the correct and grammatical Malay language
- To widen the usage of national language in all sectors and in all formal transactions and activities based on legal acts as mentioned in the Constitution;
- To build working relationships in the area of language and literature with institutions and individuals, at the national or international level.

In relation to the above, staff are given a set of corporate 'culture pillars' as the way to realise the above 'sacred' vision. They are as follows:

- To understand and to commit[71] to the vision of Palmyra
- To protect and to uplift the image of Palmyra in the public
- To value the importance of productivity and standard of the product
- To practise group work and consensus
- To value clean, efficient and effective work
- To practise wisdom, justice, trustworthiness, honesty and sincerity
- The superior lead the subordinates
- The subordinates lead their own selves
- To make effort to increase the stock of knowledge

- Work is *ibadah*.

Every year, during The Quality Day celebration, staff take an oath with the above set of pillars.

The logo of Palmyra in many ways summarises what is Palmyra. The logo encompasses four symbols: *lontar* (palm) leaf, a book, a nib and a fern leaf. Both leaves represent the Malay tradition of writing and its association with the past while the other two symbols represent modern day publishing and writing work. A motto, written in Malay script, is clearly visible in the logo. It reads --- "the language is the soul of the nation."

THE STRUCTURE

The Director General heads the management group in Palmyra. The group task is to carry and implement policies decided by the Board of Governors. A non-executive chairman heads the board. All board members, according to the official statement, are selected on merit, based on their expertise in various fields. At present, the non-executive chairman is a politician from the ruling party. [It is a common practice in Malaysia to place a politician as a chairman in a government agency. It is a political post. As such, the chairman often serves as a linkage between Palmyra and the ruling party]. In relation to the above, the Director General is a Chief Executive Officer to over 1,000 staff that works across over 30 departments and units. (See Appendix 1 for the organisational chart). On managing and organising at Palmyra, the CEO is guided by the principles set out by the Malaysian Public Services Department.

Staff are primarily categorised under four bands:

1) The top management (the CEO and the various directors),

2) Management and professional (Head of departments and group A officers)

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71 *Menghayati* (Malay). I sense that it is more than 'physical' commitment, as the meaning of the word relates to the 'thing' inside your body such as the soul.

3) Supporting 1 (Group B officers)

4) Supporting 2 (Group C officers and below).

With reference to the second category, the staff in this group are mostly degree holders. However, a considerable number of staff are promoted via the internal promotion scheme from the B group. In recent years, several changes have been made to the group's job title that is from a research officer to planning officer. Many professional staff (editors) are not happy as the title denotes their position on a par with the administrators. As a matter of simplicity, I would use *karyawan* as a term that both encompass the professional (editor) and the administrator. The term *karyawan* is a neutral term as seen in Indonesia. *Karyawan* can be sub-divided hierarchically into three main groups:

a) K1 (Senior officer)

b) K2 (Middle officer)

c) K3 (Ordinary officer)

More often than not K2 and K1 officers are heads of department. K3 officers however are the immediate 'bosses' to the B staff. Upon reaching K1, officers might have set their eyes on the "Very Important Post" (VIP).[72] People in the top management group are often VIP holders.[73]

CHARACTERS/ACTORS

Palmyra staff in the headquarters are mostly Malays with one or two people from other ethnic groups, Chinese and Indian. Constitutionally, Malays are people who practise Malay culture and accept Islam as their religion. At this point one must take note that Malay practice does not mean it is always Islamic in nature. Although it sounds homogeneous, Malay is a broad term for people with many subcultures and backgrounds. As such, one may racially be Javanese but officially, he/she is Malay. Thus, Malays in retrospect have many distinct subcultures. More often, such

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[72] There are cases of staff from K2 being promoted to VIP position upon being considered as 'very good officers' by the management.

subcultures relate to the issue of 'differences'. In some cases, such differences are reinforced by dialects.

Metaphorically, if one use the metaphor of "weaving and fabric" (Harris, 1993) Malays are seen as having a "silk brocade tapestry" culture. As such, they are

> highly stylised motifs ...with [tight design], constrained by style and has great tensile strength... When [one] is actually torn or cut, they are extremely hard to repair. Such brocades are rarely rewoven, but rather patched with a similar fabric when necessary. Similarly, such cultures assimilate foreign elements and make them their own. They can incorporate much without need to change quickly...[The tapestry] is woven slowly. Little gets in and little gets through. The individuals ... like strands of tapestry are close together, each in its place. One move, the whole fabric moves. The weave holds it together... (p. 212-213)

In relation to the above, Malays are considered to be in the strong culture group (Hofstede, 1980). As such, 'authority' is very much at the higher end in decision-making or management-related issues. At the work place, harmony and equilibrium are espoused.

In the span of over 40 years, Palmyra has grown tremendously. Constitutionally, several revisions with the Ordinance of establishment have been tabled in the Parliament. The latest revision was passed in 1995. At the end of 1995, a massive re-positioning of management and professional staff took place in Palmyra as part of its 're-engineering' programme, which in turn had an effect on the organisational chart. Physically, the change was seen with the construction of a new office block, besides opening three regional branches in Peninsular Malaysia.

To date, Palmyra has been managed by seven CEOs. The present CEO, the seventh, began his career in 1994. Since he came to the Palmyra, he has engaged himself with a 're-inventing programme' of making the 'new Palmyra'. Under the hallmark of "paradigm shift", he introduced officially the notion of 'bringing' God to the workplace. As such, work is seen as *ibadah*. In other words, work at Palmyra is defined as having an eschatological value.

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73 The terms K1, K2 and K3 do not exist in Palmyra, nor does VIP as they use a different abbreviation system. However the spirit of the division remains.

Chapter 5

Tales from Palmyra

This chapter is about my experiences in the field. I wanted to write in the ethnographic manner I had seen in the work of Scott (1985). I tried in the first instance to emulate this, but abandoned it due to constraints of space. This choice was a hard decision to make. For reference purposes, some of the stories with details are given in the Appendix. In this chapter, only selected summaries are presented.

Indeed, I found 'practical troubles' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. xi) in telling stories from the field to readers. Reflecting upon Creswell's (1998) suggestion, I decided to do a simple combination of mystery, plot and characters, and the critical or key event approach as described by Wolcott (1994, p. 19-23). I hope this approach will ease the burden for readers unfamiliar with Malay culture in trying to make sense of the 'data', because of not "being there" (Geertz, 1983).

I begin with my understanding of Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) words:

> [A] good ethnographer cannot hope to succeed without a habit of wide reading ...work of [related] others. (p. 241)

In the course of my reading, I met Kiesinger (1998), and I tried to copy her way of writing a 'good story' about live experiences. In my first attempt to make stories look good, I became overzealous. As such, I added new backdrops in the form of 'imaginary places' to the various stories. In due process, the background to one-to-one conversation was deleted. That was an error. This method indeed ignored the idea that respondents produce different talk when in-group or in isolation in their own rooms, as group communication theorists have shown (Gudykunst, 1998;

Hartley, 1997). In so doing, I mistakenly denied the exclusiveness of group talk where control, among others, plays an important part in 'weeding out' false or extreme views of respondents. According to Patton (1990, p. 335-336), group talk often culminates in some relatively consistent or shared view. Shadowy group talk in a high power distance society (Hofstede, 1980) could end up with data of 'domination' produced by certain individual(s). Methodologically speaking, good intentions, without careful theoretical and cultural consideration about the location of the field, could yield negative outcomes.

I feel I was lucky to realise this mistake, as pointed out by fellow researchers, at that early stage. Otherwise, I would be another Shabono.[74] Perhaps one day I will meet Ellis (1995)[75] and Bochner to tell them my adventure of trying to follow their footsteps wrongly from afar. However, one thing is for sure --- honesty is important in writing ethnographic works, as one could easily be a Shabonoian.

However, I did not want to be tied by 'historical truth' where I must concern myself with producing exact, accurate renderings of time and place, as accounts written this way read much like clinical case studies or "simple reports devoid of texture, vitality, and evocative power" (Kiesinger, 1998, p. 89). Nevertheless, I must tell 'a good story' that expresses the pulse and the flow of my informant's life experiences in the Palmyra. As a solution, I decided to become the first person narrator where I will be the main protagonist of the story I tell. At the same time, it gives me the opportunity to be participants or merely observers to the story. In this regard, Culler (1997) writes,

> First person narrators ... may be observers of the story, whose function is not to act but to describe things to us. [They] may be fully developed as individuals with a name, history, a

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[74] An ethnographic work praised by many anthropologists to be superb but later its 'originality' came under scrutiny as to its amount of plagiarism. See Clifford and Marcus (1986).

[75] In the final chapter of her book, Ellis presents an important dialogue between her and Art Bochner on the issues of "sociological ideal of getting lived experience precisely 'right.' She says she was told that what made sociology significant as a discipline was that if we listened hard enough (and of course used the right methodology), we would hear reality speaking its truth, and the only way to do that was to keep your distance, not let your own feelings and beliefs intrude. Ellis writes, " I know now that reality does not speak, but I still do not find it easy to give up the goal of representing reality, of telling it the way it really is". In his response, Bochner challenges the notion of 'telling' reality as it really is. He emphasises that orthodox social science has been very concerned with the reality part but has not thought very deeply about the telling part.

personality, or they may not be developed at all and quickly drop from sight as the narration gets under way, effacing them after introducing the story. (p. 87-88)

A point to note: stories told in this chapter are seen through the eyes of my 'characters' (informants). As human beings, my informant's stories are their interpretation stories (hermeneutics # 1), and I interpreting (hermeneutics # 2) those stories.

Why do I take interest in my informant's stories? It is because I believe that from stories, one could derive pleasure, and that view is linked to my 'epistemophilia,' as mentioned in the Introduction. Simply, it is a desire to know and discover secrets, to know the end, and to find the truth about 'what goes on in the Palmyra.' Respondents in this sense offer me the possibility of perfect knowledge of others and compensate for my lack of understanding about them.

As this is a chapter about "constructing an account" (Atkinson, 1990, p. 36), the assumed relationship between the observed, the observer and the tale are shown explicitly. In this regard, 'tales' are mainly constructed from verbal data (face-to-face conversations or interviews). In due course, 'messages' from other "communication performances" are incorporated. In this context, I refer to various rituals, ceremonies, documents and artefacts.

Concerning the above, most parts of the "original" texts (such as interview transcripts, field notes or documents) are couched in a "secondary" text. Mulkay (1985, p. 237-8), as quoted by Atkinson (1990), explains:

> One necessary feature of the secondary, analytical text is that it differs from the original text. If the secondary text did not differ from the original text, it would be a mere repetition of that text and would be analytically empty. The secondary text inevitably selects from the original text, summarises it, ignores part of it, rephrases it, puts it in a new context, identifies its important and unimportant features, simplifies it, and so on...(p. 179)

In this chapter, the original texts are simply re-ordered and re-presented so as to reveal their meaning.

No tape-recorder, please!

In eliciting data from various conversations with informants, no tape recorder was used. My respondents clearly stated that they did not wish their talk to be recorded for their own personal reasons. It seems the machine created a kind of anxiety in them.[76] A researcher doing an interview without a tape recorder can come under criticism, especially in relation to the fear of 'made-up creativity' on the side of the researcher. I sensed what was playing in Richardson's (1992) mind when she questioned how Whyte (1943) 'produced' the famous Street Corner Society. Whyte (1997) answered the mystery. Unknowingly I replicated his explanation of how to come to term with no-taped interviews as shown below.

In my case, my experiences in conducting many interviews while working in the Palmyra helped me in gathering the interview data. First, I tried to write 'all facts' in detail as soon as possible after an interview. Such remembering of detail was made with the help of my notes taken during the interview. As a way of ensuring data 'correctness', the transcriptions were shown to respondents for 'approval'. Of course, I do not claim that every single word is correct, but my informants made no strong statements of objection upon seeing the transcribed notes.

Pandai-pandai

Even though informants told me about their "fear" of the tape-recorder, I always tried to persuade them to allow me to use the machine for recording purposes. I told them about discrepancies of remembering their voices (words) by looking at my

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[76] Almost all informants refused to be audiotaped during interviews. The tape became a kind of constraint and created a lot of anxiety. Listening to your own voice is not a culture in Palmyra. Implicitly, my informants told me about the possible repercussions on their career if their taped-voices fell into wrong hands. In other words, my informants believed the tape could be a liability. Many of them quoted the first line of a *pantun: Kerana pulut santan binasa* (Because of the glutinous rice, the coconut milk rots) as their conclusion so as not to be taped. In this regard, they expected me to finish the whole *pantun* where the other line is about "your mouth is your tiger". Such avoidance is best explained in Hosftede (1980). See a similar case of not using a tape-recorder during interviews in Rademakers (1988).

jottings and notes. They said what was important to them were not verbatim words but the message.

In relation to the above, two informants, Sari[77] and Lela,[78] gave me a solution to the problem.

> You must *pandai-pandai* in doing it. We believe in you.

The term *pandai-pandai* is indeed a superlative adjective. *Pandai* is practically translated as clever, but the above term is more than that. Wittingly, by telling me to be *pandai-pandai* my respondents are hiding their voices behind my back. At the same time, they believed the researcher would not do *buat-buat pandai sebarang* [79] with the data. Such an attitude of trust I believe related to my previous relationship with them.

Although I was obliged by the informant's request not to use the tape, a fear of romanticising their stories in my own words enveloped me. The last thing that I wanted was the criticism of me making up the data, as experienced by Borland (1991). Beatrice, her grandmother, showed a strong disagreement with the 'distortion' made by Borland:

> The story is no more my story at all. The skeleton remains, but it has become your story."
> (p. 81)

Indeed, I did not want to end up being called a 'colonialist who took respondents' voices.' In this state of anxiety, I felt the guidelines on doing ethical fieldwork as published by an anthropological society were my best remedy.[80]

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[77] Male, K1-2 (+15). See chapter 4 for explanation about K1-2. Summarily it denotes staff grouping. The number in the brackets denotes number of working years in Palmyra.

[78] Male, K1-2 (+20)

[79] A Malay term for being mischievously clever. In the above context, it is related to tampering with data so much that the respondents cannot recognise their data.

[80] I take guidelines as suggested by anthropologist. See Anthropological Newsletter 30:8,1989 for detail.

Data collection

In gathering data, I made three official visits (July-September, 1997; December 1997-March, 1998 and November, 1998-January, 1999); each lasted for 12 weeks. Most of the stories in this chapter were constructed from the richness of the first visit. In the second and the third visits my informants showed a kind of 'diminishing return curve' in responses toward the researcher. Most of my first informants were revisited during the second visit as a way of checking on any 'story-change' over a period of time. Many of them answered in a simple sentence: "No new story as things are almost the same; no big thing has happened, and we are tired people." In the second and third visits, observation increasingly became a major part of the engagement. A point to note during the third visit: there was political tension in the country. The tension indeed affected the 'flow' of engagement, as almost all respondents became less 'active' in the research. Their stories about Palmyra remained unchanged. However, new terms and phrases, borrowed from that new political situation, were used in describing their wellbeing as citizens of Palmyra. Nevertheless, several interviews were made in the second and in the third visits.

Almost all my interviews and talk were done on a one-to-one basis. In this engagement, I adapted Edgren's (1990) commando-culture-interview-guide as my guiding light through the maze of excitement listening to too many stories. An effort has been made to create a balance of voices between male and female officers in relation to the total population of K and VIP staff. I think this relates to a positivistic influence. However many female staff were reluctant to be interviewed for whatever reasons known to them. I believe my gender did play a role, however small, in their hesitation. With the help of key informants, 26 officers from all categories in K and VIP group took part in this engagement. In other words, stories told in this chapter are stories from the 'top people' (*orang atas*)[81] and 'bottom people' (*orang bawah*).[82] Experientially, the number of informants marked the point of saturation.

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[81] People at the top. Here they were referring to the people in the top management, or head of department. Categorically they are in K2, K1 and VIP group.

[82] People at the bottom; subordinates. In this context referring to K3 staff and below.

Interviews: My pre-understandings

Explaining what was going on during data gathering without explaining my thoughts about the way it was carried out is not sufficient. I had several pre-understandings:

- I wished my respondents could talk in-group in the various real places where stories about Palmyra are often narrated: the eating places, in the prayer room, in the lobby and in the "orchard". [83] Besides giving me the chance to give readers the colourful backdrops, various "smells, odour of eateries" could be presented. Furthermore, ethnography is a provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages, of cultures and societies (Crapanzano, 1986, p. 50). In a way such presence could help me to combat the monotony of seeing the same arrangement in respondent's rooms: piles of manuscripts and documents on the working tables, reference books on small shelves, a telephone and very few personal decorations. Worse still there were no green plants in the room for extra oxygen while interviewing.

- By talking together on a similar issue of coming to terms with the 'disorder' as the result of "paradigm shift," my interviews could play a dual role of giving, perhaps unknowingly, a therapeutic dimension. As such, they could open up their hearts to others with similar 'problems' rather than keeping it deep waiting for things to erupt. Thus, it could pave the way for new cultural behaviour of openness among them. Furthermore, as I observed respondents tended to talk more when in a company compared to when they were alone.

However, later I realised the importance of understanding the context of the field. As the Palmyra is a close organisation where everyone knows everyone, to reveal openly what is inside your heart could bring many negatives. This research is situated within the realm of sensitive topics. The point is again emphasised by several respondents during interviews. Therefore, an interview in the privacy of one's own room was beneficial to them. On moral grounds, I was collaborating with

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[83] The temporary car park

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them to reduce their vulnerability (Sieber and Stanley, 1988; Renzetti and Lee, 1993).[84]

As Malays, the informants were aware of the importance of face. As such, talking openly about others, especially concerning the CEO and the management people, could bring repercussions to their working life, at least to their career development. Besides one could be seen as a rude person without *bahasa* and *adab* in a culture where politeness is widely valued (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1997). Paradoxically, and contrary to my earlier assumption, poor data would emerge from group interviewing.

One-to-one interviewing was preferred as it provides a safeguard against any "emotional harassment" arising from the availability of their personal secrets' to others. As such, it closes the door on any gossip or points that could jeopardise their position or stature. This issue is taken seriously, as many informants believed there are a lot of 'hantu'[85] (informers) in Palmyra. Such existence of 'management spies' or 'opportunists' could be understandable as hundreds of K3 officers must 'fight' to get their portion of the 'scarce cake' (to use a political phrase) of a very few K2 posts.

- The strategy of talking alone with the researcher also saved the informants from being coerced or pressured by the presence of a group. In relation to that, the researcher has great opportunity to record emotional 'outbursts' such as laughing or other body languages. On my personal level, by interviewing in the respondent's own room, I could appreciate the importance of space, especially in relation to the issue of power relations; to the personal body and to the management. A room is said to be able to generate emotions. A room is also said to signify the extent of one's power in an organisation.

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[84] Sieber and Stanley (1988, p. 49) define socially sensitive research as "studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research."

[85] Ghosts

My background of doing a lot of journalistic interviewing while working in Palmyra made many respondents scared[86]. Many of them understood the idea of "scooping" where secrets flow out unknowingly due to a certain interview style gained through years in the trade. Furthermore, I am working on issues that relate to emotions. To many Malays, emotions must be managed, and are not to be shown explicitly especially to strangers.

By focusing on management and professional people (K and VIP group), this research has some limitations. They were chosen, as they are the interesting group to watch. However, I believe there are many rich and thick stories, which reside among the supporting staff. In passing, several attempts to encroach into the minds of the supporting staff were made. The most common answers given to the researcher were as follows:

> For people like us whatever happened here does not bring significant change to our work life here. As clerk, typist and supporting staff, we are just involved in 'changing rooms' not jobs. Our job is always the same whenever we go. We are small people. It is better for us to follow the rhythm set by the management.

I believe further research is needed to explore the world of the supporting staff, as Pringle (1989) has shown how interesting these people are.

VORURTEILS ON ORGANISATION

Morgan's (1997), Bolman and Deal's (1997) and Reed's (1992) writings largely influenced my ideas and assumptions about organisations.[87] To me Palmyra is a

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[86] I was told by Chin (male, K1-2 (+10) about the issue. The number in brackets denotes years of services with the Palmyra. As staff in K1 and K2 categories are small, many could easily point out the specific individual. As such, K1-2 is being employed as an issue of confidentiality.

[87] Morgan presents eight dominant images of organisation: As machines, as organisms, as brains, as cultures, as political systems, as psychic prisons, as flux and transformation, and as instruments of domination. Bolman and Deal frames as follows: The structural, human resources, political and the symbolic. Reed offers five analytical frameworks: Organisation as social systems, as negotiated orders, as structures of power, and as social practices. Morgan's work is selected as it is the most cited work in organisational studies (Usdiken and Pasadeos, 1995; Simkins, 1999). Borman and Deal's ideas meanwhile are seen as a practical guide to organisational lives. Reed, on the other hand, claims that his work is sited in the modern organisational life where Darwinian struggle for survival is the hallmark.

cultural site, and people in there are unique and "exotic" in its own right (McLeod and Wilson, 1994; Pacanowsky and Trujillo, 1983/1992). I believe people at Palmyra are symbol users (symbol-making/symbol-misusing beings) as Burke (1950/1969, p. 136) suggests. I see symbols as full of motives where meanings and expectations reside (Johnson, 1981; Bantz, 1993; Pachanowsky and Trujillo, 1982, p. 123). In a similar vein, I see symbols as objects that never stand-alone as they interact, collide, provide subtle differences and marked contrasts, act as motivators and unifiers, and as reason and sources of divisions. I also assume that in their every day talk they make sense about the reality of the work place (Pace and Faules, 1994; Pepper, 1995; Borman, 1983).

I view Palmyra's "natives" as the main authors of their cultural texts (Brown and McMillan, 1991, p.50). As such, they are seen as authors of symbols, languages, beliefs, visions, ideologies, and rituals, besides constructing and regulating social life in their in-dwelling (Pettigrew, 1979, p. 579). I take a position of construing them as weavers of narratives where there are many voices, emotions and desires to name a few. This metaphor is employed in the light of Harris's (1993) classification of cultures. By taking Weick's (1995) arguments where people make sense out of narratives in order to create their understanding and make meaning in a particular world, I see the above weaving as "world-making" (Flick, 1998, p. 29-38).

An organisation as a place of communicative performances is another major vorurteil that I bring to the field. In that light, I view Palmyra as a stage or explicitly a theatre or an arena (Gardener and Avolio, 1998; Bryant, 1997; Czarniawska, 1997; Bolman and Deal, 1994; Mangham and Overington, 1987; Mangham, 1990; Turner, 1974). From an organisational communication point of view, the performance is related to social interaction, and could be best seen in enactment, co-production and story-telling (Putnam, Phillips and Chapman, 1996). In enactment, the performance is a sense-making action by members about the reality of their life-world. In co-production, members are collectively doing performances as a way to come together to produce social practices and co-ordinate local agreements. Meanwhile story-telling is how members dramatise organisational life and transform mundane events into zeal and passions. In addition, in this rubric of performances,

fun and play reside. In a similar manner, the term performance also connotes behind-the-scene activities (Deal and Jenkins, 1994) where 'dark-realities,' such as the suppression of voices and violence, are at play.

ENTERING THE FIELD

Saturday, 5th July 1997: my first day of the engagement.

As I entered the gate of Palmyra, I could sense the wind of change in the place. What caught my eyes first was a new, big bronze signboard on the wall of the main gate. Previously, the wall was not decorated. In the concourse, I could see an orderly two sentences, which spelled Palmyra, which was previously misarranged. On the ground floor of the *Jebat* Hall, a big decorated door looked majestic. The Platinum Gallery had also received a similar face-lift. Everything looks 'cultured' in that front region (Goffman, 1959). At the back of the main block, thirty-three storey new office blocks were under construction. Perhaps to mar the dynamics, was another 'dynamics': There were no parking spaces for staff cars. Now, most staff park their cars in the 'orchard'. Above all, the major of all changes, Palmyra was in

the state of "paradigm shift" under the new leadership of Kaypi,[88] the newly seconded CEO. I wished that two big slogans high up on each side of the outer wall of the Jebat Hall, Leadership by Example and Q, which survived the change, could tell me more.

As a relative stranger, I decided to take my entry pass from the security guard in the main lobby. I knew I could easily pass through many points of entries, as there were many 'open' entrances. Besides, I wanted to 'test' my status of organisational membership after being absent from the place for many years. While waiting for the guard to process my entry, my eyes wandered across that front region. To my right, the Platinum Gallery, that house many artefacts of an author known as the

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[88] All names in this chapter are anonymous as a way of sustaining confidentiality. However, as Palmyra is a close organisation, the above anonymity could be transparent to some people at Palmyra.

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Platinum,[89] containing the histories of the glorious days of the Palmyra, and documents about events of language struggle, among others, were empty. The image of Kaypi in a beautiful frame, near the entrance of the Gallery, however struck my eyes. A calculated and a careful move by Makcik Auntie, I presumed, who supervised the Gallery.

My thoughts were interrupted when a senior security guard came over to the table. Apologetically, he told his junior about me.

Ini orang lama. Tak payah pakai pas security.[90]

At that moment, I realised I was seen as 'one of them,' at least to the security man. To this man, I was a native. We exchanged much information at that table. According to him, many seniors had left Palmyra. What surprised me most was the early retirement of Yob who was widely known as a man who 'eats, sleeps and drinks literature.' "Why?" I sensed issues. I was hearing data from the ground. McKendall's (1993) phrase, "tyranny of change" danced in front of me. A voice in my mind however brought me back to the present state. "Che, beware and be aware of the priori biases in this research of discovery, otherwise you would end up with the research of 'a priori' confirmation.

The ghost of Wittgenstein

10 a.m. Coffee time. At first many staff did not realise I was present. After a while, the lobby turned into a noisy place. In due course of *tanya khabar* (exchanging news about one's well being) I told them about my research. Jawa[91] teased me with his dry joke. "Another beard man. We should not believe his talk." At first, I took no interest in the humour --- a momentary loss of being a researcher when surrounded by friends. Later, using the hermeneutics dictum "do not take anything for granted," a sense of suspicion sneaked up into my mind. Why beard man? The thought kept

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[89] A fictionalised name given to one of Palmyra pioneers; a writer.

[90] He is our old timer. No need to take the security pass.

[91] Male, K3 (+10)

returning to my mind while taking the ginger-tea with some of the staff at the tea stall across the road, a favourite place for exchanging stories and talk among staff.

In the office of the officer who processed my organisational entry, I explained about the aim of my engagement and the issue of confidentiality. This was a repetition as all of them were clearly written in the 'application' letter. I was lucky as the officer lets me loose without conditions though I was not given access to attend organisational meetings. I understood the situation as meetings were considered a secret place especially with the Official Secret Act lurking behind every staff back.

Sensibly, I went to the office of Kaypi to make an appointment for an interview. It is adat[92] to pay a visit to the elders. In simple words, you must give a salam[93] when you enter a place. Kaypi was out. Along the hallway, I met Chin, a senior manager. He invited me to his house for conversations. Any motive in that invitation? Wittgenstein, I believe, would smile widely at that moment as I was taking his ideas: All utterances have motives. Is that the ghost that will shadow my whole engagement?

Tali people

My first stop after Kaypi's office was Department Bheta. Many female staff down there were very happy upon seeing me. As if waiting for an ear..to listen, they mentioned their state of unhappiness. It was there that they mentioned the existence of *Tali*[94] people in the Palmyra. I knew the term was metaphorical. Naively, I asked who they were. Upon probing, things became clearer to me. They

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[92] Custom or tradition

[93] A Malay term derived from Arabic. In this context it refers to saying hello and wish for good health and living.

[94] A Tamil word, which literally refers to a rope. In present India, the word relates to marriage. As such, *tali* could be associated with intimacy and closeness between people. Linguistically, many Malay words are 'loaned' from Sanskrit.

were referring to a group of people "roped" together by virtue of coming from Kokos[95] County.

At that juncture, I remembered a note made by Rudie (1994, p. 50)[96] about people of Kokos. According to her, native theory played an important part in a regional identification whenever Kokosians move outside the state, even among non-Malays. My 'remembering' was disturbed when one of the females said the following: "They are very powerful people here. We believe Haji is the leader."

While talking, a female staff[97] scribbled and wrote a list of *tali* names. The staff showed me the list, I made note, and the staff crumpled it, and threw it into the dustbin. "Why did you do that?" I asked innocently. Maybe, like a fool too. However, behaving like a fool is hermeneutical. Even Schein (1987) recognised the importance of foolish behaviour where one must push less, open out and be aware.

Schein (1987) says,

> See without staring, listen quietly rather than listen hard. Use intuition and reflection rather than trying to figure things out. The more you can let go of trying, and the more open and receptive you become, the more easily you will know what is happening. (p. 22)

However, as shown by Czarniawska (1998, p. 34), being an 'idiot' does not always work favourably especially in situation where you are under informants' gazing eyes. I feel this way since researchers from universities are often regarded as 'clever' people.

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[95] The choice of Kokos as the fictional name is based on the physical nature of the state where coconut is found in abundance. Kokosian speak different *patois* compared to other Malays. Indeed, every county in Malaysia has their own slang and dialect. Kokosians were perceived to be parochialistic in nature. As such, they tend to help 'blood brothers and sisters' wherever possible.

[96] A female Nordic anthropologist who did some research in the Kokos County years ago.

[97] K3 (+ 5). On the appointment day, she refused to be interviewed. I could sense her regret of the slip of the tongue (*terlepas cakap*) in relation to the existence of the *tali* men.

The female staff continues,

> They (the *tali* people) were invulnerable people (*orang kebal*)[98]. We must be careful. In here, people are afraid to mention about their existence. However, every people with open eyes (*orang celik*)[99] could see it. They see us as *orang luar*.[100]

This 'revelation' indeed enthralled me. I decided, then, to use the *tali man* story as my point of departure.

Hawthorn's Rescue

I knew Kokosians were all there since I knew the Palmyra. Why all of a sudden were they so 'visible?' I tried to make sense. How should I proceed from this point? Several authors came to my rescue at that moment of difficulty. The first to come was Kets de Vries and Miller (1987). Both of them advised me to remember that an organisation is a text. Chambers (1984) was the second to appear. "A text is always contextual." Hawthorn (1996) was the last. "A text is always historical." With the above 'sounds' in my head, I went to see some *orang lama* (old timers) for background about the emergence of the *tali* men. Almost all 'old timers' seemed to avoid giving me a direct answer, except Japar.[101] To him, the issue of *tali* men is just like "a boy with a curly hair in the class of all straight hairs."

Japar says,

> All this while, curly boys in the class are just ordinary phenomena. All of sudden one curly boy is selected to be a monitor.[102] From that point on, curly boys are seen to be everywhere.

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[98] Indestructible or invulnerable people. The word is linked to magic and supernatural powers in the classical Malay world. In that historical time, becoming *kebal* was one of the characteristics of a good warrior. Such a person was believed to be vulnerable to 'weak' weapon such as sugar cane or banana trunk.

[99] Not blind

[100] Outsider. The Malay term is used widely by Kokosians in describing other people, namely non-Kokosians. A difference should be made between *orang luar* in the general context of the story. Here *orang luar* is seen in relation to Kokosians vs non-Kokosians. As such fellow Kokosians are known as *orang kita* (our people) not *orang dalam* (insider).

[101] Male, K1-2 (+15 years)

[102] A reference to Kokosian. Becoming a monitor was another way of saying about the appointment of Kaypi as the CEO.

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For me *tali* men are just an imagination. Our top people deny such existence, and I believe them.

Inside my mind a question popped up: 'What if *tali* men did actually exist even though only in imagination?'. I must make my mind about their existence; imagined or real I must 'find' them.

Upon reviewing my first day of stories, it was clear to me that the arrival of Kaypi was the trigger point. I tried to make sense with the list of names given. There, the 'imaginers' were constructing linkages with various posts held by 'curly hair' boys. At the top of the list was Kaypi, the CEO; Haji, the personnel, finance and resources director; Don, the senior manager of corporate planning. The three posts were very important posts as seen in the organisational structure of Palmyra.

Now, the anxiety of becoming a researcher enveloped me. Have I succumbed to 'home-blindness' in pursuing *tali* men theory? Did my experiences in Palmyra colour my way of seeing things? Nevis (1987) gave me an answer.

In doing a research work, to understand the meaning of presence is very important. (p. 78)

With such gestalt awareness, I made an appeal to my mind to hear more stories, to be open to all angles and not to be myopic. After all, I must not forget Schein's (1992) idea about the existence of an iceberg in organisational culture.[103]

I am the instrument of research.

In this engagement, I take the view that I am the instrument of research. As such, I must preserve my own *amour propre* while working in the field. In this relation,

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[103] Hyatt, Jenny and Simons, Helens (1999) use ocean as a metaphor to describe an approximately similar situation. To them the waves represent the turbulence of the surface observations; the shallow waters beneath, the signs and symbols; and the depth of the ocean, the bedrock in which tacit beliefs are buried. The metaphor has an advantage in sense that the fluidity of the ocean allows for movement and changes as levels are recognised and interacted. In this light, culture is neither immutable nor static.

informants sometimes gave me clues of how to do it. For example on the issue of 'hurting others', there is a point best summarised by Chin's words:

> It is no good telling bad things and mentioning names about others to the public. It is against our religious teaching. Furthermore, it is better not to make others feel *malu*. I believe if you make somebody *malu*, some day you will receive it too. Therefore, it is better to keep the secret about a bad thing to yourself. In addition, your mouth is your tiger.[104]

Thus, I must be careful not to 'go overboard' in asking questions. Field roles affect research (Johnson, Duberley, Close and Cassell, 1999). Furthermore, in a place like Palmyra, where everyone knows everybody, I must be cautious not to 'harm' my informants as the result of the engagement. Out of this quagmire, I decided to 'maintain poise' between observer and participant, between outsider and insider, between distance and inclusion. I hope such action enables me to penetrate the back stages, members' theories-in-use, and at the same time avoiding over-rapport. At the same, it provides me with intellectual and analytical space (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 115) to breathe.

As I am no Kokosian, many of my 'prejudices,' despite trying not to be prejudicial, coloured my way of seeing things. How should I do it as I had the experience of being in the state of emotional toxicity (Frost, 1999)? In my field notebook I wrote: Follow the principle of Malay elders as espoused in the proverbs --- In taking hair out of a heap of flour,[105] the hair must not split and the flour must not scatter. Further more, a snake does not lose its venom by gliding slowly over the roots. I took the position of that snake.[106]

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[104] *Malu* is a fundamental concept in Malay interaction. It is an important adjective in the social emotion of Malays. Though it is often glossed as ashamed, shy or embarrassed, these translations do not convey the fact that Malays regards the capacity to feel *malu* as socially good, akin to sense of propriety. Two other related concepts are *maruah*, dignity and honour. In the larger context, *malu* and the two concepts are part of the whole idea about face.

[105] *Rambut jangan putus, tepung jangan berserak* (a Malay proverb).

[106] *Ular menyusur akar tidak hilang bisanya.* The notion of snake in this paragraph must be understood within the context of a Malay proverb.

Tali men are the elites in Palmyra. They are in the inner circle. They are the 'power'. At the recognisable core are Kaypi, Haji, Don, and Dolah. The latter was perceived as the main 'conduit'. A point to note: in the inner circles, there were non-Kokosians too. However, the staff see them as 'weak' members. With reference to the conduit club, I assumed, several non-Kokosians were in it. Unluckily, many 'suspected' conduits refused to be interviewed during the engagement.

Below are stories about key *tali* men (Kaypi, Haji, Don and Dolah), which were explicitly mentioned by informants. Data by *orang kita* (Kokosian = our people = insider) and *orang luar* (non-Kokosian = other people = outsider) and *tali* men themselves[107] are used in this construction.

Kaypi, the CEO

To see Kaypi the CEO is not an easy thing to do. He was a very busy man. I made several appointments but they were cancelled at the last minute. On one occasion, he seemed to 'forget' the arrangement. In that incident, I waited alone in his empty office for a long time. That day I went home angrily. Upon reflection, I realised in the field one should manage one's own emotions as the perception of informants on the personality of the researcher counts (Johnson, Duberley, Close and Cassell, 1999). Maybe I am too extreme to equate doing fieldwork as emotional labour, but this type of work is really a "managed heart" assignment (Hoschchild, 1983; 1993). Furthermore, uncontrolled emotions could blind me to being "insensitive" to the data (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 102).

The mirror

6.00 a.m. Staff who stay far away from the city arrived with their car headlamps on at Palmyra. They came early in order to beat the traffic jam. Otherwise they could

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[107] Both terms are used extensively and have become a common phrase among Kokosians in Malaysia in reference to Kokosian and non-Kokosian.

not do the clock-in routine before 8 a.m. Being late means low performance appraisal scoring points, and it has an effect on increments and promotions. The clocking-in-and-out machines are situated on the ground floor of the new building. Above the machine is a long horizontal mirror (*cermin*). The idea I was told comes from the popularity of *cermin diri* (self-mirroring) as a concept.[108] There, I could see a strong resemblance with the Lacanian concept of mirror. At Palmyra, the 'mirror' has a religious dimension. As such, the management turn the artefact from the position of zahir into *batin*, [109] (from external form into inner meaning). (See Nasr, 1966, p. 58-61 for explanation).

Haji explains,

> The physical mirror is a reminder to staff early in the morning and before going home of the importance of *muhasabah*.[110] As such, you could count your good deeds and your bad actions at the end of the day. Implicitly, by looking at the mirror staff are reminded of their mortality. In our religion, the more you think about the next world the less you would adhere to wrong doings such as not doing proper job at work. Furthermore as often emphasised by the CEO you could easily turn your work into a mill that churns *pahala*[111] as work is *amanah*.[112] Work is *ibadah*[113] The CEO mentioned this 'auditing' (*muhasabah*) explicitly in one of his speeches during one of the ceremonies. It is one example of this paradigm shift to achieve excellence at work for the benefit in this world and in the next.

I observed that many staff do not care to 'mirror' their faces in the mirror. They go there to do the routine, that is to clock-in and clock-out their day in Palmyra.

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[108] At one time, a local television programme pursued this idea of *cermin diri*. The presenter even placed a small face mirror in front of him during the talk.

[109] Both the words in italics are common in Sufi literature.

[110] An Islamic concept of self-auditing associated with doing right or wrong. A good Muslim is encouraged to audit their action every night before going to bed. This concept is related to *amal*.

[111] An Islamic concept of good reward. The concept is very much related to the reciprocation of rewards in the hereafter.

[112] Trust

[113] Literally, means prayer to the Creator in the widest sense, not merely doing the ritual of praying as performed in mosques.

The overseas trips

Kaypi was in his office. Previously, on many occasions, he was not there. "*Dia pergi luar negeri*,"[114] was the usual answer given by staff in the office. The staff were referring to Kaypi's overseas trips, promoting and spreading Malay language and literature. Indeed, his frequent physical absences from the office, caused concern to many senior non-Kokosians officers. To Kakang,[115] such absentees provide a fertile ground for some opportunists to play their power game. Although not implying Haji, I could see his arrow. To Kakang,[116] such trips provide a good cover to be in the media limelight, which in turn could earn Kaypi a good picture among the 'powerful lot' (like ministers) as a man who is doing a lot of work. Makcik Auntie[117] was more explicit as she wondered how much benefit could be gained from such trips especially with the weak state of Malay language at home. In addition, she noted that such trips could be just another programme of 'official holidays' like the previous CEO used to do. Indeed, as the result of his frequent overseas trips, Kaypi earned many 'titles,' such as a "travelling sultan"[118] or as the "globetrotting commander."[119]

Kaypi was busy at his desk when I arrived for an interview. He himself 'hates' a tape recorder. "Oh, yeah it is better not to tape our conversations. It is better that way." For me that was another request that I must entertain. As a researcher, I saw the issue as a part of creative interviewing process that I must bear. ..

Before the interview, I sent him my interview guide. According to his secretary, this requests was made, as he wanted to prepare good answers. On that day, Kaypi told me that he had very little time to entertain me. I felt 'cheated' by him. Anyhow, it

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[114] He went overseas

[115] Male, K3 (+10)

[116] Male, K1-2 (+ 15)

[117] Female, K1-2 (+15)

[118] Mentioned explicitly by Mahmud.

[119] Being mentioned explicitly by Kakang.

was a price to pay when you meet a busy man. 'At least he wanted to see me,' I soothed myself. Trusting the power of metaphor, I asked the sole question of how he views Palmyra metaphorically.

> This organisation must be seen as an ark. I prefer an ark rather than a ship. An ark has more relationships with our religion. This organisation has for so long anchored itself in the harbour. For the last twenty years or so, the ark is waiting for trade winds to blow. The ark is wind breaking. Now, I found out it has many leaks and we need to repair it before it could be sea worthy again. You should see my poetry for further explanation.

Then from the side door, his male secretary entered the room with a big diary. The secretary mentioned all his engagements of the week, even on Sundays. I listened, or eavesdropped to be more correct, about his tight schedule.

Behind his chair, in a small frame, are images of his spouse and his children. I wonder what their feelings were upon receiving the news about Kaypi's appointment as CEO. To Kaypi, it was a big surprise.

> I heard there are many others who are more eligible. This is a gift from the Almighty. Praise to Him the Sustainer.

Suddenly Dolah, [120] one of the names listed as one of the *tali* men, entered the room. Without giving a *salam,* as one should do especially when meeting elders, he told Kaypi about my 'aggressiveness.' According to Dolah, I asked many things about Palmyra. "He asked many bad things too." Dolah's behaviour caught me by surprise as he broke the psychological contract of confidentiality of the interview. Worse still, it happened before me. Why he did that? Was he doing some sort of impression work? What was he up to?

Dolah was no K1-2 officer. However, he always represented his boss at inter-departmental meetings. A week earlier while I was on my way out of Haji's room, Dolah was there too. To make matters more interesting, when I went to Timbalan's room for an interview, he was there too. Dolah was 'everywhere'. As such, it was

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[120] Male, K3 (+5) who rose through the rank and file. He has been in Palmyra for nearly 20 years.

no wonder that many staff called him the chief conduit. Many staff believed that if they wanted their voices to be heard by Kaypi or Haji, they just mentioned it in front of Dolah. God willing, they said, in a day or two they could hear responses. Thus, it was no mistake then if many called him the 'Third Deputy CEO'.

Indeed, during an interview with Dolah, I did ask him about his closeness with Kaypi, Haji and Timbalan. According to him, he knew Kaypi for a long time before coming to Palmyra. Furthermore he said, his house in the Kokos county was not far from Kaypi`s. About Haji and Timbalan, he told me that he used to work directly under them for a long time before.

Chin however gave me another dimension to Dolah's intimacy with Kaypi and Haji.

> He is willing to do many non-official jobs for both of them. He is a Gurkha. Once I was told, he became their driver to a political meeting in the Kokos County. Recently, he was extra busy doing some unofficial job. Out of guilt not doing his official job maybe or he just slipped his tongue out of his zealousness, he told to one, his reason for the busy-ness. He told the man about his job of organising an Eid[121] programme for Kokosians in the Kokos County.

Being cornered by Dolah, I explained to both of them the importance of 'good data' and 'bad data' in a research that could be a great use to Palmyra as an organisation. Kaypi agreed.

> An academic research is more reliable to depend on than merely hearsay about what is really going on here.

Dolah disagreed. For him, outsiders should only be told about the good things. Dolah's statements stung me. To him I am an outsider. Now I remembered why he did not want to talk much during the interview. Everything came to me in pieces. In the interview with him, Dolah almost echoed everything that was said by Kaypi and Haji. Being positive on everything that happened in Palmyra was almost a motto to him, at least that what came out from my interview with him.

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[121] Muslim celebrates Eid festival after the compulsory one-month fasting in the month of Ramadan. Fasting in Ramadan is one of the pillars of Islam.

Dolah's 'intrusion' was very costly to me as Kaypi had other appointments to attend to. After saying thank you, I gave my *salam*. Kaypi stood up. In a low voice almost like whispering, he said the following words:

> I am doing *silat*[122] in a slippery and muddy field.

I wonder what he meant by doing that Malay art of self-defence. I hoped to find the secret. Then his voice came back to normal level.

> I wish I could talk more with you about this organisation. However, as you can see, it is all busy-ness around me. Even on Sundays, I must go to meetings. I am sorry. I hope you could find and trace my voices in various annual reports and speeches. Do not forget to read the poetry. I read it at the event to commemorate the 40th birthday of Palmyra.

Outside the room, staff were queuing for their turn to see the CEO. I was taking their time. That day on my way home, late in the evening, I could still see Kaypi's official car in the annexe. Perhaps, he was 'busy man'.

The collage

Who is Kaypi really? Since the exit of the fifth CEO, Palmyra was seen by some staff as 'dumping ground' for 'residues' from the Ministry of Education. At least that was what many respondents perceived about the previous CEO. He was called the 'Headmaster' by many staff. After his retirement, he was re-appointed again as the CEO. The man was said to have left Palmyra 'in a mess'. Semiotically, during his period of tenure, lifts in all buildings were often broken down. When he left, many rumours flew around about who would be the next CEO. Ironically, Timbalan's name was not at the top in those rumours. Before the arrival of Kaypi, one linguistic professor was said to be on the way to be the new CEO. However, he failed to turn up which many believed due to certain political games by a section of the Malay linguistic circle. I was told that the professor's views on Malay language were not 'compatible' with the said influential group.

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122 Malay art of self-defence

To many staff, Kaypi was the 'awaited man'. They really hoped he would save them and clear away the 'leftovers' from the 'headmaster.' Such high hopes are not far away from what was being described by many 'positive' writers on leadership, where leaders are seen as "people who do the right things" (Bennis and Nanus, 1985/1997) with all roseate values (Washbush and Clements, 1998). Perhaps, the above high hopes on Kaypi sprang from stories about his nice life, as portrayed in some newspaper articles and word of mouth.

Chin described his experience upon the arrival of Kaypi.

> I read stories about Kaypi and his family in one newspaper. I also heard how nice he is from my reliable friends out there. Thus, when he first arrived here, I see him as a kind of Ratu Adil[123]. To be more precise, half-saint.[124] A religious personality. Further more his speeches were full with religious tone.[125]

However, Chin's expectation was short lived.

> My perception changed when I saw something that I could not describe here. He turns around when an opportunity arises. He is a clever person - masquerading in order to promote his own agenda.

Indeed the issue of 'agenda' preoccupied Jawa's mind. To him the agenda was political. He asserted that Kaypi showed his true colours, that of incompetence. To him, Kaypi was just another "chief hospital assistant who believed in being a surgeon." At one point, he saw Kaypi as a man without *malu* who tried to be a "new hero" by telling the world about the previous CEO's incompetence. Offensively, Jawa says,

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[123] A kind of Messiah as understood in the West. The term literally means the Justice Queen, a common vocabulary in the study of peasant societies and rebellion in Indonesia. The Queen is a mythical character, believed to bring order out of disorder.

[124] *Setengah wali* (Malay). *Wali* is a term used by Malays to depict someone who is very close to God.

[125] Often his speeches are coloured with the name of the last Prophet, Quranic verses and other religious terms.

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He is like a bad husband telling nasty things about his own wife in the public. He publicly tells the people about his spouse's sagging breasts or being sexually productive no more. Is he not ashamed (*malu*) about it?

Kakang's opinion was not far from Jawa. To him, Kaypi is not a smart and observant man.

He is always giving general instructions as if he himself is not clear about his job. He should give directions to his senior officers what to do. We senior officers do not know whether he is telling a story or giving instruction to us. As such, our mission is not clear either.

Makcik Auntie agreed with the point, although she showed some sympathy.

I think the problem lies with him. I know he tried his best to help this organisation from declining. He is not clear what he wants to do with this organisation.

To Longman,[126] Kaypi is not a "strong man" as he was seen as a man who did not really "drown himself" in building Malay language and literature.

All the above descriptions about Kaypi were 'not acceptable' to both Dolah and Hitam's[127] ears. Dolah says,

Kaypi is the perfect man for the job. He knows about language and literature. Thus, he knows what he is saying. Being a poet is already a surplus value.

In my mind, Dolah would probably add more sentences about the importance of a CEO being a poet if he knew the existence of the Poetry Place scheme in Britain (Clove, 1998; Molden, 1998).[128]

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[126] Male, K3 (+15)

[127] Male, middle manager (+10), Kokosian

[128] Managers are acknowledged poets of the world, a writer writes in a professional manager magazine. Working with poetry at workplace is seen as part of imagineering, an issue of importance in creative management, which is one of the hallmarks of management in the 21st century.

Hitam also gave examples of his claim about the bright side of the CEO.

> I feel that he is very smart. Nowadays *kaki ampu* [129] have a difficult time. He was just looking at their behaviour. He left them to play their game. It is a bit difficult to *makan* [130] him. It is true that some people managed to pass through his net, but the number is very small. It is not like the time before him.

In this regard I knew Haji did not like me to do this collage about the CEO as to him staff 'opinions' were just "complaints."

> Some staff like to do a lot of complaining about top people and the management. My principle is you do your job and let others do their jobs. If you talk about other people's job, you have no time to do your own job. They must remember Kaypi is their boss. I see him as my boss. I always see the CEO as my boss. That is why I have no problem working with him or other CEOs.

In relation to the above, many respondents refused to talk at length about the CEO. Tambi[131] summarised the attitude.

> He is the CEO. He is paid to do the job. Why do you want to think (about him) until your head is opened into halves? What do you get? Your salary is still the same. Your post is still the same. I do not want to get headaches. Playing carom is a better thing to do[132].

Haji, the big boss

Haji's office is unique, as it has no door. He described it as an "open office."

> I like to be open with everybody in here. I like to be accessible to all staff. My office is the only open office in the whole of Palmyra.

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[129] To support somebody with the intention of gaining something in return.

[130] To consume, to influence or to deceive him with a performance for one's own gain.

[131] Male, K3 (+10)

[132] The Malay expression is more powerful: *Buat apa fikir pasal dia sampai pecah-pecah kepala. Apa yang awak dapat? Gaji tidak naik juga. Pangkat tidak naik juga. Buat apa pening-pening kepala. Lebih baik main karom.*

As 'the big boss' or Tuan Besar, a term used by Kakang, the CEO easily accepts his ideas and his words. In elaboration Chin said,

> Haji belongs to a special breed. He is a powerful person around here. Many see him as the real power behind the throne.

To Haji, the paradigm shift spear-headed by Kaypi was very timely.

> Palmyra is borne out of *semangat perjuangan bahasa* (the spirit of language struggle). It coloured us for nearly fifteen years. Now the struggle is different. We are in the climate of change. This organisation must behave like an amoeba. In other words, an organisation can be built and can be destroyed creatively. That is my idea of organisation. However many staff could not accept change. These are nostalgic people. Now almost every one is thinking along economic terms. To survive in this climate, the Malay language and literature must be seen as a marketable product.

Upon probing, Haji elaborates the notion of the paradigm shift further.

> I believe this organisation is very relevant to the present Malay society. As part of the new century challenge, we are re-building and re-inventing this organisation. Besides enlarging Palmyra physically, we have planned to rejuvenate our human resources to the full. Kaypi spelled out those things in his maiden speech here. The staff in this context must reinvent a new positive attitude towards work. Kaypi wrote beautiful poetry on that. He wants the staff to break the negative shackles of the past. We help staff achieve that by means of re-organisation. Some staff, especially those belonging to the old timers group do not like to change. They said the old way works here for years. For me if you want to be happy, you must follow what your boss says. Kaypi is my boss.

As the main protagonist, according to many staff, in the re-organisation programme, Haji gave his 'version' of the story.

> This is a part of the re-inventing process. First, we make several structural changes, which is with the aim of enlarging the language and literature departments. Directors must head both departments from the VIP group. Therefore, we devised a scheme to get an approval from the government. We asked the Chief Secretary of State[133] to launch a book dear to his heart. Upon coming, we showed him our plans. He was very impressed with us. He gave

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[133] The big boss in civil service.

more VIP posts than we asked for. Our problem now is that we do not have qualified staff to fill those VIP posts.

Haji smiled widely. Grinning. I did not know what was in his mind. Nevertheless, one thing was clear. The VIP post he mentioned was higher than his present grade (K1). Was he aiming for the post? I wonder.

> With the availability of new posts, we started to re-structure Palmyra. Various directive powers of particular domains, including the deputy CEO, were re-defined. You could see such changes in our Annual reports. Only after this re-structuring, we began to implement the re-positioning of staff programme.

At that point, I remembered someone who used to say; you cease to exist in an organisation if your name is no more (active) on the organisational chart. If that claim is true, who is going to 'disappear' from the scene? I was curious to see.

Haji realised many staff see his enthusiasm for re-organising 'wrongly.'

> People in here are unique. Consultants who used to work with us could not work out what type of culture is prevailing here. They could not find it in textbooks. I am baffled myself. From what I see people here need a lot of pushing. You must push and push them. If not their flame of *perjuangan* will get smaller and smaller. As a manager, I must make their flame bigger and bigger. Without such help, the flame could extinguish slowly by itself. This re-organisation is part of our help.

With regard to his position as the director of personnel, management and finance, Haji explained:

> I am a manager. I am a manager. As a manager, I need to manage this organisation. As mentioned by Kaypi, the concept 'let the manager manage' should prevail here. I heard some staff said how could I understand Palmyra, as I never wrote even a single poetry. Still, I believe a manager has to manage. I am the manager. My principle of management is to work through people. My idea is to use people for the people. No doubt in my position I made many decisions. So far, there is no serious contention from the staff. In this regard, we have a strong commitment towards Total Quality Management. We celebrate the Quality Day every year. Indeed, I think, our Q alphabet on the wall of Jebat Hall is the biggest in the city.

Haji however admitted that organisational rejuvenation was not easy.

To us work is *ibadah*. That is why we must *syukur* to Him, The Sustainer of Life. Otherwise, we become the ungrateful lot. I always told my wife about it. I told her we have a considerable sum of savings in the bank, a good life and good children. That is enough. Without *syukur*,[134] life could be chaotic. Indeed, without *syukur*, it is difficult to realise the importance of this rejuvenation. I think many staff lack the attitude of saying thank you to Palmyra. In comparison with others, this organisation is very generous. Here you could easily get a car, housing and computer loans. We have so many panel clinics and dental surgeries. They are all free for the staff and their dependants. The staff should feel gratitude for these special things.

At that moment, he took out a religious text, <u>Minhajul Abidin</u> (literally, The Path of the Pious Worshippers). He started to read a section of *syukur*. He continues,

The staff I reckoned should not see things in monetary terms only. Furthermore, they are chosen and special workers. They are doing what our Lord asked human beings to do in the first *ayat* (Quranic verse): Read! What staff is doing here is more or less propagating people to read. If staff work with pure heart, they will benefit in this world and in the hereafter.

When I asked whether Palmyra is sick or not, Haji replied:

This organisation is not sick. I do not know who is telling you this. I think such idea comes from people who are not happy with this paradigm shift. They do not understand what is going on. I think these people still cling to the past. I do not really worry about them. Many of them are in the retirement age band. I am banking my hope on the new generation. I would like to make it clear. This re-organisation is not my own making (*pandai-pandai*). I am not above anybody here. I am just a staff member under the CEO. I am just a man who tries his best in helping the CEO to change the work culture in the best possible way to make Palmyra great.

On my way out from his office, I kept wondering what would Haji's reaction be if he knew what Jawa, Chin and Kakang had painted about him.

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134 Meaning - thank you Allah for giving life (including good health, food, etc).

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According to Chin, Haji was a 'bad' man.

> I think he is not a wise man. You remember about the volcano of discontent, which erupted in Department Z. There were so many *surat layang* and open letters of complaint[135]. In response, he called for a meeting. In there, the Head was dressed down in front of his staff. We Malays have face. He should call the man quietly and asked him what was all the fuss about. If staff allegations were true, he must think of what to do with the guy.

To Jawa, Haji was a 'double faced' [136] man.

> I had direct experience in that. One day, I was called for an interview. Being the most senior candidate with experience, I thought that I would get the post. Alas, one junior lady got it. I asked Haji for an explanation, and he told me the decision hinged largely on compassionate grounds. He told me the lady (Hajar) is a single parent with a small baby. "If that was the case, why a girl with an old parent to support was not given the post?" I said. He gave no answer. Later I found out the real story. In the interview, the lady told the panel, including Haji, about her Kokosian root! I think both Kaypi and Haji have rhinoceros ears[137]. In one meeting, my friend, a senior manager, told me about their denial concerning the truth of *surat layang*. One senior officer told me all the allegations were true to the skin.

To Kakang, Haji was a man who thought he knew everything.

> In one meeting, a middle manager was explaining about the mark-up of a book. He said it should be make-up not mark up. What a foolish man. Both terms were different in concept and meaning.[138] I do not know how the staff feels for him. He makes the same type of mistake again when he said *orang lama* do not like change. His assumption is wrong. Most people like to see change. The problem is he wants to make many changes all at once. In that hasty behaviour, he created disunity among the staff. Many staff saw it as a kind of manipulative action. He should sit down, listen and hear what is going on around here. He should remember that being new in Palmyra, he could be misguided by some manipulative hands. The other day he received an excellence award. Many people in the hall gave him a loud applause. I do not know what their real intention was, but I strongly believed it was meant as a kind of cynicism.

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[135] The theme of various letters is related to staff unhappiness about their Head's misbehaviour.

[136] *Cakap tidak serupa bikin*. Literally meant, your action is different from your words.

[137] A proverb for a person with impaired hearing.

[138] In publishing, mar-up refers to pricing of a book while make-up relates to illustrative works.

Dolah, the conduit

On my way out of Haji's room, I met with Dolah. He was going to see Haji. Seeing him in a busy state, I asked him what made him so hurried.

> I am very busy. You know this entire school textbook thing. People outside there are complaining about us being slow and inefficient. They blame us for that. What they do not know is that we are dealing with so many red tape bureaucracies with certain government agencies outside there. As we are at the end of the tape, all fingers are pointing at us but nobody sees the fault on the other end. Those people think publishing a book is like doing photocopying. Now we are in hot soup. I believe when some of our publishing works are being privatised, we can sort things more quickly. Anyway, what are you asking Haji?

Being cornered once in the CEO's room, I gave him a cautious answer. I suspected if I said something 'sensitive', it would travel fast into Kaypi's room. After all, I was being 'alerted' by many informants about his 'conduit' activity.

To some, Awang's 'closeness' with the top people makes him the best source to know some secrets about what is going on in the inner circle of the management, Dolah was the best source. Intended to be leaked or not, Awang had many 'secrets' that were often classified as 'hearsay' or 'rumours.' It was through such transmission that Chin heard about the story of Timbalan's (the deputy CEO[139]) precarious position in Palmyra. From what Chin heard Timbalan would be removed from his post. To Chin, if the rumour is true, non-Kokosians were going to lose one strong backer.

Indeed the story about Dolah organising an Eid party in the Kokos County bothered him.

> If the story were true, all Kokosians would be there to attend the party. In that party, how could you differentiate what is a friendly talk and official talk? All the top people like Kaypi, Haji and Don will be there. Who knows what are they talking and what are they planning? We shall see after this if there are any changes in here. I hope they do not talk about putting Haji as the new deputy CEO.

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[139] Non-Kokosian

Don, the secretive

Don is the last *tali* man that I managed to interview. He is very secretive. Perhaps his knowledge about how organisational research could reveal many 'hidden secrets' makes him very cautious. After all, he has an MBA. Such anxiety was shown when he asked me why I chose Palmyra as my site of study.

> I do not understand why are you doing research here. The private company is more interesting than here. Anyway may be it is appropriate for some rebels like you.

I was shocked to hear his perception of me. That was the third time within two weeks I was being 'harassed' by the *tali* men. Earlier in the week, in the mosque, Haji 'jokingly' labelled me as an 'emotional' man. Worse still, he said those words in front of Kaypi. In the second instance, Awang construed me as a man looking for bad things. Was I threatening *tali* people at that moment? Were these *tali* people comparing notes about my 'questions?'. I believed Don could see changes on my face. Don changed the mood by 'explaining,'

> What I meant is that someone who sees differently from us, and then left us. No hard feelings, eh. We are still friends, right. I do not have much time to spare. I am sorry, as I must pick my children before 5.15pm.

The word rebel still stung me. I believe the word was related to organisational citizenship, the very jargon being used regularly by the management in addressing staff. Don says,

> Actually there is nothing interesting here. I believed the most frequent word that most of your informants mentioned is organisational politics. They will say this place is full of politics.

Interestingly all informants did not mention the word politics although they explicitly described it in their stories. At least, Don knew what is going on in the orang bawah's mind, I thought. Perhaps, Don picked those things at the mamak stall where he was a frequent customer.

For me this organisation is good. The Palmyra is very compassionate with their staff. We give the all necessary loans for their benefits. Politicking around here is mild by standard, at least compared to other organisations. You know I would like to laugh aloud when many staff said that Palmyra is sick and bad. You see some people could accept and believe what I am saying. These people have no experience working in other places like me. I just laugh at their anxieties.

ORANG LUAR STORIES

As mentioned earlier, *orang luar* are non-Kokosians, and they perceived themselves to be on the periphery as Kokosians dominated the centre. Almost all respondents told their narratives, which acted as their perception, sensory and communicative extensions, full with metaphors and filled with proverbs. Such speciality seems to confirm the notion that man is fundamentally a metaphorical being. Those metaphors are mental images that serve as explanatory function, which arises from the paradigm shift and 'disorder' phenomena.

However the shift phenomenon, I believe, only acts as a catalyst that awakened the image-making part of the brain. The change 'freed the genies' as respondents talked about their historical experiences. I view metaphorical understanding as not merely a matter of arbitrary fanciful projections from anything to anything but more as a creative act of mapping one type of concrete experience onto a different, more abstract concept. As an explanatory device, man uses it to clarify, to comprehend or to show insight to what is going on in a life-world reality (Pepper, 1942). Proverbs are 'strong imageries' that my respondents used to emphasise their metaphors.

To many *orang luar*, they hoped for wellbeing in the workplace as espoused in the paradigm shift culture whereby the perennial philosophy is the basis (Schuon, 1976). To them Palmyra would turn itself into a compassionate organisation where the good morality prevailed. However, they experienced otherwise. Thus using words as "weapon of the weak," (in the forms of proverbs and metaphors), they sought 'order' from the 'chaotic' reality. In so doing, they mostly tapped the rich reservoir of Malay literature and culture as their references. In many instances, they utilised their knowledge of Islam too.

To *orang luar,* the following are prevalent in Palmyra.

- Management action, spearheaded by *tali* men, is a kind of *Chinese wayang* (opera) with a lot of noises and masquerades, full of rhetoric and impressions.

- Cleverness more often does not pay and indeed could lead to your own death or 'sickness,' a point that fits with the myth of *Hang Nadim in* the Malay Annals. In a similar vein, some Heads even 'ate' their own staff as a way to survive, besides acts as a 'punishment' for not being 'loyal' followers. To staff the action is seen as '*snakehead fish syndrome.*'

- Good points from 'small people' (*orang kecil*) are often seen as irrelevant as people close to the centre of power think they know everything. They are behaving like officers in the old Malay sultanate kingdom. When it comes to the reality of working, they are just flustered people. They are *hot worms.*

- Being at the top with power, the management people (read: Kokosians) are perceived to be the 'untouchables.' As such, they are construed to belong to a special breed of caste, *the Brahmins.* As such, their followers get special treatment from them. Therefore, some people feel that the present change is more or less like a rainbow after the morning rain, nice to look at but it then disappears.

- The office politics is deeply entrenched in the body of Palmyra. Even non-Kokosian management members are not safe from the *tali* men who are very good in playing the game of *halus.* In this game, Kokosians were said to hide behind 'nice' discourses, especially taken from the current management and religious texts, and 'nice' actions.

As a way to make sense of this 'disorder', *orang luar* took several measures. They wrote stories that could be easily identified with Palmyra (see *The Ship*), made graffiti and authored *surat layang.* Some took the vow of silence while a small number of them 'avoided' the situation by 'beautifying' their body (see *The Tie of Headache*). Besides using writings, *orang luar* also used their mouth to voice their

views about the paradigm shift. They also made jokes and labelled a certain thing with certain images.

Literally, *surat layang* is the general term for 'unofficial' literary displays made by unknown, yet often insiders, authors about people or personalities.[140] In the context of Palmyra, *surat layang* took many forms such as short stories with illustration, excerpts from *hikayats* and small posters. Almost all of them were displayed in the back region that is on the toilet door in one of the floors of the building. I also found one of them hanging behind the door near the mosque. Often, *surat layang* were copied, and they became a topic of interest at the various eating-places. At Palmyra, *surat layang* was published in series and it became a popular reading. Readers, I was told, were always in the position of waiting for the next issue to be pasted on the toilet door.

ORANG KITA STORIES

Orang kita is a term that is used widely by Kokosians to define themselves in comparison to others (*orang luar*). To non-Kokosians, *orang kita* resides deeply in the centre, which in turn translates as in the inner theatre of power. However, the notion of Kokosians being 'privileged' people was not clear, at least on two accounts. First, many Kokosians were not open enough to talk about the issue of *tali* men syndrome. Second, claims by *orang luar* about Kokosians were challenged by those Kokosians 'who dare to speak' with me. Only three Kokosians willingly wanted to be interviewed at length.

The following are viewpoints raised by *orang kita* in relation to the management behaviour. Tengku[141] argued that the management was not *bijaksana*[142] as it seems. As stated in the various official documents, *bijaksana* is the espoused managing style in Palmyra. However, upon observing management behaviour in

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[140] *Surat layang* is often translated as poison-pen letters. In my opinion to treat all letters as poisonous is an act of over-simplification. Anyway, a poison to whom?

[141] K3. Male (+15)

[142] Clever, wise, strategic, knowledgeable and thoughtful behaviour.

relation to their reading of the new Palmyra Act (1995), Tengku doubted the above claims. He saw those people at the top as unable to think in a very creative and strategic way.

Tengku also observed that many 'outsiders' were using Palmyra for their own interest, primarily in dealing with language issues. The management that he construed as clouded in the mentality of fathers-do-no-wrong' however does not like such 'cleverness.' In this relation he saw that the management is very good at playing with nice words such as organisational learning and organisational citizenship, and doing physical things such as building new office blocks and decorating the present buildings in order to portray that they are *bijaksana*. What was important however, as Tengku argued, was the real *pengisian erti* (meaning fulfilment) of *perjuangan bahasa* (language struggle) in the widest sense.

With regard to the above employment of nice words or discourses, an interesting account can be seen in the '*Caressing Buttocks*'. According to Hitam, many staff were taking 'leadership by example' seriously, at least in the form of following 'how-to-go-up' the career ladder as shown by some seniors, that is by "caressing buttocks" of the 'powerful" people. Yet, he admitted that he was stupid for not taking part in the ingratiating process. In general, he summarised the state of Palmyra like the princess of Mount Ophir.[143]

> To outsiders she was a beautiful young voluptuous woman. In reality, she was an old *nenek kebayan* (witch) with no teeth. To us, insiders, she was a nenek kebayan. Heh, heh, heh.

Hitam[144] largely voiced a similar point as Dolah`s.

In this period of change both Dolah and Hitam praised Kaypi explicitly. To Hitam, the CEO is a smart guy who lets those ingratiators play their game and yet he did

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[143] A mythological account in the Malay Annals. The king of Malacca, upon being told about the prettiness of the princess became a lovesick man. He wanted to marry her. At the mountain, an old lady met the delegation under the leadership of Tun Mamat. She spelled out terms of conditions. Many believed that old lady was the princess herself. The princess was a witch who could turn herself into many 'faces.'

[144] K3, Male (+20)

not succumb to it. Dolah, meanwhile saw Kaypi as a man of vision. He told me he could even read what was in Kaypi's mind.

I could give you answers on what he wants to do in here. I know what he would say to you.

However Hitam admitted that there were so many secrets in the fourth floor where all the big powerful men reside, so much so that at times he saw himself just like a passenger. Tengku also shared a similar feeling.

Pulling the hair from the flour

The issue of Kokosians ruling in the Palmyra, as claimed by many non-Kokosians, was one of the pertinent questions that bothered my mind during those visits. Really, how should I ask that question? Then, the fear of 'breaking' a friendship is always great. It is an issue related to closeness. After much thinking, I decided to use my 'closeness' with them as my Tao. However, how should I ask this sensitive question? Am I ready to ask that question and face its consequences? In this relation, many Kokosians gave their 'answers.'

After searching in the reservoir of Malay culture, indeed it was there within me all the time; I managed to solve the issue. I told myself, the question must be the last before we say salam and thank you, which is when my informant and me stand up to shake hands. At that juncture, I would ask my informant if I could ask one last question. That question should begin with asking for their forgiveness. That way of asking is well entrenched in the etiquette of polite Malay. Thus, the question begins with the following sentence: 'Please forgive my words and me. I am going to ask you a sensitive question. Please correct me if I am wrong. I heard that some people say the Kokosians rule this place.' This issue of asking the specific question is like pulling a hair from a small heap of flour.

Almost in uniformity, my Kokosian informants used Timbalan's denial of the existence of tali men as their answer.

Dolah almost jumped hysterically when I asked the question. With a strong voice, he answered.

I would like to deny it strongly. All the Kokosian senior managers were there before the present CEO arrived.

As a point of rebuttal, he mentioned about the existence of Johorean mafioso, previously. All the CEOs before the arrival of Kaypi came from Johore.[145]

> Why, there should be no fuss about it? This is an issue of coincidence. I believe people who created this seditious story could not accept the paradigm shift. I believe this group of people does not like change. Our deputy CEO (Timbalan), a non-Kokosian, for a long time denied such existence a long time ago. Such bad story created a climate of discontent.

I did not know what would be his answer if he knew Jawa's answer to the accusation about Johorean Mafioso.

> I think many Kokosians think we do not know the history. I agree with the point that all CEOs before Kaypi came from Johore. However, they give chance to every one. When we talk about Kokosian rule, we are not talking about the CEO being Kokosian. We are talking about their parochial influence on the management team. When we say that OK[146] (*orang Kokosians*) rules this place, they accused us of being 'anti-OK'. My wife is a Kokosian. Do I hate my wife? I love her very much. What we hate here is attitudes of favouring to their own 'caste.'

Hitam almost repeated the same answer like Dolah. He answered me with a high-pitched voice.

> It is not fair to say Kokosians rule this place. Those Kokosians in the management team worked their way up long before the coming of the present CEO. It is coincidental.

In emphasising the above point, Hitam posed me a question.

> Is it fair to say that all Kokosians women are prostitutes if you meet one or two Kokosian prostitutes in a red light area in this city?

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[145] A state/county in the Federation of Malaysia.

[146] An abbreviation for Orang Kokosian (people from Kokosian county).

Darus[147] said that he heard a lot about nepotism going on in Palmyra. As such, he did not deny that group biases were at work in Palmyra. However, he believes that not every Kokosian is one of the 'privileged' people.

> One day I came a bit late to the office. As I need to clock in before 8 a.m. I parked my car in one of the senior manager's lot. Later I heard that I could park in the lot as I am from Kokos County. It is not fair to accuse every Kokosian as parochialist. I myself do not get any special treatment by the top Kokosian men.

Mek, a lady with a Kokosian ancestry line, also shared the above point. According to her, since her family moved to Silver County, the management sees her as no more an "original" Kokosian.

> To the management, I am not a pure breed. I was fed with waters from different rivers, not from the Kokosian River.

Perhaps, such 'impurity' made Mek tell me a story, as narrated to her by Siti, on the account of Siti's friend, about an incident in a meeting room in relation to the staff excellence award.

> One of Siti's friend was selected to be a member of the committee. Upon receiving all the names, the management team would sit down and decide who would be bestowed with the award. According to Siti's friend, when they came to one Kokosian name, one of the *tali* men exclaimed, huh, *orang kita*. (That person later was awarded as an excellent staff). Little did they realise that my friend is non-Kokosian.

Another Kokosian, popularly known as the Crab[148] heard our conversation. From his room he spurted out to tell me about him not being in the parochial group. Almost every one in the section of the department heard him saying that.

Tengku however did not give me a direct answer. His face changed and the flow of conversation stopped, however, when I posed the question. Then he began to narrate the behaviour of certain Kokosian businessmen in the city. All characters in

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[147] Male, middle manager (+15)

[148] Male, middle manager (+16).

his story were 'tricksters', and they had 'weird ideas' too. I believe that Tengku wanted me to contemplate the answer about the nature of Kokosians from the narrative.

Changes in voice and face among my Kokosian respondents really made me unhappy. I was asking a very sensitive question. Yet I believe I showed them my innocent face and I hoped they could understand my motive. In sum, after asking those Kokosians, I felt a strong relief. Perhaps this tension is typical of researchers doing fieldwork at home. Many could argue about the claim, but at least I found a great sympathy from Yun (1999) who shared a similar feeling. After all, like what Malays used to sing, Palmyra is a place of many friends.

The Cape of Katung with its calm seas,
A place of washing,
A place where you fell, you remember,
A place where you play, you never forget.[149]

HEROES

In Palmyra, the second CEO, Laksamana, is regarded as the principal hero. He is seen as more or less the founding father. His exploits as the language warrior in the early years of Palmyra's development are almost mythical. Such testimony could be seen clearly in the exhibits in the Platinum Gallery. As a way of remembrance, the Jebat Hall was renamed as Laksamana Hall during the 40th birthday celebration. Interestingly, he also regarded the Palmyra as an ark. Admiration towards Laksamana comes from Kokosians, non-Kokosians, old timers and 'newcomers' alike. With reference to the last group, they know about Laksamana's heroic adventures through reading and narration of the elders. During the birthday celebration, the management highlighted mythical stories about Laksamana.

With reference to Laksamana, many respondents thought that Palmyra would not be in the present situation, if Laksamana were still alive. Tina[150] summarises,

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[149] See Dailie (1990).

I never worked under his leadership. I feel I know him through my readings and stories told by seniors. He is a man of *perjuangan*. Under him, the Palmyra flourished. I believe things would be different. I believe there will be no chaos like the present.

Datuk, the fifth CEO, meanwhile was seen as the living hero. I could see such status in style when Datuk gave his talk at the Hall. The place was almost full with people. Jawa explains,

Today is a very different day. You could see for your self. Almost all senior officers came to this talk, I meant if you compare with other ceremonies.

During the talk, Datuk implicitly 'bashed' the management for being too purist with language planning. He said, the pursuit of grammatical purity, based on a single school of thought would not decide the death or survival of the Malay language. What important now, he said, was to address issues like how to make knowledge corpus in Malay language rich.

At that time, I could see that many seniors' faces were glowing. After the talk, many seniors followed Datuk to the Platinum Gallery. I took their photos. In the manner of a voyeur, I overheard seniors talking about their happy times under Datuk's leadership. Indeed my respondents painted Datuk very much in positive way --- a scholar, intellectual, kind, man of ideas, man who makes the staff happy and big-hearted man. Longman describes,

The moment Datuk left Palmyra, this organisation became a cybercop. That cop walks in agile and looks great. Tap. Tap. Tap. Yet, his body is full of wires and chips, with no soul.

DOING *PANDAI-PANDAI*

As an act of courtesy and verifier of the 'truthfulness' of my data, I paid Chin many visits. Still, he was very secretive. During my visits, I heard many rumours about Timbalan, the Deputy CEO, of Palmyra. "His time is coming to an end," said one

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150 K3. Female. (+10)

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staff. The Deputy CEO was my first superior when I joined the Palmyra. Nobody wanted to talk about it really. However, I could sense that there was something wrong somewhere. "A power play at the top, perhaps," I said to myself. Chin did not make any comment about the rumour.

> I heard what you heard. There is a saying in Malay. You have your eyes to look and you have your ears to listen. Do not say anything foolish. Your mouth is your tiger. Further more, if your *perahu*[151] missed the way you could pull it back, not your words[152]. There is a lot of wisdom in that proverb. I would like to suggest to you to dig deeper in our proverb. I believe it could help you very much in this research.

With almost a year in the field, at three different times, I believed I had enough data to paint what is really going on during the paradigm shift period in Palmyra. Yet, during the engagement, I was not able to go into the management meetings. I was told meetings come under the rubric of secrets as stipulated in the Official Secret Act. Although I believed there was much rich data behind those doors, I soothed myself with El-Or's (1997) confession: "I did not really know how my ethnographic informants make love after being so close with them."

No shoes, please!

Upon combing my field notes, there are several points that I would like to make public. In the course of interviews, *orang luar* showed a high skill of playing with words. They weaved their talks with metaphors, proverbs and other cultural knowledge. As such, I believe my experiences with local knowledge were very helpful. Otherwise, I think I would be lacking data. In some cases, informants even expected me to '*pandai-pandai*' to complete their discourse. Indeed, I could feel that the transference about a researcher must be "clever," especially if you are coming from a university. On the other hand, I could feel the tension arising from that expectation. Furthermore in this research I always adhered to the concept of 'no shoes, please.' The concept relates to the behaviour of Malays removing shoes upon entering a Malay house. It is an *adat* or a custom. In the wider perspective,

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[151] A type of Malay boat.

[152] *Terlajak perahu boleh ditarik terlajak kata buruk padahnya*. A proverb in Malay.

the *adat* demands me to leave my pre-conceived ideas outside Palmyra, and enter the house 'clean.' Now, an *adat* transformed into an ethnographic guide. Indeed that was my thought upon being 'invited' by Jawa to his room, upon coming out from the mosque.

Not doing real research?

A point to note: some staff did have some knowledge about doing social science research. As such, I believe that they know what I was doing in there. Jokingly may be, some respondents even mentioned how "dangerous" I was to them. Mek[153] said:

> Beware. When he entered your room, he is not merely chitchatting with you. He is recording your talk in his book.[154]

Chin at one point even used the term 'participant observation' upon seeing me in a room witnessing a special ceremony. I wondered how their knowledge about research 'secrets' influenced their 'honesty' in giving data to me. Being a former staff member, I believe I could minimise the risk of being 'set-up' by them. Unexpectedly however, I do not realise that some staff are trained to take up a positivist understanding about research. Lily's[155] husband highlighted it. Lily is the officer who wrote the *Ship*. It happened after I interviewed Lily.

> Whatever, it may be it is your interpretation about Palmyra. That is your interpretation not ours. You are just collecting people's talks or gossips. They are not the real data.

No wonder the man refused to be interviewed. To him I was not doing 'real research'. At that moment, I remembered what Cassell and Symon (1994) said on doing qualitative research in organisations. According to them, the work, among

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[153] K3. Female (+15)

[154] *Jaga-jaga. Dia tu bukan saja-saja bersembang. Nanti cakap kita dia masuk dalam buku* (in Malay).

[155] K1-2. Female. Recently promoted after more than 20 years in K3 position. Her husband is a Kokosian. I was told he is one of the 'rising stars.' In my opinion, his refusal to be interviewed had some relation to this point.

others, is to help qualitative researchers to do research in the dominant non-qualitative realm. Yet, in there I could not find the issue about being confronted by quantitativist.

In addition to the above, I feel that I am really 'in' the research during the fieldwork. I would like to narrate the experience. Upon being given the *surat layang* trilogy, I read it as an ordinary reading. However, things changed upon being 'enlightened' by my wife and my son. At that time, in the study room, my wife was teaching my youngest son about the Malay language. He was reading loudly from a passage. I heard their voices clearly. I came out from my 'hibernation' to see them. Ong's (1982, p. 7) words about orality swam in my mind.

In every instance, a language exists as spoken and heard, in the world of sound. (p. 7)

After a while, my son stopped reading aloud and my wife asked him questions. He was "recalling" the sound. At that moment I remembered how I read the various *surat layang*, the CEO speeches and poetry collected at Palmyra. I read them all in silence. "Why not read them aloud?" I asked myself. Furthermore, there was a thing called psycho-dynamics of orality (Ong, 1982, p. 31). I started with the *Power Rangers* trilogy. All of sudden, upon reading, I could hear the various sounds in the text. They are arranged intentionally with all superlatives and rhythmic syllables as common in the Malay *hikayats*. In no time, I was imitating the way in which storytellers read the Malay hikayats. I was inside the story and anything else was outside (Ong, 1967, p. 117-121). I could feel the sensation that tickles my rib to laugh. At one point, upon coming to a phrase used in one film by P. Ramlee,[156] I laughed aloud. My wife and my son entered the room surprised. Indeed, the 'other' way of reading brought a new way of seeing things. Now, I could see how *surat layang* served as a kind of 'carnival'. The sound of reading without doubt gives 'life' to the document.

Indeed the idea of reading aloud in order to give a 'life' to a text is not alien to Malays. Since childhood, they are taught to recite the Quran in such a manner. In

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[156] The famous Malay film star. It is considered unusual if Malays do not know him and his films.

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my adult life, I found that Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali's[157] explanation about such action fascinating. As translated by Muhammad Abul Quasem (1982), Al Ghazali says:

There is no doubt that it is necessary to read the Quran loud enough so that the reader can hear himself because reading means distinguishing clearly between sounds; thus sound is necessary, and the smallest degree of it is that which he can hear himself. (p. 49).

In the above light, Bruns (1992) noted that for al-Ghazali it is in reading aloud that one enters into an exclusive relationship with the Quran, and "reading aloud awakens the mind of the reader" (p. 129). In a similar vein, one should read slowly and distinctly in order to be able to reflect as one reads.

Bingkai as a genre

With regard to story telling, my informants subscribed to a very peculiar form, known in Malay as *bingkai*. It is a story within a story. Perhaps, it is like the Mousetrap story in Hamlet. More often than not, the second story is not their own story but a story written by others. Such stories among others are popular folk tales or fictional events from published literary texts. Sometimes, the second story is presented by interrupting the flow of story-telling. Such interruption is best seen when the informants physically put the second story on the table, for example in the case of *surat layang* or text excerpts. To me such action is more like transplanting artefact. Another form of *bingkai* is by transforming the whole setting of human realm to the animal realm. A good illustration could be viewed in Mahmud's narration about "the cat and the buffalo people" in Palmyra.

To some researchers, the *bingkai* could be construed as merely ornamental in nature. In this relation, Malay literary critics showed that *bingkai* provides many possibilities. The most famous of all is to save one's own neck from the wrath of authorities such as seen in <u>One Thousand Arabian Nights</u>. In the case of my informants, they were using it as a way to convey their emotions. This behaviour is indeed within the cultural scope mentioned by Asmah (1992) as "beat around the

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[157] A Muslim scholar. His writings greatly influenced Malays way of thinking.

bush" phenomena. Some scholars perhaps view the above *halus* situation as an act of politeness and 'saving face'.

However in Palmyra, the use of *bingkai* goes beyond the physical realm. It is related to their religious belief. Muslims believe it is very bad to tell bad things about others, unless it is necessary (Kamali, 1994). Moreover, commanding good and forbidding evil is an important Quranic principle. In this situation of 'constraint', a position of *hikmah* (wisdom) must be sought. In addition, doing *bingkai* is one of those. In sum, the *bingkai* provides the following to my informants: An opportunity to express their emotions in an amour propre, releasing them from constraints, and at the same times being able to criticise the authorities.

A point to note: in many cases whenever the second story involved printed texts, the informants assumed *pandai-pandai* at work. As such, they mentioned it in a word or two referring to those texts, and they expected the researcher to 'know' those texts. This expectation arises from their knowledge about my reading background. However, the most important of all is that the informants construed that academic researchers must not be naive enough not to know about 'popular' literary texts that they referred to. Indeed this high expectation is a constraint to the researchers who are unfamiliar with the subject. Yet, to behave like a 'fool' at Palmyra undermined my stature as a researcher. I believe 'foolish' behaviour works best in a place where "natives" are not too literate. In Pamyra, staff often make fun of foolish researchers. Perhaps, Daillie's (1990) face would turn red if he knew how some staff described his 'naiveté' while doing a research on Malay pantun years ago. Knowing the state of perception, I devised a scheme whereby 'no question about the said text' would be asked in the first sitting, but in the second. Such strategy provides me with ample time to know intimately about the referred text. However, I did not need to operate on the strategy, as I had no difficulty in knowing those published texts.

Throughout my interviews, Malay Annals, one of the most important Malay historiographical texts, was a popular reference. The text describes Malay feudal society in detail, especially in relation to the Malaccan kingdom. Luncai, a folk tale about a trickster who managed to fool authorities in a kingdom, is another common

reference. From the realm of Malay classical romance, <u>Malim Deman</u>, a powerful warrior king with many skin diseases, was mentioned. About the above, <u>Animal Farm</u> was also used as data by several informants. As expected, Kaypi and Haji used Islamic texts as their references. Basically, respondents were utilising Malay culture collective consciousness in their 'fusion' with the researcher.

Chapter 6

Meanings under the Sacred Canopy

This chapter is about interpreting unfolding stories, scattered across texts, and assembling them into a coherent whole. In a sense, it is about presenting hidden meanings. To facilitate my 'revealing' those meanings, I take metaphors as my 'device'.[158] Hermeneutically speaking, I believe that metaphors are important in understanding culture. Tilley (1999) writes,

> Metaphors facilitate the capturing of our phenomenological experience of the world in a unique way. They are means of linking subjective and objective experience, conjoining them and resulting in a fresh "fusion of horizons; they reside, therefore, at the heart of a hermeneutic ... practice. " (p. 8)

In catching metaphors, I believe `key words` are important as they intimately link with cultures (Wierzbicka, 1997). Lexical items seen in this manner are considered the focal points in which cultural domains are organised. Work by Pacanowsky and Trujillo (1982) best reflect this idea. Indeed such exploration is not new: Sapir (1949, p. 29) noted that vocabulary is a very sensitive index of a people's culture. By 'making connection' between keywords, the hidden reality, which permeates all stories, can be unmasked. This action of "connectedness" has recently been regarded as one of the important ideas in organisational communication studies (Stohl, 1995).

Upon interrogating informants and having transcribed interviews hermeneutically line by line, I sensed that the keywords in most interviews related to the notion of disorder/s. Here I view communication as a transaction experienced by informants. I define a transaction as suggested by Pepper (1995), that is, where meaning

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[158] I was alerted about the term by Czarniawska (1998, p. 1). According to her, the term was coined by Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1928/1985.

emerges from the combination of communicative participants within a specific context (p .9). Disorders are indeed 'responses' to context/s.

In this research, I found two primary contexts (Context 1 and Context 2) that underpinned disorders. They relate closely to the state of Malay language and to the state of the body of Palmyra. In the following paragraphs, I shall elaborate how both contexts led to the introduction of a new context of order (Context 3), which in turn paradoxically played a major role in 'causing' new disorder/s (Context 4). Indeed the bulk of my ethnographic data revolves around issues of disorder.

Then I shall discuss issues related to sense-making among staff, which arise from those disorders. I conclude this chapter with some commentaries on the meanings made by informants.

In relation to the above, *taqwil*, a 'native' way of seeing things, is included in the commentaries. The term *taqwil* literally means to take something back to its beginning or origin. Everything is seen as having an interior (*batin*) and exterior (*zahir*). *Taqwil* is to go from the *zahir* to *batin*, from the external form to the inner meaning. I take the *isyarah* (signs)[159] given in the text as my point of departure. From this perspective, metaphors are part of *isyarah*. Another point to note here is that the idea of penetrating into the inner meaning of things in this context is adopted from Islamic literature, which most Malays are familiar with.[160]

CONTEXTS

Context 1 : The Malay language under threat. (The English language 'awakened').

As seen in the words of Kaypi, the CEO, Malay language, that forms the main preoccupation of Palmyra, was under threat from the upsurge of interest in the English language. This situation was seen as 'dangerous' as it undermined the very

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[159] *Isyarah*, among others, can be seen in talk, observed human behaviours and artefacts.

[160] According to Nasr (1966, p. 58-61), *taqwil* is an integral part of Islamic hermeneutics.

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foundation of the Palmyra establishment. The main aim of Palmyra is to develop and build Malay language in accordance with the notion that Malay language is the national language. As an organisation rising from the seed of Malay nationalism, Palmyra is viewed as a 'sacred' body. Such testimony is illustrated clearly in the lyrics of the official song of Palmyra itself where Palmyra is described as 'keramat'.[161] In this regard, it is understandable why people at Palmyra often described their organisation as such.[162] Literally, the word is closely related to the notion of sacredness.

The struggle to put Malay language on a pedestal, as stipulated in the Federal of Malaysia constitution, reached its climax with the establishment of a university, which used the Malay language as its medium of instruction in the early 1970s. This period was considered the 'happy times'. The story about police camaraderie with the course of Malay language struggle during this time was almost legendary. Then came the economic miracle of 1980's - 1990's. With that, the effort to create new Malays as the "global tribes" (see Kessler, 1999) is pertinent. English language came 'out of its slumber' and became the language of importance. Several important power brokers made the matters worse by behaving like Anglophiles at one stage or another. The point is summarised by the non-executive chairman in one of Palmyra's Annual Reports:

> What makes me worry lately is about the emerging elements of hostile and infertile attitudes towards our language struggle. Some leaders even show attitudes of not using [Malay language], as if they are not clever enough to use it. Some of them even dare to suggest that Malay language, which we put on the pedestal as the national language of this country, is not a 'complete' language. ...These elements of ignoring our national language should be doused, otherwise what is being achieved through our hard work and struggle would be disrupted, or maybe is lost all together.

Kaypi, the CEO, voiced a similar concern. He described the above situation as a 'fading-of-own-language-proud' syndrome   (in the Annual Report, 1997). Such

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[161] Metaphysics phenomena where one is considered to posses a supernatural power. It is 'a gift' bestowed upon man who is close to God. In some societies, keramat man (in life and in death) is seen as a 'giver' of happiness to a distraught person.

[162] See "Human Resources and Development" working paper issued by the management during a seminar on Planning and Strategic Management organised by Palmyra, 1997.

anxiety was understandable, as during this period Malay language was 'creolised' regularly over the air. A similar phenomenon was also depicted on various advertisement billboards. Interestingly, the police department who used to be seen as a 'very good friend' now turned out to be one of the main 'culprits'.[163] To Malay language defenders, as many staff at Palmyra considered themselves to be, such acts of hostility could not be tolerated. Jawa, a K3 officer, described this situation as an insult to the 'masculinity' of Palmyra. To these staff, the 'pureness' of Malay language must be defended and protected. Upon scrutinising various official documents, words related to doing combat in the light of *silat* (art of Malay self-defence) were numerous. Thus, for example, words such as *perjuangan*[164] and *mengorak langkah*[165] were common in many speeches.

In sum, Palmyra, in this time of threat, was moving from the state of 'having' influence to a state of 'losing influence' and being 'ignored'. To use Kaypi's term, this was the time when "the moonlight is losing its glow". As a whole, the position of Malay language during this period is best described as being under attack, dishonoured and tarnished.

Context 2: The weak state of Pamyra. (The "ark" is not catching the wind).

To Kaypi, Palmyra was an ark that waits too long in the harbour for trade winds. After being too long in the water, many parts of the ark were not strong enough to sail in the raging seas. According to his observations, various parts of the ark and its crew needed a new lease of life as both of them were in changing times. In this regard, Kaypi believed he inherited the 'twenty-year mess' left by his predecessors. Although some staff challenged the claim, they agreed that the situation of disorder worsened during the period before his arrival in Palmyra.

Before Kaypi, another 'outsider' was seconded to Palmyra as the CEO. As a former teacher, many staff regarded him as a 'headmaster'. Upon observing what he saw

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[163] The department used 'creolised' Malay words in describing their posts.

[164] Struggle; battling.

[165] A move in *silat* before one engages in a battle.

as 'casual' behaviour by staff, he imposed disciplines. On many occasions, he would 'sneak' around to see any late-coming 'teachers.' Often he would say 'harsh words' to 'errant' staff. As a man whose retirement was approaching, staff did not see him taking his post seriously enough. Furthermore he was very much involved in 'book-fair excursions' overseas. In protest against such 'extravagance', the staff jokingly regarded Palmyra at that time as turning itself into a "Language and Tourism" agency. Perhaps, his 'could not care less' attitude is best revealed by the state of the lifts in various buildings during his tenure. According to many staff, it was a 'miracle' at that time not to see a broken lift regularly.

In relation to this, a Kokosian lady seconded as the Deputy CEO, was seen as an important figure in painting further 'black dots' on the headmaster. According to Tengku, K3 officer (a Kokosian), the lady was the 'real' power during the period. Many senior officers were re-positioned. Some staff regarded her as the Dowager.[166] Several insiders even believed she played important role in imposing a certain school of thought as the 'correct' Malay language.[167]

In later years, the 'headmaster' returned to Palmyra as an ordinary man. I was told that his ex-subordinates ignored him. According to one female K3 officer, he cried in the lobby having received such treatment. Despite his poor reputation, he was 'good' in pointing out that there were disorders at Palmyra, especially about issues of discipline and attitudes among staff towards work. Although details about these problems were not given, informants gave clues. Among others they said Palmyra was a place of *main-main* or a place famous for *makan-makan*.[168] Simply, both these attitudes encompass the notion of coming ,to office just for *makan gaji* .[169] Work in this view is just for *cari makan*.[170] One K3 officer, who had been in

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[166] A cruel, female, Chinese empress.

[167] Indeed, some staff openly showed their disagreement towards her adoption. They believed such an imposition would make Malay language very rigid. I view this event as a reflection about the state of planning at Palmyra. The issue is about how dependent Palmyra is on outside resources to survive. One K3 officer noted that many staff were becoming *budak* (boy) to a certain linguist.

[168] *Main-main* (playful); *makan-makan* (feast). The latter refers to the act of giving a feast after each ceremony.

[169] Figuratively speaking, 'work' in this concept is just to get a salary at the end of the month.

[170] To earn a living.

Palmyra for more than thirty years, described those attitudes as 'black soy sauce' mentality.

> [Those people thinks they are] working in some sort of black soy sauce (*kicap*) factory. They put soy into a bottle, packed it, and sell it to customers ...this organisation is more than its name. It is part of Malay soul.

If we view situations moving from Time 1 (T1) to Time 2 (T2), the state of Palmyra moved as follows:[171]

T1 (Prior Kaypi's arrival)	T2 (Kaypi's arrival)
Being influential (in the society)	Losing influence
Being loved deeply	Ignored; love is fading
(language) pure	dirtied; creolised
(language) is fertile among 'friends'	infertile
happy times	precarious
English language being kept at bay	English entered the harbour
respected by politicians	insulted
the 'moonlight of language is glowing'	dim
the ark is strong and moving	weak and moored
the ark is seaworthy	leaking
the ark is clean	In shambles
good image	bad image
the CEO is not serious to move the ark	serious
Work as *perjuangan*[172]	work as *main-main*

Table 1 : *The state of Palmyra before and after the arrival of Kaypi*

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[171] It is very difficult to pinpoint where T1 stops and becomes T2. The above demarcation therefore is very simplistic. According to Kaypi, he inherited a 'mess of twenty years'.

[172] Relates to patriotism. The staff often described the situation as working with *semangat* (spirit of the language struggle).

This situation of weakness can be seen more clearly by looking at images produced by staff on the state of Palmyra.

a) Palmyra is like the Princess of Mount Ophir:

> What Tun Mamat saw on the mountain was an old lady, not a beautiful princess. In reality, she is a toothless old maid.

b) Palmyra is a menopausal lady:

> She is like a menopausal lady. She is sexually unproductive.

c) Palmyra is a toothless tiger:

> Now, this organisation is a toothless tiger... The police department recently slapped our face. They ignored terms coined by us. Instead, they create their own version of Malay, which is creolised Malay.

d) Palmyra is a *pamorless kris*:

> If we can say, this organisation is a *kris*. It is now a *kris* without *pamor*.[173]

From this we can see that the state of reality at Palmyra is pathologically moving towards disorder. Philosophically, the yin is no more in balance with the yang. To address the dynamic imbalances, the new CEO suggested 're-inventing' as the way forward. He viewed disorder as closely related with the old ways of seeing things. As such, liberation was needed. Among others, the liberation work included: reviewing the adoption of Western and certain Eastern ways of managing; staff portfolios; and ways of spreading Malay language and literature. This led to Context 3, which tried to rectify the disorder of Contexts 1 and 2.

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[173] A damascene ornament on *kris*. Many believe such ornament is magical. Malays believe a kris possesses a kind of 'venomous' power. For a warrior, a pamorless *kris* is a useless *kris*. In Malay culture, *kris* is a sign of power, masculinity and dignity.

Context 3: The new order ('bring God back') in the workplace.

a) Work is *ibadah*:

As often in many Commonwealth countries, British left their administrative legacy behind for the 'natives' to follow. After a few years following British 'guidelines', Malaysian agencies were attracted to American ways of doing things. A training institute to train administrators was built with a large initiative from the USA. As such, managers in Malaysia now know more about Peter Drucker, Mintzberg and Iacoca than Charles Handy. In recent years, many Japanese ways of management have also been adopted. So words like "kaizen" are familiar vocabulary to staff.

To Kaypi, the above Western styles of management and the adoption of the Japanese way of organising, is not holistic in nature. In line with his belief about Islam as "a way of life", he promotes the idea of "bringing God back to work." Using the re-organisation programme as a vehicle, he put forward the notion of work as *ibadah*. In this notion of work, the worldly aspect is inseparable from the religious aspect. From this point of view, an organisation is no more than a tool or a vehicle to achieve the ultimate aim of human creation on earth. Metaphorically, work in this world is seen as just a tilling plot where one sows seeds and the hereafter is seen as the place to reap the harvest. The worldly aspect is seen as a preparation for the religious aspect, in which the later has ultimate and final significance. I refer to this perspective as *tawhidic*.

Tawhid is a state of commitment - accepting the Only One, the Beneficent and the Merciful Allah as his/her Lord. In this light, all man's reverence and gratitude is to the only source of value, which is Allah. Here, man recognises no authority except Allah's, and accepts no guidance other than from Him.

Being a leader in this *tawhidic* perspective however is not a 'speciality' as he/she is burdened with the responsibility to ensure that *adl* (justice) prevails so as to give birth to *al-falah* (having a prosperous, beneficial and triumphant life in this world and in the next) in the workplace. As a leader, he/she must make sure evil or destruction

(*al-fasad*) is eliminated. In other words, a leader/CEO/manager must put *adab* (morals) as the main priority of the job. *Adab* is a term that refers to recognition and acknowledgement of the right and proper place. The loss of *adab* implies the loss of justice, which in turn betrays confusion in knowledge. Such confusion "creates the condition that enables 'false' leaders to emerge and thrive, causing the condition of injustices" (Al-Attas, 1979, p. 2).

At this point, it is important to note that justice (*adl*), an opposite of *zulm* (injustices) is an important feature of the *tawhidic* paradigm. Justice not only refers to the state of affairs that can operate only within a two-person-relation or dual party relation, but also to the harmonious state of affairs whereby everything is in the 'right and proper places.' According to al-Attas, the concept of 'right and proper place' refers not only to man's total situation in relation to others, but also to his relation to his own self. Briefly, disobeying God or doing wrong to others is seen in this view as an act of injustice to one's own self. In summary, man in the *tawhidic* paradigm, regardless of status, must pursue *al-mizan* or balance, a metaphor for fairness of the divine standard.

The context of this new order can be summarised in the table below:

Old paradigm	New paradigm
Philosophically secular	*Tawhidic*
Work is a worldly matter	Work is *ibadah*
Dark injustices (*zulm*) tolerated	Light and justice (*adl*) upheld
'Cruel'	Compassion
Misery	Happiness
Despair	Hope
Pain	Cure

Table 2: *The state of paradigm before and after the arrival of Kaypi*

b) Spreading Malay language:

In relation to the threat posed by the English language, and to demonstrate the ability of the Malay language to withstand the change of time, several methods to 'liberate the situation of infertility' were used. These included bringing the Malay language to hostile environments such as commercial places, to non-Malay speaking areas at home, and to foreign lands. Various memoranda of understanding were signed with bodies in Malaysia and abroad. Often, Kaypi headed such delegations. On the legal front, the Ordinance of establishment was revised.

c) Re-organisation:

As part of making this new order, the management embarked on a programme known as 'life re-organisation'. In implementing this idea, the management executed the following programmes, among others: moving staff; moving offices, and 're-drawing' the organigrams. Staff were now regarded as 'citizens'.

Context 4: The new disorder/s. (Kokosians on the march).

Kaypi is a busy man. He is always 'on the plane' with the mission to globalise the Malay language. This is part of the strategy of liberating Malay language as explained in Context 1. It is an action of 'order' in the light of the 'disorder' posed by the threat of the English language. Staff who for a long time perceived themselves to be "Malay language defenders" saw the liberation methods as not 'real' work, especially with the obsession to go overseas to sign memoranda of understandings. To Makcik, a long-serving K2 officer, this action reminded her of the previous CEO who liked to go around the globe 'visiting' book fairs. Makcik says,

> In their excitement to sign all those agreements, are they not aware about thousands of eyes looking at them and their behaviours? People at large will start to wonder why Kaypi is so busy with all these signings. As *orang lama* I think you could still remember our previous CEO and his associates who went all over the world under the cloak of visiting book fairs for the sake of book development in Palmyra. Yet, many staff saw no real book development. I am afraid these memoranda signings are just another way to justify some other interests. Let us say more *makan angin* (holiday) than work.

To Makcik Auntie, signing those agreements are just structural things as the main task of liberating Malay language lies at 'home.' She adds,

> Nowadays many people look at Malay language with their eyes half open. What is the point of talking about globalising it if we have a real problem here? Now, many people feel Malay language has no class. What a shame to go around the world to promote Malay language, talk big out there, but at the same time you fail in your own court.

Paradoxically, by liberating the language in foreign countries, Kaypi 'caused' disorder at 'home.' This is because he had given room for someone to play power-game in his absence. Kakang notes,

> He is so busy with memoranda signings, and always on overseas trips. It is good for publicity as he puts Palmyra in the media limelight. However, when we are so often absent in the office, some people may take advantage of our absence.

Tengku shared a similar point. He says,

> We know that when the king is not in the palace, the clown sits on his throne. As a way to show people how powerful he is, he wanted to change everything. He is like Wak Long. To Wak Long, when the king is not in the country, he wants to change everything. Even, if he could, he wants to remove the pillar of the palace. He wants to show off to people how powerful he is.[174]

In this sense, I view 'clowning' as a form of disorder. At this point, it is worth remembering that the situation developed within the climate of the new order, the paradigm shift. As described earlier, this paradigm was concerned with bringing staff out of 'darkness' into the realm of 'enlightenment': from misery to happiness. Although almost all informants 'dared not' pinpoint who is the 'clown,' my data showed a consistent pointer towards Haji.

According to Chin, the K1-2 officer, Haji's ideas and words were easily accepted by Kaypi. As such, many see him as the real power behind the throne. With that status, Haji earned a string of 'titles' such as the Big Boss or the Resident.[175] In this

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[174] Expressions based on popular shadow play. Wak Long is a clown in those plays.

[175] During the period of colonialisation, the British Residents gave their 'advice' to Malay sultans on how to govern their states. Even though they were known as advisers, Malay sultans were at their mercy. Any sultan who went against the Resident's advice would be removed from the throne.

regard, his 'authority' over personnel and finance domains made him more powerful than ever. This perception is reinforced by his competence in 'removing' his potential non-Kokosian enemies from the theatre of power. (See Appendix 1-3). In this context, one must note that Kaypi is a 'seconded' man. Furthermore, in an anonymous message posted over the Internet, Haji's intention of becoming the Director General was mentioned.[176]

The Deputy CEO during this period, Timbalan, who is a non-Kokosian, was more or less on the periphery as he was rumoured to be under 'investigation' by the government for mismanagement. Another senior executive is Don, a Kokosian, who headed the Strategic Planning department. In the absence of Kaypi, Specky (a VIP) is the most senior figure. Yet, he is not the Deputy CEO. Timbalan, in this regard is not a VIP, but still in the K1-2 category. Specky, meanwhile was symbolically 'pushed' out by a method of physical 'distancing' from the fourth floor where power resides. His office was 'placed' on the sixth floor.

Under the aegis of Haji, the first phase of the re-organisation programme was implemented. Staff were moved from one department to another regardless of experiences or interests. Even, departments' locations were changed. In that period, to see staff moving their bulk of belongings (personal or official) from one floor to another, was a common chaotic scene. Jawa describes,

> They re-organise rooms and move departments from this block to that block, from this floor to the other floor. There is a lot of confusion. It is like the divide and rule strategy of the colonialist British when they wanted to conquer Malay states. When people are so tired of the confusion, people give up to think hard about what is going on. At last, they would resign with a note: We have life outside the Palmyra to think of. This is what the management wants us to be. Then, they could go around telling people, how good they are in re-inventing this place. They make things here deteriorate. They worsened the state of the pitcher (*labu*),[177] not otherwise.

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[176] Informants who like to surf the Internet told me about the message.

[177] *Labu semakin rosak, bukan semakin baik* (Malay). Here the speaker is referring to a proverb "like a rat mending a pitcher" (*seperti tikus membaiki labu*). It is interesting to note that Luncai, the trickster, is also associated with a pitcher. I wonder whether both are interrelated. However, in the above context, the management is implied as rat. This rodent is another hated animal in Malay culture. Many Malays believe a rat can hear what humans say about them. Rats in this light are seen as vengeful animals. As such, Malays are always polite not to say bad things about rats. Among elders, a rat is known as a 'princess.'

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Longman notes,

> We are being transferred everywhere regardless of our experiences. Take me for example. For most of my working life, that is more than 20 years, I eat and sleep with the magazine business. With their stroke of pen, I must do something related to book production. I must start from zero again. The management is throwing my experience into a drain. I heard that another chap with a first class honours in literature is given a portfolio in the language department.

To staff, the re-organisation also gave a good excuse to 'eliminate' clever people. Jawa explains,

> You know Yob. Once he was a head of department. He had a PhD. In this reorganisation, he was given a small room at the corner of the floor with no clerk or power like before. For me it was a demotion. Maybe he shines too much, and the management does not like it. He was being penalised for being too clever. His fault was that he did not know how to caress top people's buttocks. I heard people up there branded him as a rebel. For me the action of putting him in that corner is an act of putting him in a refrigerator.[178]

Pon , a female K3 officer relates,

> I do not know what is in their (the management) head. They send me to further my study, but on my return they do not utilise my skills and my new knowledge. It is like throwing your degree into the drain. It reminds me of the story about the king of Singapura.[179] The king hated clever people. This management kills clever people too. Sometimes they do it very softly, without you knowing it, from behind. I cannot understand this type of behaviour. Yet, they talk about organisational learning and organisational excellence. They think that we people down here do not read books. We know what these terms are about. When we questioned them, they labelled us as rebels. They always said, let managers manage. I think these people thought they know everything about running an organisation.

Concurrent to the re-positioning of staff, a new organisational chart, in the name of "re-structuring" was drawn. In that new structure, the Deputy CEO's (Timbalan) domain of specific control was reduced while Haji's empire was seen to expand. He controlled the 'domain of the purse' and the promotion of staff. According to Bo, a

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[178] An action to stop someone being active at work. In due course, the person would be demoralised and frustrated. Metaphorically, it is an act of 'freezing.'

K1-2 officer, the 'territorial' last-minute change was made when Timbalan was away on an overseas mission. Bo says,

> Timbalan is being skewed in this true game. *Halus*...

Here, I interpret 'game' as understood by Crozier and Friedberg (1980). According to these authors, organisational games are concrete mechanisms that actors use to structure and regulate their power relations while preserving some freedom to act in their own best interests (p. 56). Often these games are 'subtle,' and their rules of play are not necessarily clear or known to all players (Lukes, 1974).

Intentionally or not, Haji's success in playing the *halus* game as the result of opportunity 'provided' by Kaypi, pushed Kokosians to the centre of power. Perhaps, it is symbiotic in nature, as Kaypi is an 'outsider.' On the other hand, the situation had a centrifugal effect on non-Kokosians. Imagined or not, now they feel they are truly *orang luar* (outsiders). With the monopoly of power in a handful of Kokosians, comes the term the *Tali* men. *Tali* is a Sanskrit word meaning rope. In this context, staff are referred to as a group of people 'roped' together by virtue of coming from Kokos County. Kokosians are perceived to be parochial in nature and having their own sub-culture. In particular, they speak a distinctive dialect that is regarded as 'French' by many Malays.

By July 1997, many staff perceived Palmyra to be the "Kokosian land." The management denied this, and the often-quoted answer was the denial from Timbalan, the deputy CEO. To some senior officers, the issue of "conquest" was an imagined issue. Metaphorically, it was seen as an issue of a "boy with a curly hair in the class of all straight hairs." Japar elaborates,

> All this while, curly-haired boys in the class are just ordinary phenomena. All of a sudden, one of them is selected to be a monitor. From that point on, curly-haired boys are seen to be everywhere. For me Kokosian *tali* men are just imagination. Our top people denied such existence, and I believed in them.

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[179] Related to the famous story of ancient Singapore. In the story, a clever boy, Hang Nadim was killed by the king, under the influence of his bad ministers who felt threatened by his cleverness. Hang Nadim was found guilty as he proposed a scheme to save the kingdom from garfish attack.

To some K3 officers, the above statement made by Japar, K1-2 officer, is a "safe" statement. A female K3 officer notes,

> We must be careful. In here, people are afraid to mention about *tali* men existence openly although people talk about it in close circles. But every person with open eyes (*orang celik*) could see it. They see us non-Kokosians) as "*orang luar*" (outsiders).

Non-Kokosians by now felt out of the 'prosperous' gaze. Longman says,

> At last, our hopes and dreams for a better Palmyra are becoming a kind of play with no main script. If the scripts were not there, various actors would start to produce their own script that is assuming the script is the right one. If you are a lousy scriptwriter or having no script at all, your future is at stake. However, script or no script, if you are under the gaze of the top people you are safe.

In relation to this, many informants recounted Jawa's experience as their 'facts.' In many senses, the story almost became a new saga. Jawa says,

> I was called for a promotion interview. Being the most senior candidate with experiences, I thought I would get the post. Alas, one junior lady got it. I asked Haji for an explanation. He told me the decision was made on compassionate grounds, as the lady is a single parent with a small baby. Then I said if that is the case, why was a lady with elderly parents not given the post? He gave no answer. Later I found out the real story. During the interview, the lady told the interview panel about her Kokosian roots. I was told, one of the panels exclaimed the following words: "Oh, *orang kita*."

Indeed to be *orang kita* proved beneficial. According to Mek, a female colleague (Siti) relates the following story to her. The story was based on Siti's friend account. She relates,

> Siti's friend was some sort of a secretary to a committee that oversees the organisational excellence award ceremony. When your name is up, a few people in the management, with Haji as the main man, scrutinise the list. They decide whether you are eligible for the highest award or not. They look at the name in the list one by one. Then suddenly, not realising Siti's friend a non-Kokosian, one of them says, "Ha, here is *orang kita*." The *orang kita* man then got the award in a ceremony.

Besides being 'in prosperity', to be under the gaze of the 'new order' also means that you are safe from 'disorder,' and stay alive. Chin relates,

> One day a pregnant non-Kokosian lady's name came up on the roster. So did one Kokosian lady. Both of them applied for 'postponement.' However, the pregnant lady's application was rejected. She went to the course, lost her pregnancy, ended up with sickness and died. The management accepted the Kokosian lady's application. She said she must look after her sick children during the time of the course. Now, she is alive.

One K1-2 officer says,

> This morning a 'messenger' approached me. I think he is somebody's *utusan*.[180] He asked me when I am going to resign, as I am a sick man. I told him, not to worry as I am going to resign soon. You see people nowadays are no more polite. They are so blunt when they want to get rid of you especially if you are not in their circle. I am just lazy enough to think what game this 'upstairs' people are playing.

As expected, almost all Kokosians denied the existence of the division between *orang luar* and *orang kita*. However many Kokosians admitted that, under the new management order, they prosper. Some of them even could tell in advance what their next post would be. Tengku announces,

> I am going away to do Phd. The management told me upon my return I should go to literature department. There is only one doctorate down there. I could see my chance of going up.

Now, non-Kokosians feel the new paradigm is far from liberating, as it should be, but they are trapped inside it. Such entrapment is understandable as staff make comparisons with the 'past era' where the 'secularist' paradigm was said to be dominant. To many of them, during that time they were not in the periphery. The staff used temperature to describe the situation, such as hot and cold. Longman describes,

> The present climate is like a declining graph...I think I need to run to cool places to cool my head. When I took unpaid leave for a year last year, I felt my head was light. Now, everything

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[180] A messenger. The word carries a strong feudalistic flavour. In this regard, I remembered how the famous Bendahara (Chief Minister) of Malacca was killed on the orders of the Sultan. The Sultan sends a messenger before the execution. During my second visit, I was told the said informant died.

is heavy. ... Now, we feel not *ghairah*[181] coming to work. There is no more *syahwat*. No more erection.[182]

It is a situation of "burden" (Höpfl and Linstead, 1993; Hopfl, 1994). In sexual terms, the heavy load put them off from having positive 'intercourse' with Palmyra.

The situation of 'misery' is best seen in the staff perception of the long mirror near the punch-card machine. To the management, it is a mirror to remind staff about the important of 'straightening' the disorder of the heart. Haji explains,

> The physical mirror is a reminder to staff, early in the morning and before going home, the importance of self-auditing associated with doing good or wrong (*muhasabah*).[183]

Now, the mirror is seen otherwise. Mek summarises,

> When I look at the mirror, I see my stressful face.

MAKING ORDER OUT OF DISORDER/S

In relation to the above disorder, the staff sensed the 'dangerousness' of the new situation. The staff respond to the paradigm shift programme as a 'hot' communicative event. To the staff, survival and prosperity in this climate of 'unfairness' are important. As a way of making out, the staff create a new order of their own. They feel the need to re-work their ways of controlling the environment, or at least understand it sufficiently in order to 'live' within the new arrangement of order. If we take Longman's metaphoric term, there was a dire need to become a 'mouse deer,' that is to 'live dangerously'.[184] Indeed, to make oneself safe in this

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[181] The feeling of sexual desire. Lustful. I find the word interesting as it brings new perspective to me about how an organisation is becoming a sexual object. Perhaps keywords, such as menopause, caressing buttock and infertility, that staff and management use in describing issues related to disorder/s would shed further light on the metaphor. As speakers who used these metaphors were male, I wonder whether they see Palmyra as a 'woman.'

[182] Hilang syahwat (in Malay). A situation of losing the urge to have a sexual intercourse.

[183] A good elaboration of the Islamic perspective on the relationship between a 'mirror' and the human mind can be seen in al-Ghazali's work. See Bruns (1992) for a short journey into that realm. See also Muhammad Abul Quasem (1977).

[184] Mousedeer 'kancil' is a small animal associated closely with Malay culture. The animal is considered to be very witty, and can 'out-play' big and dangerous animals such as tiger, crocodile, python and even human being. It is strange if Malay children do not know anything about kancil

unstable situation is an ironic arrangement. I found there were two popular 'how-to-survive' acts taken by staff during this period of disorder/s: Performing *lakon* and practising arts of resistance.

Performing *lakon*

Literally, *lakon* is acting, and it is closely associated with 'main' (play) or 'main-main' (playfulness). This can be seen clearly in the following depictions:

a) 'Cloaking' one self by becoming a classical hero.

> One morning a staff waited for the CEO near the lift. When the CEO entered the lift, he followed
> him from behind. He stayed at one corner. After a while, in an unexpected manner he hit his own
> forehead, and gave a little cry. The CEO then naturally turned to him and queried. The man
> showed his worried face with lines of stress on his forehead. "What happened?" asked the CEO.
> "I could not sleep last night. I kept thinking about the Palmyra. I kept thinking how to make it
> great," answered the man. Naturally, such lakon would give a good impression. Later the CEO
> called the man to his office. In there, he showed his plans. The man was promoted. It does not
> matter whether you could deliver them or not. You must be clever to *lakon*. Malim Deman's[185]
> principle is working here... That Malim Deman was a man full of impetigo. However, when he took
> his shirt off all that impetigo was shine and glitter. Nobody talk about his impetigo. Instead, he was
> hailed as a hero, smart, macho, and sexually active man.

Indeed, I observed the same senior officer practising what he said. In the interview, he told me about his story of getting permission from Kaypi to write an article in a newspaper. Such an act of getting permission, as far as I know, is very rare in Palmyra. On one evening, he over-stayed and the delayed his journey home just to get the approval signature from Kaypi. According to him, it is important as he uses the office time to do the writing. Such honesty is indeed included in the *tawhidic* paradigm. In Islamic literature, such an act of not using office hours for personal endeavour is often associated with the second Caliph, Saidina Omar. I observed staff 'misuse office time', and then repay it by working during lunch hours.

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stories. Longman is a K3 officer who has served Palmyra for more than 20 years. At school, he was known as the mousedeer.

[185] A hero from a classical Malay romance.

Sometimes they even delayed their journey home. The moral of the story is to let the CEO know what you are doing behind his back.

b) To ingratiate by 'caressing some one buttocks.'

> In here, a hero is a person who is good in telling lies, nosing around, caressing buttocks of the top people, 'and fanning' them with the biggest fan available. They are the busiest people in the people whenever Kaypi is present. In the hall, the previous day we had a ceremony. These types of people make themselves look as if they could not spare a minute in the hall. They are doing *lakon* as if their works are urgent matters. That is why they are bringing heavy files into the hall. Ha, ha ha, if they could bring a lorry full with their files, they would do it. What is important, the action caught the eyes of the CEO and the top management people. Ha, that is how to be a successful person around here, you know....

c) To behave like a female domestic cat.

> A cat purrs softly in the presence of her owner. She does not need to work hard. Once a while she must chase a mouse in order to make her owner happy. Otherwise her main job is to sleep. She follows the smell of her owner even when her owner is absents from the place.

d) To be a *gurkha*.

To become a *gurkha*, one must make oneself available to do 'donkey jobs' for the people at the top. Among others, this may be by being an unofficial driver or a butler, or by working extra hard and staying busy regardless of time. If the situation permits, one sometimes must 'mutilate' oneself as 'proof' of how good a *gurkha* he/she is[186], that is by letting the organisation 'eat' their body. Pon says,

> Maybe I am not working too hard like the Chin. I heard he was hospitalised for a few days as the result of over-working. His blood pressure is up. He never talks about it. However, in here secrets are not secrets.

In addition, the *tali* men however must see the 'proof'. In the case of Chin, one of his immediate subordinates is a *tali* man. Implicitly, these *tali* men in many ways work like '*hantus*' (informers) for the management. According to one K1-2, the presence

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[186] In Malaysia, the image of Gurkha is often associated with an obedient subordinate, who willingly follows the boss's orders.

of *hantus* makes him more or less mute in the office. To him walls have ears in Palmyra.

e) Transforming oneself into *budak raja*.

In relation to the above, to be a good gurkha also means to turn oneself into *budak raja* and predators. In the feudal Malay kingdom, *budak rajas* were loyal followers of the king. They shut their eyes to the king's misbehaviour, and they were ready to do anything to please the king at any cost. On the surface, it seems they did it for the king, though really it was more for the sake of their own prosperity. They were following the principle of *mahu hidup* (survive, live and not die). The <u>Malay Annals</u> illustrate many stories about *budak raja* adventures. In many cases, they became murderers. In sociological terms, becoming a *budak* is often related to the enslavement mentality. It reminds me of Bennabi`s (Barium, 1992) work, who described physical and mental colonialism at length. Indeed, to free the enslaved mentality is one of the main objectives of the *tawhidic* paradigm. In this type of *lakon*, deceit and betrayal are paramount. Pon elaborates,

> If you asked them why they are doing this, they would simply say this word: *Mahu hidup* (to survive not die). Yes, every one should *hidup* but it does not mean one should kill other people.

Practising the arts of resistance

Maintaining resistance is another way of coming to terms with the disorder. It is an 'action against the flow' compared to *lakon*. According to Collinson (1994), resistance has been defined as a behaviour that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations. Followers take many forms of resistance such as strikes, protests and sabotages. In my research, the staff resorted to 'resistance narratives' or what Scott termed "hidden transcripts" (1990). They are part of the "weapons of the weak" as the author mentioned elsewhere. A hidden transcript consists of those off-stage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript. It challenges the dominant interpretations of reality as espoused by the management.

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To take Goffman's (1959) notion of "regions and region behaviour," hidden transcripts take place in the back region.

Often, resistance narratives take the forms of rumours, gossips, songs, private jokes, gestures and stories (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993). At micro-level, the choice of words used in the hidden transcripts matters as words reflect deeply-held assumptions and thoughts (Bethanis, 1995). In the transcripts, I view words are reflections of the siege mentality.

In the course of my research, several hidden written transcripts were presented in the front region for public consumption. They were published in a nationally circulated magazine published by the Palmyra while some of them were presented to departmental meetings. More often than not top men were present in those meetings. I view them as 'explicit' in nature as they are accessible to the public, management and staff alike. These transcripts changed into public transcripts.
The following paragraphs elaborate selected hidden transcripts.

a) Writing a short story.

The Ship is one of the explicit stories written by a female K3 officer. (She was later promoted to K2 position). Many readers feel that the story has a strong 'resemblance' to what was going on in Palmyra. Some of them could even see characters' similarities with certain personalities in the organisation. The writer however claimed any similarities with the 'reality in Palmyra' were 'fictional coincidences.' However, all staff interviewed disagreed, as the story is too similar to life at Palmyra. The setting of the story is a ship full of sages. The captain of the ship in this regard is the chief sage. He is described as a busy man who follows the Japanese style of management. He also loves Drucker's ideas. One day, the ship becomes a venue for an international meeting of sages. Many 'bad' incidents happen on the ship during the meeting. Upon seeing the captain in the state of disorder, several foreign sages come forward and give him many tips on how to handle the situation. Their words are related to the Captain's assumptions:

i) Busy-ness with work is a sign of an excellent worker.

Indeed. However, busy-ness could lead to waste of energy; time and money as busy people have no time to think. Thinking in a calm condition would lead to the path of truth that is with the help of our God. Remember, we are just a speck of dust in the eyes of God....

ii) On the issue of managing

In managing this ship, we must not rely solely on the Japanese way of management or Drucker's ideas alone. I myself have read the <u>Malay Annals</u> more than ten times. In there, I found the story of Kitul[187] is very relevant. In every place, Kitul exists. As Head we must be careful....

iii) On the issue of organisational direction.

In the *Ship*, the navigator of the ship was found fainted at the rudder room.

"Too much work?" asked one sage.

"Not really. He did not know how to work," the Chinese sage replied.

"What do you mean he did not know how to work? He had been at the rudder for the last 15 years. It is impossible that he does not know how to navigate this ship," said the captain. "Actually he had severe tension. Every sage asked him about the destination. He could not answer, as he had no answer. An answer must come from the top."

"I have asked every sage to make this ship move. That meant this ship is moving," said the captain with heavy breath.

"Moving alone is not enough, captain. Its destination must be clear. It must come from the head of the sages and intellectuals like you, captain. That is why we must not be too busy. I am not saying that all sages here are not working. As far as I could see, every sage here is working very hard, but the ship moves sideways, to and fro, and not forward."

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[187] One of the main characters in the <u>Malay Annals.</u> His involvement with corruption among influential people played a significant part in the downfall of Malacca Empire in 1511. Kitul was a businessman with a hidden agenda. He gave a very good impression to certain Malaccan court officials. With their help, a faithful, loyal and able administrator was accused as a usurper to the throne of Malacca. The sultan 'believed' their 'good stories' as told by Kitul's accomplices, and ordered the tragic killing of the Prime Minister. Upon realising his mistake, the sultan cried. In many places, the sultan was described to be weak. In short, some wicked men killed a good man due to poor leadership and because of good impression and convincing stories.

b) Writing anecdotes

In relation to the above, several K3 officers who had close access to magazines wrote anecdotes about disorders that prevailed during the period. *Jentayu* and *People at the Top and People at the Bottom* are two 'strong' writings. Both writings employ high use of symbolism. In *Jentayu*, the writer uses the Ramayana as a point of reference. Jentayu is a mythical bird revered by Hindus, and is often associated with freedom. In many cases, Jentayu is an ancient version of Superman, a caring, helpful creature. In the text, however, the bird is turning itself into a bird of prey. Simply, the bird is abusing its power. In another anecdote, the flag is used as the point of departure. The writer notes that without a pole ('subordinates') there are no flags ('superiors'). In the anecdote, the superior's weird behaviours are elaborated (see Appendix 4).

c) Writing official presentations

Another front arena utilised by staff to show their 'unhappiness' with what was going on in Palmyra is the meetings with management[188]. Specky, one of the most senior officers and a member of the executive team is one of them. He wrote a story with the title, *One Satire*. The story is about a king and his ministers. In one of their briefings, one minister tells the king about the situation of the state theatre. Specky writes,

> Please forgive me, my king... Our theatre is empty... It is true as said by my King. Your slave had made every effort and tried all avenues to fill the theatre. Yet, our citizens have stayed away.

> After a certain deliberation, the king asked his ministers to make the theatre strong and great as a way to attract citizens to view their play.

> "Please forgive me, my King. But, how?" asked the minister.

> The King put his sacred mouth near the minister's ear.

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[188] The session is often recorded on video. Unfortunately, staff at the Documentation Centre could not locate the specific material although they admit that the session was recorded.

"Is it not that I gave you a big salary, my minister. It is your job to think," whispered the king.

Kakang, another senior K1 officer,[189] also likes to write stories. The story concerns the behaviour of a captain of a big ship.[190] In the text, the author describes the captain as an incompetent man, who always listened to whatever decision that was made by his right hand man. As the 'real' captain of the ship, the right hand man believed that small ships must give way for his big ship in entering a harbour. On one foggy day, the 'real' captain saw so many small lights in the harbour. He thought those lights were from small ships around. He asked them to give way. Upon approaching he realised those lights were small lighthouses. Refusing to accept the reality that those lights helped his big ship to enter the harbour, the 'real captain' steered back the ship into the dark waters.

d) Telling humorous stories

Interestingly, informants did not recount many humorous stories to reflect the situation of disorder, at least in the form of verbalisation. Perhaps doing some things verbally is 'dangerous,' as the author of the text is visible. Malays believe that your mouth is your tiger. In my research, there was only one prominent story that had many versions. It is about Kaypi and his 'sacred' mission of globalising Malay language. Specifically, the story concerns the issue of overseas trips. Here, I give the version told by Kakang, who presented the story dramatically. Kakang says,

> In one meeting room, some officers are talking among themselves.
> "Do you know what our Director-General is doing now?"
> "Well, he is recovering from tiredness after a series of overseas visits last month, last week and yesterday."
> "Oh, yeah, I think I know what is he doing at the moment. He wants to point at the globe."
> "What do you mean by that?"
> "Well, first he asked his trusted lieutenant to spin the globe. On his first poking, his finger touched one XYZ country. There is no Malay research centre in that country. He is so disappointed with that. He asked his lieutenant to spin the globe again. He pokes the globe with his eyes closed. Upon, opening his eyes, he cried aloud all of sudden."

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[189] K1 officer is usually Head of Department

[190] The writer failed to find his original copy so the author narrated it again.

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"Why? What had happened?" asked one of the officers.

"His finger touched his own village."

At the end of this narration, Kakang elaborated the meaning of the joke for me. The moral of the story was that it was time for Kaypi to pack his bag and go home.

d) Writing *surat laying*

In relation to the above, where verbal jokes are considered a liability, it is not unusual to find humorous stories in written form. At Palmyra, it takes the form of *surat laying*.[191] In the course of my research, many respondents opened their desk drawers and showed several *surat layang* which they had kept. Almost all the letters were pinned on the male toilet door. The most famous is "The War of the Power Rangers" (WPR), written anonymously. The theme revolves around a war between various "power rangers" with their king. It was written in classical Malay style with various references to Malay proverbs, old films, modern songs and classical texts. Anachronisms were rife in the text. In the WPR, the management was implicitly seen as the court of the feudal Malaccan kingdom.

f) Employing negative vocabularies

Another form of narrative resistance displayed throughout my research was the use of negative vocabularies. I define negative here as words which have the power of doing violence through language. They are argots that have the potential to bring emotional disorder to the normal psychological state, such as shame, anger, despair, and cognitive suffering and pain. In my research, those vocabularies are often expressed in the form of figurative language: analogies, metaphors, proverbs and *pantun*.[192] For example, staff vocabularies revealed the following:

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[191] Literally translated as 'flying letters'. Many writers translate them as poison letters. At this point, one should ask poison to whom?

[192] A form of Malay verse.

i) Management at Palmyra is incompetent:

"Clowns manage Palmyra ... on one occasion a member of the executive team pressed the mouse like a TV remote control. Yet they talk about IT ... The Palmyra management is like a big elephant with big ears and small eyes clouded with gatekeepers. Their big ears do not care to listen, except to the sound of the lion ...The present leader is like a captain who does not know how to show the right way and the best way to navigate the ark to their crews ... I am afraid that one day staff will start singing the *Luncai* song. Let's *Luncai* jump into the sea with his pitchers. Let it be. Let it be. ...There are so many glamorous people up there."

ii) The management people are immoral:

"The CEO is pseudo-Malay ... He is a dishonest man who masquerades in order to promote his own agenda ...His ancestor could be from a weird race. ...He is a man with no shame. He is like a bad husband telling nasty things about his own wife in the public. ... Haji is a man with double faces. ... When I complained about the issue of some management people claiming my paper as theirs, the management said it was a mistake. They wanted to sell their snake oil to me. I am too immune for that sort of lies."

iii) The management is murderous:

The management is behaving like the king of Singapore who killed clever people. Sometimes they kill you without you knowing it...such behaviour is like a snakehead fish[193]. The fish eats its own fries ... If you have talent the (management) will open the ground for your creativity but if you shine too much they will put you inside a pit by saying that you neglect your office work in pursuing your creativity. In order to be safe, you must release your talents in some other places where they could not cut you with their long knife.

iv) The management is playing politics:

They are playing a kind of game...It is glamorous, you know, to see and hear your name being mentioned in newspapers and televisions ...They want to tell the world they are doing a lot of jobs around here. They call so many politicians to come to their ceremonies. If you go downstairs, you could see a big photograph near the lift where the CEO sits happily with one federal minister, a Kokosian. Worse still almost all staff must take part in that photography session. I did not go to the ceremony. For me it is just a Chinese *wayang* (opera) show. ...When some politicians start to mention the importance of IT, the management behave like hot worms. They do not believe IT is good until someone outside there said it is good. That

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[193] A Malay proverb. In its original form, only the male snakeheads are believe to eat their own fries. Implicitly, the informant suggested that a female boss was 'turning' herself into a male upon having a top position.

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goes with staff recognition too. In here, the management would jump like sheep whenever a *wahyu*[194] comes down from some one at the top.

In sum, the staff (especially non-Kokosians) claims the management is villainous. [195]

The staff were implicitly doing some sort of insult by 'cursing to death' to the management. Indeed, *Luncai* is a metaphor in this respect. As a trickster, *Luncai* was described as an ugly man. He gained power by doing tricks on authorities. However, at the end of the day, his cover was blown, and he was killed in his sleep. By using this metaphor, the staff are making '*doa*' (a prayer) for the 'destruction' of injustices. Such behaviour is indeed enshrined deeply in the *tawhidic* paradigm; to uphold right and lawful things and to forbid wrong and unlawful things. Ironically, the staff relate injustice to the same management who promote the idea of workplace justice.

g) By taking flight:

In addition to the above, 'taking flight' is another form of resistance practised by staff. Often, this flight takes the form of 'absenting' oneself from the office. Several K3 female officers told me they did it by not going to one important ceremony. Mek says,

> We left the office on the pretext of seeing a dentist.

I observed that many staff lingered in the lobby or went to stalls across the road while ceremonies were taking place in Jebat Hall. In relation to this, the staff were known to do 'carnival' in the term understood by Bakhtin; they clapped their hands when Haji went to collect his excellence award certificate.

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[194] A religious term related to messages from God, literally translated as revelation. In the above context, it refers to 'orders' from political masters or people with influences from the Ministry.

[195] Here, villainous is seen as defined by Tulloch (1995, p. 1753).

According to Kakang, K1 officer, some female staff even asked for unpaid leave with the 'intention' of looking after their small children. 'Lucky' staff were able to run to universities to further their education. Jawa, a K3 officer, told me how one K1-2 officer flew away to one foreign country under the 'disguise' of teaching the Malay language.

h) By playing dumb:

A group of senior officers admitted that they adopted a game of playing dumb. Omar, a K1-2 officer elaborates,

> In the meeting, we senior staff are mostly following the four-D principles --- *Datang* (Come), *Duduk* (Sit), *Dengar* (Listen) and *Dengkur* (Snoring). That was the most safest and healthiest way of living in Palmyra

Perhaps the senior officer's behaviour in those meetings is related to the 'white magic' spell. At least that was what one female K3 officer believes Kaypi is capable of. She mentioned a certain Quranic verse from Chapter 3, which Kaypi used to recite in meetings. She said that the staff would not be able to speak against his ideas.

i) By laughing at artefacts:

Worst of all, said Kakang, the staff asked for early retirement or resigned as a way of making order out of disorder/s. Those unable to perform such a 'strong' action 'used' laughing as their 'weapon of the weak.' I observed on many occasions that the mere mention of some Palmyra artefacts, such as the logo, the motto and management slogans, made informants laugh aloud. On one occasion, one male K3 officer even suggested that Palmyra should take a mangosteen leaf as its new logo. The informant roared after this. So, in their laughter, the staff showed their discontent with the management. This action at the same time liberated them from the pain of the disorder, at least momentarily. Laughing at the organisational artefacts not only acts as a relief from anxiety and the burden of suffering or carrying heavy organisational roles (which are not 'aligned' with their dreams of making Palmyra 'great') but also provides positive enjoyment to the staff.

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j) By turning oneself deeply into the realm of religion:

Finally, yet importantly, the staff also seek order from their religion. Although the staff did not share their *doa* (prayers) with me, I observed that they gave me many signs to work through (with *pandai-pandai* principle). Such a message is best seen in the display of excerpt/s. One of the excerpts is taken from <u>Hikayat Pelayaran Abdullah</u>, one of the famous texts in Malay literature. The author of the text is seen by many as very critical of the feudal system practised by Malay sultans. In the excerpt, the King of Kokos is reminded about the consequences of being a tyrant.

> Please, remember, o king, on the day of Judgement, our God will ask all kings about their subjects. And among the first to enter the Hell is a tyrant king. And among the first to enter the Paradise is a just king. As such, o king, please not be mislead by the idea that becoming a king would make one better man that the subjects, as a king's position is much worse; a slave of all 'slaves' of Allah.[196] When Allah made someone into a king that is not a license to fulfil one's desires, to have ten or twenty wives, to seek wealth or to kill someone without reason. Indeed the reason is (for that some one) to look after human beings so as not to be harmed by others.

Another excerpt in my possession is a text copied from a Hadith (The Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad). The text warns of putting unqualified people in post. If such a thing happens, the Prophet said it would result in doom.

Interestingly, the disorder does not make the staff forget Palmyra. They give their reasons from their heart as follows:

Pon says,

> You know why I stayed long in here [even though I am not being treated well]? I am in love with the Malay language. ... Our dream is to make this organisation a centre of excellence in Malay literature and language...this organisation is very much related to the Malay race. We are the last bastions of the Malays.

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[196] Slave in this context should be read as translated from Arabic, *abd*. Literally, it is submission with. In this regard to translating Quranic words into English, there are debates among Muslim academicians over the issue. Critics, among others, voice their fear about the distortion of meaning through translation.

Chin narrates,

> I am a poor man. My only valuable property is my house. I want to do something that my
> children could remember and be proud of. Our life is short. That is why I am working hard to
> set up the multimedia unit in Palmyra. The management agrees with the idea but they gave
> little support. They say they have no computer to spare. I brought my own personal computer
> to the office. The people in the unit used it. It is my *sadaqah* (charitable deed).

Mek notes,

> By doing work, I am doing *amanah*.[197] It is a trust and responsibility. In my view, taking a
> salary without doing a job is sinful. You may call it my strength in confronting this chaos, but it
> is also my weakness. I feel at times I am being manipulated for being honest, 'clean' and
> being in love [with Malay language and literature]. I think the management knows this secret.
> They know we will not tool down due to our religious conscience.

On the physical side, I believe that the above 'love affair' relates very much to the
bond 'produced' by Palmyra. Almost all the staff at one point or another take out
loans from the organisation. Usually, it starts with a car loan. Often, after repaying
the first loan within a maximum period of five years, staff take on another loan. This
time it is usually in the form of a housing loan. To the management, as described by
Don, this 'loan-giving' is the act of a compassionate Palmyra.

REFLECTIONS

I view the meanings produced by informants during my research as 'meanings-in-
the-state-of-tension'. In Context 1 and 2, both Kokosian and non-Kokosian staff
agreed that Palmyra was in a state of disorder/s. At this point, both groups realised
how their ideals were threatened, real or imagined, by the 'awakening' of the
English language in Malaysia. As such, the work to change disorder to order by
transacting with Context 3 was welcomed. However, the outcomes of embracing
this new context were different. Non-Kokosians felt they 'suffered.' To them, the
new state of order deprived them of organisational justice. The paradigm shift led to

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[197] Trust.

a situation like '*madu dalam racun*' (poison in the cup of honey).[198] A few Kokosians admitted that they heard about the presence of this 'bad' state. However, they maintained that they were not part of it. They claimed that they had not received any special treatment so far from the management.

SECRETS OF 'ORDERING'

I view the situation faced by many non-Kokosians as 'ironical-constraint'; they seek order, and yet they 'receive' disorder; they love and accept the *tawhidic* paradigm, and yet they cannot consume it fully at the workplace. Being deprived of the 'official' order, staff make their own 'private' order. Among others, they performed the *lakon*, took flights, wrote 'unofficial scripts', swam in fantasies, and asked for 'help' from God. Generally, those private order practices took place in the back region, where there were so many hidden secrets. I can share a few of these secrets here.

Staff were 'drowning' themselves in classical texts.

Here, I define ancient texts as texts written in classical Malay style, using archaic vocabulary and the spelling of old Malay.[199] During the period of disorder, I found that those types of texts served many purposes. Among others, they acted as 'moral' texts. Staff used extensively selected parts, events or characters from ancient texts, as their 'front' in their struggle against the 'tyranny' of the management. Such examples can be seen clearly in some texts taken from The Malay Annals and Hikayat Pelayaran Abdullah (HPA). As an illustration, I give several examples below.

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[198] *Madu* (honey) is metaphorically a term used to describe a woman who is not the first wife of a man. In general having more than one wife is sweet, and yet it is always a problem to accommodate and make things nice between wives.

[199] Since 1972, all spellings must conform to the standard approved by Palmyra. The above definition however is very general as staff also utilised texts like The Animal Farm and Mahabharata.

Texts	Episodes
The Malay Annals	*The story of Hang Nadim.* Hang Nadim, saved the Temasek kingdom from voracious garfish attack. He was murdered on the order of the king upon being advised by his ingratiators. Later the kingdom perished in a war.
The Malay Annals	*The story of Kitul.* An able minister was murdered on the order of the sultan of Malacca who acted upon false reports. One of the main culprits was Kitul, a corrupt merchant. A few years later, the kingdom was overrun by the Portuguese.
HPA	In the excerpt, the writer wrote about a king's tyrannical behaviour. According to the author, the final resting-place for a tyrant king in the hereafter is the hellfire.

Table 3: *Disorder as mentioned in Malay classical texts*

My view is that view that these chosen episodes represent 'feelings of the heart' among staff. Simply, those texts became their voices. In so doing, they shared experiences with the stories in those texts. Indeed such behaviour of making sense with texts as away to 'achieve' order and pacifying oneself in the presence of disorder is not an alien practice. As shown in The Malay Annals, Malays during the war with Portuguese in the 15th century read certain texts in order to boost their morale. In the above examples, staff saw themselves as victims, while the management was the villain. However, as the ancient texts showed, tyrants were losers in this world and in the next.

I found that ancient texts were also used as a way to describe villainous behaviours, people in the management and their supporters. A clear example can be seen from

Luncai. _Luncai_ was an ugly trickster. He managed to avoid death sentences by the king, tricked and killed the king, married the king's daughter and became a king. However at last his deception was discovered. He was killed in his sleep. Implicitly, the staff hope for the present 'pretentious' management to perish or to end. Before going further, it is worth to note how staff made reference to the famous song of _Luncai_.[200] The famous song of _Luncai_, as written in the book, is 'lifeless' compared to the song sung in P.Ramlee's film[201] (another common cultural reference to almost all Malays) where the lyric comes to life. By remembering the song as portrayed verbally and visually in the film, as full of intonation, it invokes laughter. By laughing upon their immersion into the world of text, the staff were "inside the story and anything else was outside" (Ong, 1967). To the staff it is a creative and safe way of 'hitting' the management. It is silent hitting. A similar type of hitting can be seen in the _Ship_, the _Satire_, and the two anecdotes.

In relation to the above discussion, I believe the presence of old Malay texts in various ancient texts and _surat layang_ need special mention. With the exception of classical texts, the latter was written during the time when the 'new' Malay language spelling system emerged. As such, the presence of the old Malay spelling system in the trilogy is intentional. A point to note is that Palmyra spearheaded the work of 'banning' the old system from any official use in the country. Implicitly, the trilogy is a creative direct defiance of authors towards people of authority in Palmyra. Besides the spelling system, other anachronisms were rife in the text. Such 'abuse' by the author/s is, I believe, to create comic relief. Indeed, I laugh aloud upon reading the trilogy.

I believe the _'halus'_ hitting would be more painful if the management 'realised' the place where those classical texts were 'coming' from, the male toilets. Most of them were pasted on the toilet door in the male lavatories. In relation to the toilets, there were many expressions of anger on the walls. However, they were whitewashed in a short time by the management. Graffiti were almost gone from the toilets, as I could not see them during my second and third visits. The use of such an avenue is understandable, as the toilets are the most secretive and private places in Palmyra.

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[200] (In Malay). _Biarkan. Biarkan. Biarkan Luncai terjun dengan labu-labunya._ (Let it be. Let it be. Let Luncai jump with his pitchers).

[201] It is very rare for Malays not to have watched P.Ramlee's films.

They are the back regions. According to my female respondents, the female toilets were free from such intrusion even during the height of the 'chaos' period (1996-1997). Indeed, the use of toilet as a place to 'convey' the messages rather than the official notice board is a direct protest by staff. Perhaps, such actions were part of symbolic inversion, making the 'world-upside-down'. Scott (1990, p. 166-171) suggests that this type of situation is part of the hidden transcript phenomena. In general, it is an action of criticism.

Turning to 'real' text for references is indeed a real reading of organisation as texts (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1987). Both texts and readings are intertwined in one historical time, the period of change in Palmyra. Of course, playing with written text is the everyday job at Palmyra. What amused me was the staff 'skill' in using their work experiences with texts as a 'way out'. They used 'real and old texts' to 'contradict' the management texts. The latter is viewed as the 'new texts.' Interestingly, they framed and represented the new reality in a *halus* form. They used indirectness as a rule of speaking in opposition to the direct 'bad' text of the management. Such action is best described as 'beating-about-the-bush' (B.A.B)(Asmah, 1992). This is *adab* and is considered refined behaviour in Malay society. In certain places as seen in my engagement, the staff used a 'surrogate' style in their text as a way to voice their discontent. The act of inflicting pain on the people in the management, in a *halus* way of speaking, is indeed like 'cutting one's heart with a bamboo shred'.202

If we take Hofstede's (1980) explanations about culture, the above rule of speaking *halus* (B.A.B) is related to the high-power-distance phenomena. Indeed, narratives provide a safe cover for the staff as they provide the much-needed ambiguities against the "untouchable Brahmins" at the top of hierarchical structure. They give confusion and competing ideas (Risberg, 1997). They are ambiguous in purpose (Cohen and March 1974). In sum, in that climate of fear for negative repercussions, indirectness is a sort of protective clothing used in order to stay safe. After all going against or disagreeing with a "sultan" is an act of "treason."

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202 *Pedih bagai dihiris sembilu* (a Malay proverb) - A very painful situation.

Being in the old Malay kingdom, disagreement with the sultan could be translated as *derhaka*[203]. You are then are seen as rebellious person, a kind of villain that must be extinguished.

The 'black widow' in the spun web

As seen in Geertz's (1973, p. 5) famous definition of culture, a 'spider' spins the web to make it significant. However, Geertz never mentioned what type of spider. In Palmyra, in due course of making a strong culture where staff were expected to themselves into abiding citizens, I found the 'black widow' in the spun web. In most texts, planned organisational change is often described and discussed in a very 'clean' way. In most instances of change, people assume an inherent goodness and logic embedded in its very process. However, knowing that a great deal of power is involved in such action, I believe the change is also 'shadowy' in nature. McKendall (1993) mentions that change is an exercise of power manufactured by the executive management team. With Geertz's definition in mind, I describe the shadows as the black widow, a spider which eats its own mate.

At Palmyra, under the guiding light of Kaypi, although many staff perceived Haji was the man behind the throne, the planned change was couched under the notion of a paradigm shift. In due course, a massive re-organisation programme was executed. Staff were moved and re-positioned, while the organisational chart was re-drawn. Many staff groaned about their 'unfitness' to the new portfolios and resorted to various stratagems to show their voices of discontent. The management 'accused' those unhappy with the change as a nostalgic lot who resisted change.

However, I found that those disruptions (to the smooth plan of the management) were more related to "alteration of organisational distribution of power" (Maynard-Moody, Stull and Mitchel, 1986, p. 302). In due course, new group relations emerged; the Talimen and Kokosians rose to prominence. The management denied such existence officially, but many staff (non-Kokosians and a number of Kokosians) thought otherwise.

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[203] Treason, disloyalty. In old Malay kingdom the penalty for being so is death or being exiled to the periphery.

In light of the above, I take Cope's (1998) explanation of shadows. According to the author, shadows sit in the shade, and only appear when a light is deliberately shone upon them.
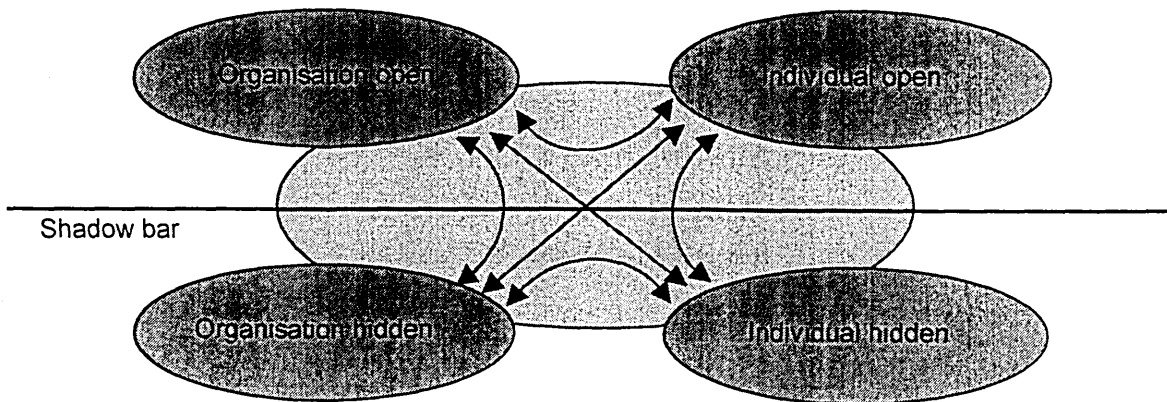
Figure 2: *Cope's Shadow Model*

In the open categories, various visible artefacts such as published reports, espoused ethos and ideals, mission statements, team goals, monthly reports and yearly appraisals are located. Meanwhile, in the hidden boxes reside, among others, the following categories: Internal politics, shadow structure, true personal goals and personal relationships. A point to note is that there are movements on all directions among the quadrants.

According to Cope, there are six models of interaction in shadows:

 Model A. *Happy talk* - concerns the open way that the people can interact with other people
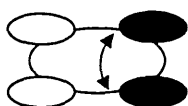
 Model B. *If I was* - turns the model inwards to look at the internal balance between an individual's open and shadow side.
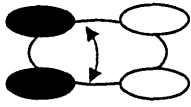
Model C. *Two tribes* - explores the idea that an organisation will have two schemata --- the one people say they do, and the one they actually do.
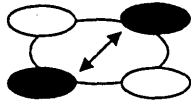
Model D. *Looking for clues* - considers the difficulties that individuals have when operating in an organisation that is behaving in an apparently irrational way.
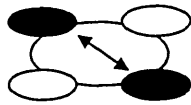
Model E. *Its all in the game* - looks at the problems that arise when individuals use their shadow side to influence and drive an organisation's open system.
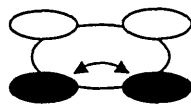
Model F. *Going underground* - considers how the organisation's and individual's shadow sides can conspire together to bring about decay.

In the context of Palmyra, many staff perceive the existence of the Two Tribes Model, as for example in the action of the management giving special treatment. Another model, It's All in the Game, is applicable to Palmyra. The story about 'removing' Timbalan from the theatre of power by re-drawing the organisational chart is a good illustration. I also observed that model D is at work in Palmyra. A good illustration can be seen in the management's behaviour towards clever non-Kokosians.

During my third visit, the rise of Haji became more visible while Timbalan was seen slowly fading into the background. What was being suspected by non-Kokosians did happen during my last week in the field. Timbalan took early retirement and, as expected, Haji took his place. During this writing, I received news about the 'movement' of Don to Haji's former post. Awang, by now more or less controlled his department. Several other Kokosians were given senior positions. I view these movements as a reward by a sponsor to a *protégé*. I provide a graphic representation of those movements in the Appendix.

In relation to the above, I believe that Haji knew some staff suspected him of playing the game. This could be seen clearly as he laughed aloud when Bo, in his farewell speech, mentioned about the importance of a leader being compassionate with staff and that a cruel leader will be punished by God in the Day of Judgement. However, Haji covered his 'masquerade' moves very well by 'clever' arrangements. Among others, this included him working very hard with the new building project. Many suspected him of using the Machiavellian principle – the end justifies the means. As such, his success (so they said) was because he stepped on other people's heads (*pijak kepala orang*).

In sum, in planned change, "power in action" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 7) is at work. As such, I find it strange for some writers on change to suggest that political behaviour is not a 'necessary' topic to be addressed explicitly (French and Bell, 1995; Hutton, 1994; Stone, 1997). In this regard, I see Buchanan and Badham (1999) who demonstrate how organisational politics permeate every planned change, as courageous.

In search of light

As seen above, various meanings emerged as the result of the various transactions informants made with contexts (1-5). They are meanings that arose from the dynamics of order and disorder. I view them as the *zahir* meanings. Now, I am going to view those meanings from the *batin* perspective.

As a term, 'change' can be viewed as overused as behind it one finds a spectre of multiple meanings and interpretations. With reference to organisations, a change is often discussed in terms of moving from one initial state to a desired state. In the case of Palmyra, the aim of the change was to make the organisation great again. To the CEO, the journey to the desired state is through re-inventing the organisation. Metaphorically, it means to make the "ark" new again. I view the metaphor as much more than the usual movements from one point to another as he anchored the dynamics to religion.

The image of an ark brought me back to the story of Noah and the flood. In many senses, I feel transference and counter-transference at work upon my encounters with various argots of morality in various transcribed texts. I also feel I am in the 'flow' as the result of the informants' religious behaviour. Such unconscious feelings, I believe reinforced my remembrance of the story of Noah. Symbolically, the great deluge is a point of departure to start a new life. At the same time, the image has a strong philosophical meaning related to the position of man in this world. To Muslims, this world is just a 'temporary place', and life is a journey to the "permanent" place in the hereafter or *akhirah*.

Besides the religious tone of the image, an ark is often associated with Malay culture. Although the word is more or less archaic, the image is strongly embodied in the romanticism of patriotism as seen in the title of the song, an *Ark of Independence.* Indeed, I see clear traces of the song in the oath taken by staff during the Quality Day.[204] In relation to the above, an ark is indeed an image "coined" by Panglima, the second CEO, who was considered by many as the founding father of the Palmyra. To Panglima, the struggle to steer the Palmyra is like a voyage to the island of hope. (See Panglima's Collection of Speeches. It was published in conjunction with Palmyra's 40th anniversary celebration).

As a way to repair the "leaking ark," Kaypi espoused the importance of returning God to the workplace, whereby work is translated as having an eschatological value. I view such a 'spiritual' return as adopting the *tawhidic* paradigm (Hasan, 1990). Man in this perennial view commits to the authority of God, accepts His Guidance and sees God as the only source of value. Man in this perspective is *khalifah*, the vicegerent of God on earth. The above understanding is deeply rooted in the religious belief about the purpose and the creation of man as stipulated in Islamic texts. In sum, the introduction of the paradigm is to create a new moral state for the benefit of everyone at the Palmyra.[205]

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[204] In the oath, the staff see themselves as princes and princeses that have personalities. In the *Ark of Independence*, a similar word could be heard clearly. Interestingly, the symbol of ark brought back the idea of the king and sultan of the feudal Malay kingdom. During that period, an ark is more or less a "water-palace" on the move. To me, an ark is an image couched in romanticism.

[205] See "Human Resources and Responsibility." A working paper presented at the Planning and Strategic Management Seminar, organised by Palmyra, Kuala Lumpur, 1997.

Before going further, it is worth summarising a 'native point of view' on morality. Being Muslims, Malays at Palmyra accepts religious goodness as their foundation of morality. Basically, a cluster of terms denotes the religious goodness concept: goodness, righteousness, equity, justice, truth and right, known and approved behaviour, and finally *taqwa* (piety). In principal, three components underpin Malay-Muslim moral foundation. They are namely *iman* (faith), knowledge (*ilm*) and action (*amal*). *Iman* is a true and undoubting belief in the Oneness of the Lordship of Allah, and it is translated in one behaviour and one way of seeing things. Without *ilm*, a believer could go astray. The spring of knowledge in this context is derived from the well of mind, experiences and revelation. Implicitly, *ilm* encompasses two realms, spiritual and mind-logic. Through both realms, man knows about and knew his Creator. *Amal* on the other hand is very much dependent on *iman*. On *amal* Hassan (1990) writes,

> It is the direction of human appetites along their right paths, controlling of passions, in order to bring the lower nature of man under the subjection of reason(s). (p. 38)

In relation to the above, Muslims agree that man has a dual nature, soul and body, and thus man is both physical and spiritual being. Muslims also agree that man is a forgetful (*ghaflah*) being. In times of *ghaflah*, one is led astray to disobedience, injustices (*zulm*) and ignorance. On this point, Shariati (1979) notes,

> Every man is endowed with these two dimensions, and it is man's will that enables man to decide either to descend toward the pole of sedimentary mud ... or to ascend toward the pole of exaltation, of God and the spirit of God. This constant striving and struggle takes place in man's inner being (soul). (p.74)

With reference to the above struggle, I view it as a struggle between *nafs*. Many theologians agree that in humans reside five types of *nafs*; (A) *mutmainah*, (B) *sufiah*, (C) *ammarah*, (D) *lawwamah*, and (E) *mulhimah*. A is a constructive desire and a soul at peace. It is a soul satisfied in all eventualities: happiness or affliction, wealth or poverty. It entertains no doubts; it is free from transgressions. B is a desire for love while C is a desire for evil. D is the desire for excessiveness in terms of sex, eating or enjoyment. E is the desire or ambition for attaining something. B and E are two neutral desires. If one could bring his/her nafs towards the

mutmainah (A), one is said to be in control of their *nafs*. However, if one is falling into *lawwamah* or *ammarah* domain, one is said to be in the position of "disorder." As all desires working in a system and always in the struggle state, the equilibrium of *nafs* could come at one second and be other wise at the another.

As an illustration, the relationship between various "winds of desires" is presented below.

The line of equilibrium

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A B C D E        A B C D E        A B C D E
     1                2                3
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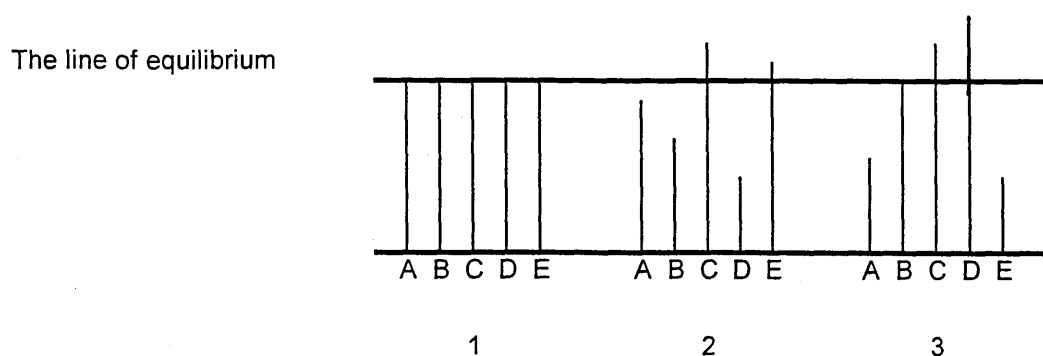
Figure 3: *Wind of Desires (Nafs) Equilibrium*

Position 1, where all desires are in the equilibrium state, is the most sought after by man. In position 2, *ammarah* takes a higher position and often leads man to do astray things. It is interesting to note that E often follows C from behind. If we take E to be the ambition to be rich, C is the crooked way of getting it. In other words, I suggest that, when E is above the line of equilibrium, C often goes much higher in the plane. In this regard, B and E are often compatible with each other. In other words, both desires must be contained at a certain point. In position 3, *lawwamah* is high, ahead of other desires. This is a position that one needs to avoid. In my view, positions 2 and 3 are position of *zulm*, physically and mentally disastrous to man.

In a similar vein, some scholars explained the idea of order in man in terms of forces of attraction (*hasb*) --- love of wealth, love of lust and self-love. According to Naqvi (1993), if these forces become too weak, a person may lose self-

respect and integrity. On the other hand, if they are too strong, the person could become egocentric and over-concerned with his own self.

Forces of Divine's Love

Line of equilibrium

Self

F1 = Love of wealth
F2 = Love of lust
F3 = Self-love

F1   F2
F3
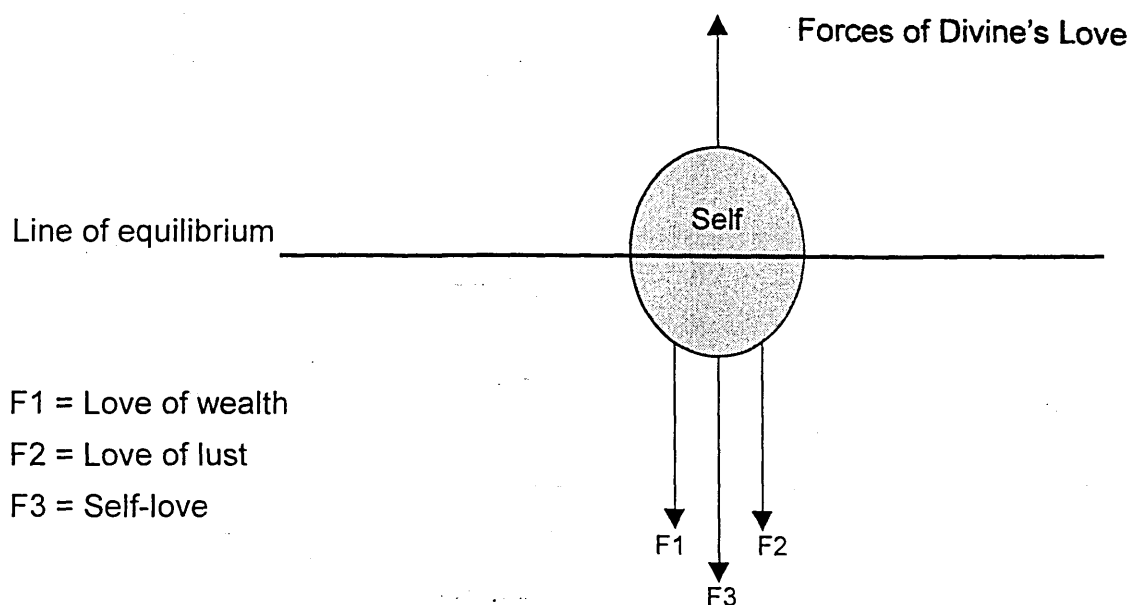
Figure 4: Forces of (Hasb) Attraction

In performing actions toward achieving equilibrium, man in the *tawhidic* principle must subscribe to certain general ethical principles (*akhlaq*), that is before such action could be accorded the status of *ibadah*. Besides *iman*, one must observe *taqwa* and *ihsan*. In theological discussion, the word *taqwa* covers the moral sense whereby a man with *taqwa* is supposed to be vigilant against moral peril. Meanwhile the term *ihsan* signifies the beautifying of one's behaviour. It implies the notion that one is cognisant of God's presence and that his/her conduct is being observed by Him (Abdel Rahman, 1995, p. 191). As such the pursuer of *ihsan* is best suited to be God-fearing, in the sense that he is ashamed, scared or sad at doing something that would displease Him. Contextually, this fear is based on divine accountability and the concomitant divine reward of punishment.

Summarily, *hasb* and *nafs* are 'like fire' in the mindset of Malays. To Malays, a fire is a friend when it is small but an enemy when it is big. Indeed, *hasb* and *nafs* are a kind of energy in the spiritual psychology of Islam. They are energy that pulls man to earth without which there is no corporeal existence of man (Faridi, 1985, p. 56). They are the "mount upon which men are obliged to ride in order to complete the journey man earthly life" (p. 52), and the self must become the "vehicle by which he/she arrives at his/her true destination."

In the light of the above, the planned change becomes a plot of quest. Here, the plot is defined by two parameters: an object and a subject. The object, which motivates the quest, is symbolised as O+ while the subject, which is in the state of deficiency, is S-. The quest for the object is the process by which the subject is transformed into S+, or accomplished self. A quest often starts with the issue of redeeming. It is about seeking forgiveness and remission from sins for being in 'immoral' bureaucratic cage. In the larger context, it refers to the philosophy that coloured the management - secularisation. In this 'old' paradigm, sacredness and profanity were not integrated.

Although I could not find a specific mention among informants about the issue of being in sin by working within the old paradigm, their implicit behaviours showed such. I was told about the distribution of Yaasin (Quran's Chapter 36) among staff during the period of anniversary celebration. The practising Muslims often read this Chapter as part of their effort to 'tame the nafs' (*tazkiratun nafs*). To Malays, the chapter is often associated with healing sick bodies and minds. I observed that almost all activities in Palmyra were laced with religious flavour, ranging from a simple *doa* before a ceremony to the elaborate religious talks. Although 'sponsored' by the management, a large number of my informants took active part in those activities. I observed that the prayer hall, which was upgraded into a mosque by Kaypi, was well attended during the obligatory prayer times. I also observed that almost all female staff comply with the Islamic dress code. In the simplicity of *zahir*, I assumed the above positive participation with some Islamic practices was a sign of staff religiosity.

The whole idea of quest is to be in God's grace. First, one needs to purify the state of *zulm* (darkness) by realising it. In the context of Palmyra, *zulm* is represented by secularism, which separates worldly aspects from religious aspects.

O+ = Forgiveness

S- = A sinner --- S+ = Redeemed

Second, by having understood the state of self-deficiency one must make effort to cure the body.

O+ = abd^{206}

S- = the sick --S+ = the cured

Here, the medicine is the *tawhidic* paradigm. A point to note: curing the body is often done by 'feeding' the soul with '*tazkiratul nafs.*[207]

The final metamorphosis of this quest·is accomplished once the whole organisation is in the situation of *rahmah*[208] where compassionate situation prevails.

Thus, in the light of the above, an organisation to Kaypi is a moral problem. Indeed the ambition of creating a new moral state at Palmyra was expressed explicitly to the staff. [209] I view this metaphor as very compatible with Maslow's (1998) description of the idea of 'enlightened management' where religion is taken seriously. Lakoff's (1996) explanation about the metaphor system for morality strengthens my claim. According to him, the dimensions of material well-being --- strength, health, happiness, wealth, freedom, safety, protection, nurturance, empathy, cleanliness, beauty, uprightness, and light --- provide the basis for

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[206] Becoming a 'slave.'

[207] A soul is regarded as one of God's creations. As such, soul must submit to the Creator. Nafs is also His creation, and it plays an active part in colouring the soul. By their very nature, bad nafs always try to dominate the good nafs. As such, the bad nafs must be tamed and reminded about its status as a creation. 'Staying' near Allah through various ibadah can do such taming.

[208] Merciful Love (in Arabic)

[209] See "HRM and Responsibility." A working paper presented at the Planning and Strategic Management Seminar, organised by Palmyra, Kuala Lumpur, 1997.

metaphors for morality. At Palmyra, these dimensions were clearly seen in various management discourses, either through their own words in official documents or speeches, or through 'sponsored' talks.[210] Thus in the context of Palmyra, those dimensions were deeply rooted in the *tawhidic* paradigm.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Meanings in this chapter are meanings by "the managed who define what is taken" from themselves, and not from management who define what is given in terms of paradigm shift programme. In the light of the planned change, those meanings are informants' version of their realities. They are informants' awareness about social conditions of power and influence in their everyday life. Meanings produced by the staff during my period of study are indeed ' meanings in competition'. In the eyes of *zahir*, the competition is between the management and the subordinates, whilst in the *batin* sense, it is a struggle between *nafs*. Whoever's 'eyes' one uses to look with, meanings under this 'sacred canopy' are primarily meanings-in-tension during a planned change.

In terms of organisational communication, meanings arose from stories told which largely reflect "miscommunication" (Mortenson, 1997) between the management and the subordinates. Narratives told were emotionally charged in nature, and the majority of them were "battle" stories (Eaton, 2000). In the light of the organisational communication narratives mosaic, the stories told showed a strong tendency toward their negative characteristics. Metaphorically, they were stories about being out-played in a planned change drama. In general, the stories told were stories of tension for being under the "management of influence" (Mayes and Allen, 1977).

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[210] During my period of study, a consultancy firm conducted a seminar on organisational excellence. The main theme of the seminar was about the important of *akhlak* (good moral conduct) in workplace. Work as *ibadah* was emphasised in detail.

Chapter 7

Reflections and Conclusions

In this chapter, I reflect upon the whole research engagement, covering issues related to doing fieldwork in Malaysia, possibilities for future research, what I would do 'if I were given a second chance', and the significance of this research. I view this reflection as part of my learning growth. In this light, 'bending back' is an action of looking back to an experience that has already passed away. By reflecting, I hope that new insights about this research will emerge, and can be used for future reference.

Being a 'native at home'

In this research engagement, I became a 'native' researcher. This label makes me uncomfortable as it has many implications. First, it carries the aura of colonialism. Secondly, it connotes a sense of suspicion about the status of the research. Concerning the latter, I find it rather paradoxical, as many 'foreign' anthropologists used many representative natives as their chief informants. Often, they relied heavily on native translations.

In relation to the above, a native researcher often receives advice. One of the most important points is to be aware and beware of cultural blindness and myopia while studying at home. This implies that by being a native, one is unable to perform the work 'professionally.' Perhaps here, critics cannot detach themselves from the legacy of positivism where being biassed in research is a sin. I also sense that there are traces of colonialism in this anxiety. The 'romantic' notion, that doing research at home is unproblematic, is espoused in the above ideas – I believe this is very simplistic, based on my own experiences while doing research at Palmyra.

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As an example, take the issue of understanding the local language. During my period in the field, I faced problems in understanding many words, which had been recently added to Malay vocabularies. There were times when informants 'snubbed' me for being 'ignorant' about my own language. At times, my 'foreign' thoughts made me culturally blind. For example, when staff nicknamed Haji as *Orang Ikan* (Fish Man) I thought they mean it as something fishy about the man. Instead, staff referred to Haji's previous post as Fisheries officer.

Being 'a fool' did not work in this highly literate environment as such behaviour would have only worsened my position in their eyes. A point to note here is that people at Palmyra are engaged most of the time with intellectuals as part of their daily work. As a result, to appear a fool to them is a waste of their 'office' time.

However, I found that being a native was very useful in understanding people in Palmyra, especially in relation to their hidden meanings. In this aspect, I believe an outsider without good Malay language skills and knowledge of the historical and cultural background would have faced many difficulties. Particular difficulties in 'infiltrating the expressional universe of the other' are about two intertwined issues --- understanding their references and completing their 'beating around the bush' conversations. I realised that staff at Palmyra take history and culture seriously in their meaning-making process. Such behaviour could be seen clearly during the 'disruption' period. I sensed that the staff at that time, in their attempt to create order, used stories as organising codes. Such action is understandable as symbolic forms reside in stories. Staff could use those forms to construct meanings, and even act on those meanings. In conversations, staff referred to many classical texts. They mentioned those texts as part of *biasa* (usual)[206]. As such, there were no language markers in those conversations. They did not mention the titles of those texts but only names of characters or events associated with them. Often, the following utterances took those items as their background. I found classical texts such as The Malay Annals[207], Hikayat Malim Deman[208] and Cerita Si Luncai [209] were

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[206] Laderman (1997) noted a similar phenomenon of *biasa* during her fieldwork in one part of Malaysia. In the above context, the text was mentioned without any linguistic markers.

[207] The text is regarded as *magnum opus* to Malay culture and history.

[208] One of the famous classical romances.

widely referred to. Texts from other traditions, such as <u>Ramayana</u> and <u>Mahabharata</u> (India) and <u>Animal Farm</u> (West) were also consulted.

Staff also used local history as their point of reference. A clear example could be seen in the light of metaphors used to refer to 'Sultan' Kaypi and 'Resident' Haji. Both images derive from the history of British colonialism in Malaya. Informants also made many references to and used many terms from religious vocabularies. Haji even showed me a religious text, <u>Minhaj al abidin</u>, which in turn led me to 'meet' al-Ghazali, the famous Muslim scholar, whose thoughts, I believe, heavily coloured the notion 'work is *ibadah*[210]. Simply, without knowing the relationship between the first text and the second text, one could easily miss the important point of knowing how Haji, perceived to be one of the main characters in Palmyra, made up his life world, which in turn shaped into meaning at Palmyra. Staff also took other references from their cultural world such as films, songs, silat, proverbs and *pantun*.

Perhaps, one would say it is indeed part of ethnographic work to comprehend 'strangeness'. Such a claim may work if one is clever enough to catch those texts. The issue is that those reference texts were hidden. This is typical Malay discourse. In many instances, they used certain phrases from a popular *pantun* as their sentences[211]. Informants' behaviour indeed arose from the notion of respect to the researcher. They believe a researcher must not be 'so stupid' as to be spoon-fed. Informants often expected the researcher to *pandai-pandai*. I view *pandai-pandai* to be very hermeneutical. This situation can be seen clearly when the researcher is 'expected to complete' their sentences. An ability to fill in the blanks is proof of being on the same wavelength (McAuley, 1985).

I would like to illustrate this further. On one occasion, a female informant told me about the presence of a Napoleon in Palmyra. Napoleon is a character from <u>Animal</u>

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[209] A very famous humorous folk story.

[210] During the course of my conversations with Haji, he showed me a text, *Minhaj al abidin ila jannah rabb al alamin* (Literally, The path of a pious man whose aim is to enter the paradise of God). The text is a Malay translation of al Ghazali's important works. It is written in Jawi scripts.

[211] A *pantun* usually has four lines of rhymes. In conversations, informants usually take one or two words from those rhymes. Without proper knowledge, those words could easily construed as normal phrases.

<u>Farm</u>. My informant (Halimah) asked, " Who is the Napoleon around here?" Then, she went on talking about cruelty in the workplace. Without knowing the book, the conversation seemed meaningless. Furthermore, the main aim of referring to Napoleon in the conversation is to describe the management as the 'beastly pig.' Such indirectness must be seen in the light of *'halus.'* The application of indirectness in talking also goes beyond the physical realm, as talking is an accountable action before God. Researchers who lack sufficient cultural background without doubt would find this form of talk very difficult to follow, and worse still if the researcher were not a native speaker and relied very heavily on interpreters. Much of the data would be lost from several levels of interpretation, ranging from person to person and from culture to culture.

I take Laderman's (1997) <u>Limits of Magic</u> as an example. In the work, I found several mistakes regarding Malay words. I found some of them irritating. I assumed that she relied too much on standard Malay. Perhaps such mistakes were made while comprehending voices from a tape recorder. She used *serban* for a concept related to illness, yet in Malay it refers to a headgear associated with religiosity. I believe the right word is *serebeh* (literally, miserable). In another place, she misunderstood between *petua* and *fatwa.* The former relates to worldly affairs while the latter is concerned with religious aspects. A point to note is that Laderman stayed in a Malay village for several years. I assume that she took for granted that she knew local dialect after 'being there' for a considerable period. Ong (1999), another researcher and Malaysian by birth, also showed similar behaviour of 'taking for granted knowing' about Malay culture. Yet, she wrote that *sorah* and *solat* were the same thing. Both words actually represent different meanings.

In relation to the above, several questions need to be taken into account by any researcher interested in doing qualitative research in Malaysian organisations. The first point is related to Malay emotions. Often, many 'foreigners' have neglected this issue. In their quest for 'exoticism' for personal or academic purposes, they have ended up 'offending' respondents. See Larsen (1996) for such 'insensitivity'. In this research, some respondents were 'obliged' to perform a magical act, which they wanted to forget as their 'new' understanding about their religion prohibited it. In

interpreting the 'religion' of the islanders, Larsen 'claimed' that this type of respondent showed Janusian character[212].

Secondly, the issue of tension/domination in an organisation as an example is not simply a new phenomenon. In the Third World, the issue is very much related to the ideological past/legacy of colonialism, as illustrated by the ethical problems at Palmyra arising out of the introduction of the *tawhidic* paradigm. Being so long in the Western mode of thought, the staff made comparison between the two realities. In Palmyra, the paradigm shift turned into a clash of paradigms.

Thirdly, understanding the high-power distance in almost all organisational life in Malaysia may pose a problem to some. Often respondents are obliged to give 'good and acceptable' answers out of pity for researchers or to make things easy, so that no beans spills on the ground. In my research, almost all respondents 'disowned' their own words and voices by requesting not to be taped. This could prove difficult if one is too dependent on audiotape. Worse still, they preferred *pandai-pandai*. This term is indeed a superlative adjective. *Pandai* is literally translated as clever. The term has double faces: positive and negative values. In it resides the expectations of respondents to the researcher whereby one must not make up things but can creatively play with their words as long as it is within the boundary of their ideas. Regardless of the liberty and trust given by my respondents, I checked my transcripts with the respondents so as not to be labelled as a 'data rainmaker.'

THE PRESENT STUDY

I believe it was worth taking a short journey to reflect on this research before going further to discuss issues pertaining to future research. For a long time 'stories' was a 'forgotten' issue in organisational communication studies. With the upsurge of interest in issues of culture and the 'literary turn' in human sciences, stories become one of the important areas of study in the discipline. For a long time also, communication in organisations was viewed as a 'cold' activity with the managerial

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212 Malays in villages are obliging people. They feel unhappy if they cannot fulfil someone's wish, even if at certain point it hurts them. Concerning magical acts, I believe many 'outsiders' could be misled by their observation. Magicians are known to pass their 'pet spirits' when they are old or near to death. Without this act, they believe they cannot die peacefully. I knew cases where a researcher was given the spirit. To the researcher it is a 'gift of love' but to the magician it is a 'giveaway.'

perspective taking the upper hand. Yet, I argued that organisational communication is more than a conduit or transmission of messages. By formulating narratives as the mode of communication, I showed that communication is also about process, relationship, dialogical, sense-making, voice, emotions and shadows. In sum, I see the organisational communication narrative as a 'hot' activity where facts, feelings, value, motives and opinions intertwine with each other.

Stories for a long time have pre-occupied humans, so much so that they are regarded as *homo narrans.* I view stories as narratives, full of intentions, motives and interests. With that perspective, stories are seen as anthropomorphist in nature. Combining suggestions from scholars who regard stories as one important world-making tool, stories are full of dynamism. In organisational studies, stories perform, among others, the following functions: as expressions of wishes and fantasies; as vehicles for learning and control; or as a form of emotional discharge. In Palmyra, all the above functions showed clearly. Being in a state of physical and psychological disruption, the staff 'drowned' themselves deeply in the realm of existing published stories in order to produce their own stories. As such, many classical texts were used as references, and they were presented in the *halus* Malay style. Such behaviour was in line with their culture, which promotes 'refined constraint,' cordiality and sensitivity in talk. Indeed those ways and rules are part of Malay cultural scripts. In the context of Palmyra, the staff used *surat layang*, poetry, and excerpts as an important form of conveying messages. I found organisational jokes and humour were less preferred by staff as their mode of communicating their voice. I assume that this relates to the notion of *halus* above. This claim must be seen in the light of the 'your mouth is your tiger' concept and how this operates within a high-power distance society.

Methodologically, this study showed that hermeneutics is a very appropriate tool to be used in a study where informants consumed literature and language almost literally in life. Besides its proximity with both disciplines, the method proved to be useful in a society where 'openness' is taken cautiously.

In general, in this research, the informants see Palmyra as a place --- place of work, place for playing games, place of struggle, place of love, place of fear of

(language) death. To most of them, Palmyra 'defines' them, and they define Palmyra; it acts on them and they act on it.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

This research was conducted in a 'closed society' where almost everyone knew each other intimately. To informants, this research had several outcomes. First, they could reveal their anxieties to the researcher, and be well. Secondly, their 'words' could have made their life miserable if the researcher had betrayed their confidence by becoming the management spy. So I claim this work is 'sensitive' research.

On a personal level, I have concerns about creating misunderstanding about the Malay culture and Islam in particular. As the *tawhidic* paradigm is intimately associated with the religion, its failure to bring a state of compassion to staff could then be construed as a weakness of the belief. However, one must note that implementing ideals and the true state of the religion are two different things.

On a theoretical level, in this study, I brought forward the notion of organisation as a moral problem to the fore. I believe this work should be read concurrently with issues on secularism and spirituality in organisations in the Western context. In explaining the state of disorder which arose from the implementation of the paradigm shift, whereby work as *ibadah* became the hallmark at Palmyra, one could take many approaches. I suggest two distinct ways of seeing this. The first is through *zahir* (apparent) eyes. In this respect, various theories, as suggested by worldly scholars, can be applied. Secondly, the situation could be viewed through the batin (hidden) eyes where order and disorder are seen in the light of human 'desires' (*nafs* and *hasb*). To my knowledge, the second approach is very new to organisational studies, and it is my wish that this contribution could spur further developments.

Concerning the methodology used in this engagement, I found hermeneutics a very useful tool in understanding the researched. It provided me with opportunities to understand the forms of life as experienced by the researched. The knowledge

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gained in this engagement was found through *verstehen* (understanding) with the informants. Two types of meanings were offered to me by the method. First was the cognitive meaning where the designative, informational, conceptual, and expository aspects of the text make social understanding possible. In this engagement, those meanings were communicated in Chapter 6. Second was the non-cognitive aspect of meaning, which made me suddenly 'see' something that enriched my understanding of everyday life experiences (van Maanen, 1997, p. 345). (See Chapter 7). Perhaps, we need the best of both ethnography and hermeneutics to truly recover those meanings.

FUTURE RESEARCH

With regard to this research, I would like to do the following if I were to 'do it all over again':

a) Integrating deep investigation on stories with deep exploration on metaphors:

In recent years, studies on metaphors in organisations have gained considerable interest among researchers. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.3) what we do everyday is very much a matter of metaphors. They have been described as the 'cognitive lenses' we use to make sense of all situations. So metaphors help organisation members put meaning into things they experience and realise the apparent contradictions and paradoxes they encounter. "Metaphors help organisations tie their parts into meaningful wholes" (Kendal and Kendal, 1993). In relation to this, McCloskey (1990, p. 96) suggested that metaphors are closely linked to stories as they 'criticise' each other for survival. At present, both areas in organisational communication are investigated separately from each other. By combining both areas, I believe organisational communication studies would be richer.

b) Give special attention to issues of micro-politics:

Often, organisational change is a planned activity by the management. In recent years, such programmes have come under many names, such as re-inventing, re-engineering or organisational transformation. Many writers assume such change to

be a clean process without or with little disruption to the staff concerned. As change is intimately linked to issues of power, shadows and tyranny can show their faces in the process of implementing it. As shown in Palmyra, micro-politics coloured the whole situation of change. At present, unfortunately, political issues in organisations are considered, among others, as an "ugly duckling" and as distasteful phenomena. Such perception makes our understanding of the dark side of organisational behaviour relatively weak (Buchanan, 1999, p. S74). Indeed, it would be a very interesting time for researchers who are able to explore the inner world of Kaypi, Haji and *Tali* men on issues related to organisational politics (OP). Perhaps, findings by Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick and Mayes (1980) about managers' perceptions of OP could be challenged vigorously in the future.

As the final words of this text, I would like to present a famous *pantun*.

> *Padang perahu di lautan*
> *Padang hati di fikiran*
> (The field of boats is the main,.
> that of the 'heart' is memory).

Appendix 1

Organisational Structure Prior To December, 1995
Before Reorganisation
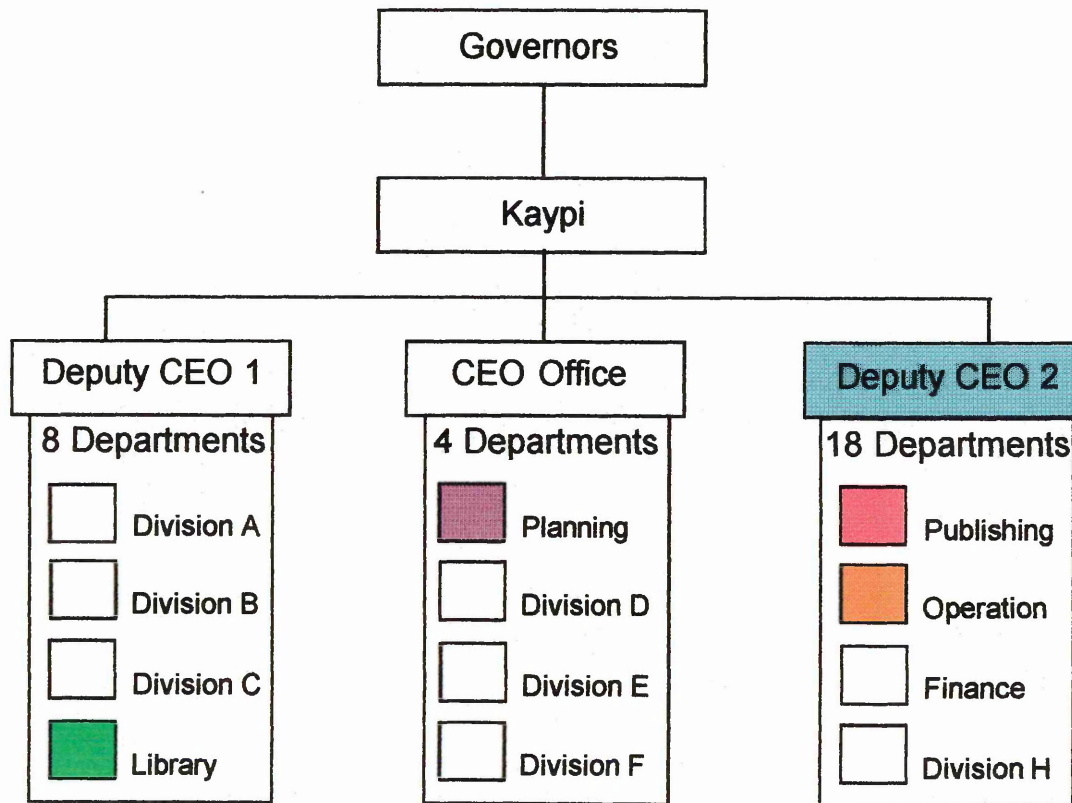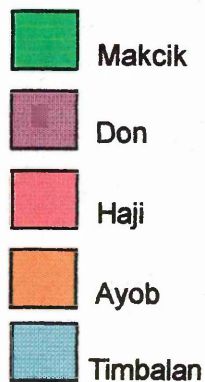
Appendix 2

Organisational Structure After December, 1995

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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │    Governors    │
                        └────────┬────────┘
                                 │
                        ┌────────┴────────┐
                        │      Kaypi      │
                        └────────┬────────┘
         ┌───────────────────────┼───────────────────────┐
┌────────┴────────┐              │              ┌─────────┴───────┐
│  Department Y   │              │              │  Department Z   │
└─────────────────┘              │              └─────────────────┘
     ┌──────────────┬────────────┼────────────┬──────────────┐
┌────┴──────┐ ┌─────┴─────┐ ┌────┴─────┐ ┌─────┴──────┐
│ Division B1│ │Division B2│ │Deputy CEO 1│ │ Division A │
│3 Departments│ │4 Departments│ └────┬─────┘ │4 Departments│
└───────────┘ └───────────┘       │        └────────────┘
       ┌────────────┬──────────────┼──────────────┐
  ┌────┴─────┐ ┌────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴────┐    │
  │Operation 1│ │Division E│   │Division F│    │
  └──────────┘ └────┬─────┘   └──────────┘    │
                    │             │             │
              ┌─────┴────┐ ┌──────┴──────┐ ┌────┴──────────┐
              │ Planning │ │  Technical  │ │   Operation   │
              └──────────┘ │12 Departments│ │   Personnel   │
                           └──────┬──────┘ │    Finance    │
                                  │        │ 4 Departments │
                           ┌──────┴───┐    └───────────────┘
                           │ Library  │
                           └──────────┘
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193
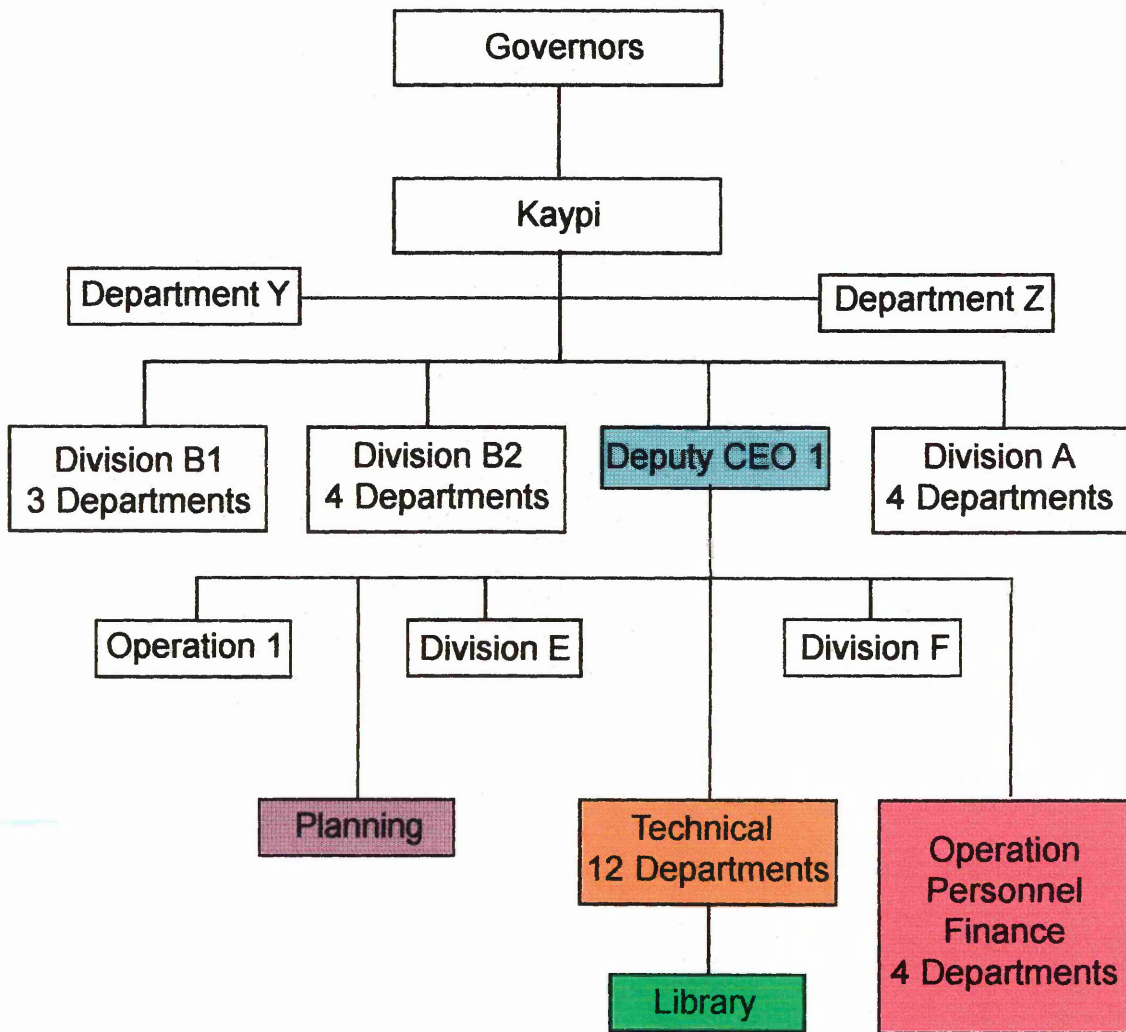
Appendix 3

Organisational Structure, 1999
Post-reorganisation

Governors

Kaypi

Department Y | Department Z

Division B — 7 Departments

Division A — 7 Departments

Deputy CEO 1

Publishing — 7 Departments

Library

Planning

Operation — Personnel — Finance — 4 Departments

Division H

Division J

Technical — 5 Departments

Operation 1 | Division E

Division G | Division F

Library
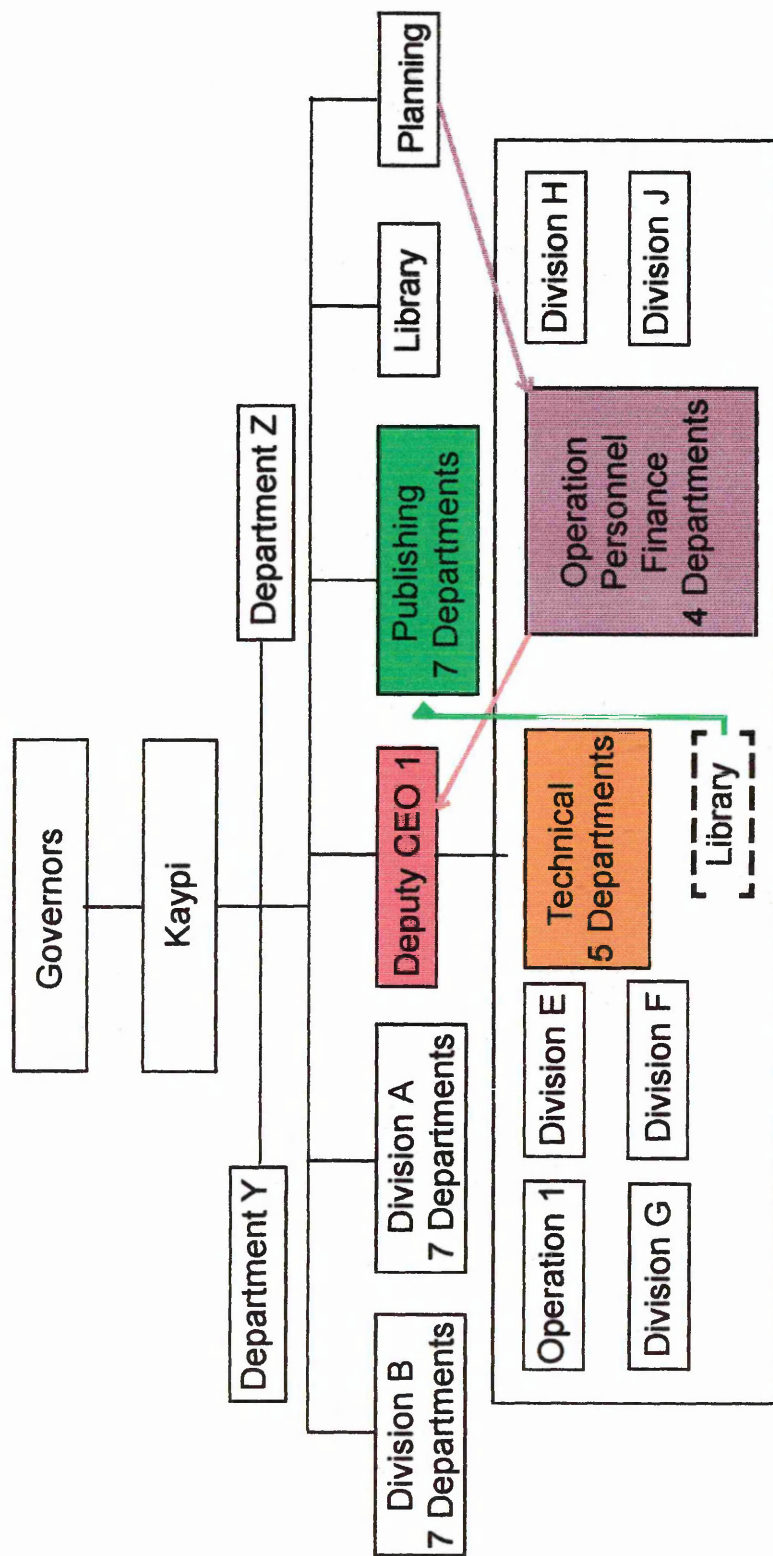
Note:
Haji Moved from K1 to VIP Position. Timbalan was "removed".
Ayub remained at the old position. Don Moved from K2 to K1 position.
Makcik moved to VIP position.

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Appendix 4

Stories Behind the Palmyra Leaf

This is OK land

Anonymous, female, K3

A few weeks ago, after the Friday prayer, my friend went to the temporary canteen to take his lunch. A few Kokosians were sitting on the front bench. Their friend (an outsider), a Kokosian, was there too. They were talking in the Kokosian dialect. After a while, Haji and Awang arrived. Things became merrier. Unexpectedly, a non-Kokosian with the intention of joking probably said that the Palmyra is not-OK land.[213] Therefore, he asked them to speak in the standard Malay patois. The outsider jumped up. "*Orang luar*, please keep quiet. In here *orang kita* rules". Complete silence invaded the canteen. The other Kokosians kept quiet too. So did Haji. My friend's head faced down. So did his friend's.

I felt that a message had been conveyed clearly to non-Kokosians that afternoon. Ironically, an outsider delivered it. Deliberately or not, there was no effort from local Kokosians to deny the 'fact'. Haji is one of the big men who were there. He just laughed aloud as if it was just an ordinary joke. I was told non-Kokosians kept eating without any word, and they left the place quietly. Haji should have said something in order to diffuse the situation. Maybe he thought the remark should not be bothered with. Nevertheless, in the present climate, even a joke could be misunderstood. I know Kokosians often talk in "harsh" way when they are so close to you. That is why they call you *menate* (animal) when they are in humorous mood. However, not so many people can appreciate that. To many Malays it could be an insult. They must not bring their local nuances here.

Although we are all Malays, we have different notions about what is politeness.[214] In the above incident, many took it as confirmation of their suspicions about the Palmyra being ruled[215] by

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[213] An abbreviation for Orang Kokosian (Kokosian people).

[214] In some states in Malaysia, to swear using crude words (to a certain extend) is permissible. However, such behaviour is not encouraged. In most places swearing is a taboo and seen a sign of "low" upbringing, socially and religiously.

[215] Translated from Malay word (perintah). In the above context, the word is related to kingship and Malay kingdom as described in Malay classics (hikayat). The word also connotes an order or a directive.

Kokosians. They were invulnerable people (*orang kebal*). We must be careful. In here, people are afraid to mention about their existence. But every people with open eyes (*mata celik*) could see it. They see us as *orang luar*. But some people just make themselves blind.

The Ark of remembrance

Kaypi, the CEO

The Ark of Remembrance
(The 40th birthday of Palmyra has arrived)

Hamba[216] would like to remind we are no more young children
strong standing to sail the ark of people in the waves of independence
language is the soul of the nation
language, a vehicle of literature: a mirror of mind, self and personality
language, a vehicle of knowledge; a prism of tradition
we are the ones that arise from the struggle fire
we are the ones that walk with all patriots
we are the ones who uphold what people hold
we are the ones who are thrust up in the government agenda
Hamba would like to remind us that for too long the ark is in the harbour
anchored deep in the sea of enthusiasm
now the sail is not strong
now the sail is not spreading wide to catch the wind of changing times
a season of losing influence
we must not drown ourselves by singing the old song
yesterday and today are too wide apart
blood and tears are no more like in the past
go and ask
are we losing the wind?
are we having no idea where to go?
are we losing the strength to sail the ark?
are we losing integrity by the challenge of heavy seas?
Hamba would like to remind us, once
in this place all intellectuals gathered
to uphold the custom of togetherness
we climbed the mountain; we went down into the valley
we shared fruits and vegetables

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[216] Humble pronunciations of self especially in front of elders or people with authority. The word could also mean slave. To many Kokosians to address themselves as 'hamba' is an act of '*halus*'.

a sign of togetherness

a patriot and a lover

an expert and master of letters

in a vow of loyalty until the end

together

Hamba would like to remind us,

in a turmoil we are too sorrow

the moonlight is losing its glow under words of argument

raise the economy and technology in the name of development

in the midst of contradictions, the struggle is now in the periphery

Is it not the time when intellectuals need a guiding light?

Let us, sages, thinkers, men of letters, teachers and all

shoulder to shoulder again carrying the struggle fire

let us show our desire of hope in this journey

stand up and destroy the chain of forgotten hearts in the fort of power

as we are weak to fight with their discourses

let us put together our cultural silat[217] in the arena of world excellence

keep our struggle to the zenith of success

look, how beautiful is our panorama of happiness

as strong as language is the nation

Hamba would like to remind us

we must not forget our ambition and love

not to break under the stress of struggle

not breaking the chain of love

let hypocrites wrap themselves in the illusion of chasing development

let them hide behind the wall of chaos

we must always look at our roots

we must never ask questions of what we already know

we must not lose the flower of wisdom

we must not lose the way to go forward

we must not adopt the knowledge and culture of forgetfulness

Let us colour the integrity of this nation

Let us uphold the self-esteem of our loving nation

Hamba would like to remind us

various signs are showing

about people who want to pull the root out of this nation

about people who dare to justify the end to kill the heart of the tree

they push knowledge into the deep

they ridicule our culture

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[217] Malay art of self-defence

thus intellectual words are no more heard

thus teacher's words are no more rules to abide

now, small is becoming big

puss is becoming cancerous boil

lies are becoming truth

good is no more an exemplar

bad is no more a constraint

Let hamba remind us,

oh ye come forward

return, to stand strong to sail the ark into the heavy seas

return, to carry the language, flag of spirit of the nation

in our togetherness to welcome the new millennium of civilisation

Let us do it together

in our conscious ambition and redemption of strong love from the heart, spiritually and physically

without forgetfulness

with praying for guidance and praise

Old film
Jawa, male,K3

I think Kaypi is a political man. His brother is a politician. He himself, according to my research, attended certain meetings of a political party. He also showed his support to certain leaders. They like to rub shoulders with politicians. They call so many politicians to come to their ceremonies. If you go downstairs, you can see a big photograph where he sat happily with one federal minister, a Kokosian. Worse still, almost all staff must take part in that photography session. It must be political. I believe he had a hidden agenda. He often makes important statements about the Palmyra in the Kokos County, not here (at the headquarters). Maybe he is looking for Datukships[218] from the county. One of the statements that he made in the Kokos County is about the state of our books in our store. I am not happy about the way he told the media about the issue. He said that we have thousand and thousand of unsold books kept in the store. He is not behaving like real Malay.

We Malays have *malu* when it comes to telling others about our own family problems. Many of The CEO is a psuedo-Malay. Many members in the management team are psuedo-Malay. They are not honest but men who like to masquerade in order to promote their own agenda. It could be that he is from one of the weird races. He is like a bad husband telling nasty things

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[218] Datuk is an honorary title conferred by a sultan of each county on a selected subject. It is common between CEOs to be a Datuk. Without the title, a person is not within a 'proper' circle.

about his own wife in the public. It is like telling people about his wife's sagging breasts, or his wife is no more sexually productive. Is he not ashamed? I believed he wanted to be a new hero, or some kind of trouble-shooter who could clear up all the mess here. By opening the closet he was ridiculing all the past CEOs in public. He makes the public think badly of us. Timbalan, the Deputy CEO, then must clear up the mess for him. Timbalan must explain to the media why such a thing happened. Where did Kaypi get all that information? Who gave him those numbers? He is a pseudo-man.

When you want to explain the above issue, you must not talk just based on numbers. You must understand how those numbers were arrived at in the first place. If you do not know the real facts, it is better to keep quiet. Furthermore, the issue is nothing new. It is like rewinding an old film. If he understood how we are obliged to publish such difficult-to-sell and unprofitable books, he would not say such things. He thought he was a surgeon but really he is just the chief Hospital Assistant. To me, Kaypi is very good at getting the attention of the media towards Palmyra. He is very clever in roaring like a lion. When you talk about thousands and thousands of unsold books, that is news, you know, and you are under the media limelight. They are playing a kind of game. It is glamorous, you know, to see and hear your name being mentioned in newspapers and televisions. They want to tell the world they are doing a lot jobs around here.

In reality, clowns manage this management. They think they are very smart and clever. On one occasion a member of the executive team pressed the mouse like a remote control. Yet they talk about IT. The management is like a big elephant with big ears and small eyes clouded with gatekeepers. Their big ears do not care to listen, except to the sound of the lion, their *sifu* (master). The present leader is like a captain who does not know how to show the right way and the best way to navigate the ark to their crews. I am afraid that one day staff will start singing the *Luncai* song. Let's Luncai jump into the sea with his pitchers. Let it be. Let it be.

Well, there are so many glamorous people up there. When they do re-organisation programme, they re-organise rooms and move departments from this block to that block, from this floor to the other floor. There is a lot of confusion. It is like the divide and rule strategy of the colonialist British when they wanted to conquer Malay states. When people are so tired of the confusion, people give up to think hard about what is going on. At last, they would resign with a note: We have life outside the Palmyra to think of. This is what the management wants us to be. Then, they could go around telling people, how good they are in re-inventing this place. They make things here deteriorate. They worsened the state of the pitcher (*labu*), not otherwise.

Now, this organisation is a toothless tiger. It is like a menopausal lady. She is sexually unproductive. The police department recently slapped our face. They ignored terms coined by us. Instead, they create their own version of Malay, which is a creolised Malay. I can say this organisation is now a kris without *pamor*. When I say all these things, some Kokosians think I am a 'sour grapes.' I think many Kokosians think I do not know the history. I agree with the point that all CEOs before Kaypi came from Johore. However, they give chance to every one. When we talk about Kokosian rule, we are not talking about the CEO being Kokosian. We are talking about their parochial influence on the management team. When we say that OK rules this place, they accused us of being 'anti-OK'. My wife is a Kokosian. Do I hate my wife? I love her very much. What we hate here is Kokosian attitudes of favouring to their own 'caste.'

Rhinoceros's ear

Jawa, male, K3

One day, I was called for a promotion interview. Being the most senior candidate with experience, I thought that I would get the post. Alas, one junior lady got it. I asked Haji for an explanation, and he told me that the decision was largely based on compassionate ground. He told me the lady is a single parent with a small baby. "If that the case, why was a girl with an old parent to support not given the post?" I said. He gave no answer. Later I found out the real story. In the interview, the lady told the panel, including Haji, about her Kokosian roots! I think both Kaypi and Haji are having rhinoceros ears[219]. In one meeting, my friend, a senior officer, told me about the management denial of the truth regarding *surat layang*. My senior officer said all allegations were 'true to the skin'. They were lying behind their teeth. It is a joke, it is not? Later I found out the real story. During the interview, the lady told the interview panel about her Kokosian roots. I was told, one of the panels exclaimed the following words: "*Orang kita.*"

Haji is a 'double-faces' man. I had direct experience in that. One day, I was called for an interview. Being the most senior candidate with experience, I thought that I would get the post. Alas, one junior lady got it. I asked Haji for an explanation, and he told me the decision was hinged largely on a compassionate ground. He told me the lady (Hajar) is a single parent with a small baby. "If that was the case, why a girl with an old parent to support was not given the post?" I said. He gave no answer. Later I found out the real story. In the interview, the lady told the panel, including Haji, about her Kokosian root!

Nowadays many officers act like a cat. They purr softly in the presence of her owner. The cat does not need to work hard. Once a while she must chase a mouse in order to make the

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[219] A proverb for a person with impaired hearing.

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owner happy. Otherwise her main job is to sleep. She follows the smell of her owner when her owner is absents from the place.

They (the management) sell snake oil

Pon, female, K3

The present climate is like a declining graph. My spirit for working is low. I believe such a cartographic image sums up the whole climate, morally and physically, of this place. I do not know what is happening here. Being non-Kokosian you are sidelined. From what I see, Kokosians are being given special treatment. You remember arwah[220] L. She was not granted leave when she was sick. She was asked to go on a spiritual development course[221]. She lost her pregnancy, ended up in the hospital and died. Another lady, a Kokosian, who gave an excuse that she had problems looking after her kids was granted leave. She lives.

Well, I do not know what was in their (the management) head. They sent me to further my study. On my return, they did not utilise my new skills and my new knowledge. It is like throwing your degree into the drain. It was wasted. It reminds me of the story about the king of Singapura. The king, perhaps his ministers, hated clever people. This management kills clever people too. I cannot understand this type of behaviour. Yet, they talk about organisational learning and organisational excellence. They think that we people down here do not read books. We know what these terms are about. When we questioned them, they labelled as rebels (kaki lawan). They always said, let managers manage. I think these people thought they know everything about running an organisation.

Now, I am doing a job that needs no further training. It is like throwing money (for sponsoring MA course) into the drain. At the same, they are throwing my working spirit away. Yet, they are talking about organisational learning. I think there is no real planning in organisational development. I believe those people up there do not really understand what are the mission and the objectives of this organisation. Well, they can parrot all those words. After all, in this place people play with words all the time. That is the problem with so many outsiders[222] in the management team. They do not really understand the *semangat perjuangan bahasa*[223].

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[220] The deceased

[221] The course is outbound in nature.

[222] Haji, Don and Kaypi come to Palmyra not as K3 officers. As such, they are seen as not 'original' member of Palmyra.

[223] Malay term. *Semangat* is literally translated as spirit. *Perjuangan* meanwhile is a term, which is almost equivalent of "struggle" but also connotes a commitment to or involvement in a noble cause.

You know such behaviour is like the behaviour of the king of Singapura[224]. The king killed clever people. Sometimes they even dare to kill you softly, without you knowing it, from behind. They like to claim someone's achievement as theirs. This is an act of robbing and killing. People in high places believe them as they have a strong voice. Furthermore, they are very good in impression management. When I complained, the management said it was a mistake. They want to sell their snake oil[225] to me. I am immune to that sort of lies (Her voice sounded cynical). They should remember when their cover is blown. Where then they want to hide their faces? Nevertheless, maybe they are after all shameless or faceless.

I am still a K3 officer after more than fifteen years serving here; a senior of juniors. Here, they call it as *pegawai kiri kanan*[226]. Ha.ha.ha. Maybe I am not working too hard like Chin. I heard he was hospitalised for a few days as the result of 'over-working'. His blood pressure is up. He never talks about it. However, I got feelers.

In here, secrets are not secrets. They told me about it. In here, nothing is *sulit* (confidential). Maybe realising how he is really a good *gurkha*, the management awarded him the excellence award a few years back. Perhaps, the management feel guilty about the incident. He is too good to be missed out as their good and loyal *gurkha*. The management need someone who can do 'real' work. Without good gurkhas, their inefficiency could be very transparent. Furthermore, he is non-Kokosian. The management could use Chin as an example of how unbiased they are toward the non-Kokosian. However, Chin paid a heavy price to be a senior officer. Now he has high blood pressure. Now, I heard he turned himself into a mute as so many *hantus* are haunting him. These *hantus* work to destroy you in order to go up. Besides, his senior assistant is a Kokosian. He must be cautious at all times where he steps. The Kokosian is watching him.

The Chinese *wayang*

Pon, female, K3

I did not go to the excellence award ceremony. For me it is just a cheap Chinese wayang (opera)[227]. You see most of the top people are rewarded. Yet, their subordinates get nothing. Is not their so-called excellence due to hardworking subordinates? These top people keep

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[224] Related to the famous story of ancient Singapore. In the story, the king, under the influence of bad ministers, ordered a clever boy, Hang Nadim, to be murdered. He was guilty to the king, as he was too clever in proposing a scheme to save the kingdom from the assault of garfish.

[225] *Minyak ular* (Malay). This type of medicine is claimed to cure many illness, which is often untrue.

[226] 'A left-right officer'. Many senior K3 used to describe themselves as 'pegawai kiri-kanan'. 'A right' officer is a senior officer. It is a cynical expression as 'kiri' (left) is always associated with bad or unwanted things.

[227] Chinese opera. In this type of show, many actors wear heavy make-up and often wear masks.

rotating among themselves to get the highest award[228]. You could see from the list of names. Maybe I am too emotional. You know I got very angry when some one like my Head got such an award. Often she takes a shortcut when there is an important meeting to be held. She would take emergency leave on that day. Hiding at home may be. I believe she learned the trick from someone above her. Yet, she is said to be an excellence worker.

I have no hope of going up the career ladder. I could not work 'smart' like telling lies, or crying in front of the panel of interviewers in order to be promoted. I have no heart to do ingratiation. I am not talented to do all those impression works. I do not want to sell my dignity in order to be at the top. To be a Head is beyond my wildest dreams. Worse still, I am not Kokosian.

You know why I stayed long in here even though I am not being treated well? I am in love with the Malay language. Our dream is to make this organisation a centre of excellence in Malay literature and language. This organisation is very much related to the Malay race. We are the last bastions of the Malays. With the present management behaviour, my love is fast diminishing. Furthermore, how long can you survive on love alone? In addition, I am too tired to fence myself from so many *budak rajas*[229] around here. This type of people accepts and follows orders from the top blindly. They told me not to be critical if I were to be healthy and happy. If you asked them why they are doing this, they would simply say this word: *Mahu hidup* (to survive not die). Yes, every one should hidup but it does not mean one should kill other people.

The management is exploiting my love for this special institution. I never heard of a place where so many people love their working place like here. If not there should be mass exodus by now. If you could count, there is hundreds of officers 'kiri-kanan' like me. I believe, like me, they will retire with the same post that they held on their first day of work. Really, this place is full of predators.

Here, we have Napoleons.[230] They are behaving like big elephants. Their big ears do not care to listen. However, their bodies shake whenever they hear the king of the forest (lion) roar.[231] However, they are very smart. They always make the king (of the forest) happy by saying everything is OK around here. However, they forget that a small fly could destroy a big elephant. I am applying for an optional retirement. I think I am one of those 50 odd 'pegawai kiri-kanan' you heard were going for early retirement.

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[228] The excellence award is divided into four categories: upward, horizontal, parallel and static. The first two are really counted as excellence.

[229] Page boy/girl with influence. In here, Halimah is referring the term to various stories in the Malay Annals. In the text, *budak raja* could kill some one on the slightest cue from the king. They follow orders blindly.

[230] A villainous character in Orwell's Animal Farm.

[231] A minister or people of high places

As I said before, there are so many injustices and inequalities in here. In economic terms, there is no fair distribution of wealth. There is a lot of favouritism and parochialism going on. One of the senior officers used to say that those are symptoms of poor leadership without a strategy. According to him, a strategist is a leader who has skill and knowledge, and can distinguish what is relevant or irrelevant. He added that a strategist should do his job and not delegate his job to others. When you are so busy flying around the world, you have no time to do your job properly. Getting others to do your main job is not empowerment, you know. I read about this thing once or twice while I was in the (United) States.

For me, a strategist knows how to make an organisation cherish. Most important of all, a strategist must learn things that he/she does not know, even if that knowledge is coming from an office boy. Here, people at the top think they know everything.

Many people say we are tired people without the old semangat.[232] They see us, as staff that are just *makan gaji*[233], like many newcomers with no history of *perjuangan*. People can say what they want but how can they understand the feeling of being hungry if they themselves have never been hungry. They can describe in a thousand words of imagination but there is no real emotion. They never wear our shoes of being stuck in the same place for the last 15 or 20 years. They do not know how hard we try to make the management see new things, yet end up back at square one. Sometimes I think it is fate to be a cucumber[234] in this place.

Hang Nadim

Jawa, male, K3

Now we are being transferred everywhere. The management calls this reorganisation of the staff. Do you remember Yob? If you go against their wishes you are in trouble. You know Yob. Once he was a head of department. He had a PhD. In this reorganisation, he was given a small room at the corner of the floor with no clerk or power like before. For me it was a demotion. Maybe he shines too much, and the management does not like it. They have their own P.H.D (Penyakit Hasad Dengki = negative envy). He was being penalised for being too clever. I heard people up there branded him as a rebel (*kaki lawan*). For me the action of putting him in that corner is an act of putting him in a refrigerator. Every one in the Malay literature world knows how good he is. He loves literature. After such treatment by the management, he left Palmyra. You see the management could not differentiate between a

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[232]Spirit

[233] Work for the sake of getting a wage

[234] Referring to a Malay proverb. Allegorically it is about a relationship between a cucumber and a durian (*durio zibenthinus*), a strong and spiky fruit. In this context, a cucumber is always a loser upon being hit by or moving toward a durian.

stone and a diamond.[235] Maybe he shone too much, and the management did not like it. He was penalised for being too clever and not following the mainstream politics. His fault was that he did not know how to caress top people's buttocks.

The management will be too happy if many managers 'turn themselves into stone.' They like mute officers who behave like sheep.[236] As such, they love officers who ask no questions, but just follow their cleverness. Yob was a victim. He was a sacrificial lamb like Hang Nadim. I pitied him. Many of his close colleagues were too afraid to speak to him as if he had a contagious disease. They distanced themselves from him as to be near to him was a risky business. To the management, he was some sort of a rebel. As such, his associates were rebels too.[237] I do not care about such things. Maybe that was the reason why I could not get promotion in the recent promotion exercise.

This reorganisation created a lot of chaos. Staff moved from this room to another. The management even did a department re-locating programme. Simply, this period is marked by a lot of changing places. There is a lot of confusion. It is like the divide-and-rule strategy used by the colonialist British in conquering Malay states. Now, the management is dividing the territory (of power) among them. When people are so tired of the confusion, they give up thinking hard. As such, they end up accepting the 'cleverness' of the management.

I like change. The issue is that they put the right people in the wrong place. They said that staff are repositioned on the merit of qualifications, experiences and interest. If you questioned their 'cleverness,' they even asked you to resign. They said we must behave nicely but they are kasar.[238] What kind of management is it that preached at people to be religious, but does all kasar things? Well, people may say I am a whistle blower. However, could you not stand up against uncompassionate people? The other day the CEO came over to our 'village' and asked Sigma, our acting 'headman' who is the most able person to be the Head of department. What would you feel if you were Sigma? Now, he has gone away to a foreign land to teach the Malay language. It is an opportunity for him to run away from the Palmyra for a while.

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[235] *Yang mana satu batu yang mana satu permata* (A Malay proverb).

[236] See Keeley (1988) for a useful elaboration on the issue of 'sheep' among followers in organisations.

[237] During the course of this submission of my thesis, it was rumoured that Yob ran away with some important manuscripts. Perhaps it is an act of revenge against his unfair treatment by Palmyra.

[238] Rough; impolite; ill-mannered

They are talking nuts

Longman, male, K3

What re-organisation are you talking about? It is a programme of 'cut and paste.' We are being transferred everywhere regardless of our experiences. Take me for example. For most of my working life, that is more than 20 years, I eat and sleep with the magazine business. With their stroke of pen, I must do something related to book production. I must start from zero again. The management is throwing my experience into the drain. I heard that another chap with a first class honours in literature is being transferred to the language department. Like him, what can I do?

I believe I cannot do well in this new job related to book publishing. I have little interest and little knowledge in that job. I have no experience with the subject. My interest, my dream, my ambition is with the magazine. I just cannot accept the management rationale. To them we as arts people can be put anywhere, as we are not scientists or architects. We are professionals in our own right. Well, their arguments are stronger as they are woven with authoritative power.

The management team does not take much account of our opinions. They are only listening to a certain group of people. Maybe and it could be that their dreams and ambitions are different from ours. Our dreams are to make this organisation a centre of excellence in literature and language, and at the same time make people understand the spirit of language struggle. I believe the moment Datuk left, this organisation became a cyber cop agency. That cop walks in agile and looks great. Tap.Tap.Tap. Yet, his body is full of wires and chips, no soul.

You know, nowadays the administration department is becoming bigger and bigger. They determine which way we should go. They decide what is the best for this organisation. On the contrary, language and literature men and women are no more in centre stage. Ironically, they call this an institute for language and literature. Is this organisation an institute? The people up there are so clever in using nice terms to camouflage their actions. That is why you will hear words such as reengineering, organisation learning, organisational citizenship, strategic alliances and many more current management terms.

Nowadays, they are talking about selling our language and literature as a product in the marketplace. *Homo economicus* thinking, I suppose. However, they do not build our product based on professionalism. Our literature men/women and linguists are no more seen as the backbone of this organisation. In the recent excellence award ceremony, most of the recipients were administrators. Again, if they really know what they are talking about, it is fine. I give you an example. Previously, we printed 10,000 copies of a novelette in the first run.

Now, it is reduced to 2,000 copies. They say we have the problem of selling if we print more. **They are talking nuts** (in English). **I would say they are talking nuts** (in English).

People at the top have no idea how to sell things. They must be creative. I know many people would say I am just a man who talks a lot. As you know, one of the previous CEOs wanted to close the production of magazine Student. I was the editor of the magazine. I told him to give me a year to prove that the magazine could be a best seller. I went up and down, met important people that could change the situation, for example people in the Ministry of Education. As a result, the magazine was adopted as the magazine-in-the-class. Now the magazine circulation is more than 150,000.

People up there just want an easy job. They should 'catch' people in the Ministry of Education and plan a strategy. For example, they could utilise the 'power' of the Prime Minister and our Chief Secretary of State. I mean we must use their influence. They can issue directives for every public servant to read books. Small favours with great impact, you know. However, people up there do not want to think in this way. I think they know the important of 'catching' important people, which could make things different. However, that type of 'catching' is not in their best personal interest. They will 'catch' top guns when it is important to them. For example in asking for posts. They asked for those posts with their own interest. In their head, they would say one of those new posts should be mine. To the management my ideas were no good. However if some one from the top says a similar thing they would take immediate action. In here, the management would jump like sheep whenever a wahyu comes down from some one at the top.

At last, our hopes and dreams for a better Palmyra are becoming a kind of play with no main script. If the scripts were not there, various actors start to produce their own script that is assuming the script is the right one. If the storyline is not consistent with the management, you are off from the stage. If you are a lousy scriptwriter or having no script at all, your future is at stake. However, script or scripts, if you are under the gaze of the top people you are safe. I think I need to run to cool places to cool my head. When I took unpaid leave for a year last year, I felt my head was lighter. Now, everything is heavy. Now, I feel not *ghairah* coming to work. There is no more *syahwat*[239] for doing the job. There is no more erection. I am planning to retire early. Recently my superior gave me a form to do MA. I tore up the form in front of her. I told her the offer came too late. What contribution could I make to this organisation with that new knowledge if I have only a few more years left? Now I am thinking of building a house in my village and living a quiet life.

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[239] Referring to a situation of sexual drive. In the above context, it refers to a low enthusiasm at work.

Hot worms

Makcik Auntie, female, K1-2

Where should I start? Yes, about change in here. The people up there want to change this organisation but many people are unhappy with that. Maybe, the management is too textbook oriented. Thus, sometimes they tend to ignore or forget about small things that bother staff at the bottom. For example, the issue of parking cars. Recently some of our staff fought with each other over this issue. It never happened before as far back as I can remember. We always considered each other as members of one big family. The management should foresee the problem. They must not compare the issue with other offices. Since inception, staff parked their cars within the office ground. It is a privilege that staff enjoy.

I do not know what to say about the management. They usually cannot see other people's ideas as important until someone from outside says so. We wanted to implement information technology (IT) in our department, but the management rejected it outright. They said we have no money to spare for such a project. I find that answer is silly as they have money for overseas trips. In fact, we had money to sponsor some conferences overseas. There seemed to be unlimited budgets for such trips. However, when some politicians started to mention the importance of IT, the management behaved like 'hot worms'.[240] They did not believe IT was good until someone outside said it was good. That goes with staff recognition too. When former staff were mentioned as good by their new organisation, the management started to blow their big trumpet by saying how this organisation had produced good people. Yet while those staff were here, no such recognition was given. At worse, he or she was seen a threat to their status quo. It is politicking, you know.

In relation to that IT thing, I could remember what Longman used to say. He told me how he was confused by the management behaviour. They talk about new technology but they cannot convey the idea to many staff that computers are not new versions of a typewriter. On one occasion, one of our senior officers embarrassed himself and the Palmyra to a certain extent when he pressed the mouse like a TV remote control. The officer thought the mouse was just a version of remote control. Yet, this type of people talks about the importance of IT. An irony is it not?

What we need now is an on-line system for everybody. By utilising it, we can work much faster. The management has launched a home page and visitor book on the net. They are so good in giving a good performance to the outsiders. I believe that surfers would think staff here are all net-literate. If you go around asking people about this net-thing, many of them say they know about it but never surf. Ironically, most of them have their passwords. I heard in

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[240] *Cacing kepanasan* (Malay). In this context is becoming exited, hurry-flurry

some department, chief clerks keep the staff passwords. They think it is a secret thing. What I see is that many staff use the computer to play games.

At present, people at the top are very busy with promoting our Malay language globally. They signed many agreements with overseas institution. In their excitement to sign all those agreements, are they not aware about thousand of eyes looking at them and their behaviours? People at large will start to wonder why Kaypi is so busy with all these signings. As *orang lama* I think you could still remember our previous CEO and his associates who went all over the world under the cloak of visiting book fairs for the sake of book development in Palmyra. Yet, many staff saw no real book development.

I am afraid these memoranda signings are just another way to justify some other interests. Let us say more *makan angin* (holiday) than work. Nowadays many people look at Malay language with their eyes half open. What is the point of talking about globalising if we have a real problem here? Now, many people feel Malay language has no class. What a shame to go around the world to promote Malay language, talk big out there, but at the same time you fail in your own court. I think the problem lies with Kaypi. I know he tried his best to help this organisation from declining. But, he is not clear of what he wants to do with this organisation.

The Brahmins

Tina, female, K3

Good to hear that you have left this organisation. Today there is so much politics around here. Most people from other counties feel that the Kokosians are gaining the upper hand. They feel that they are being sidelined. Many senior officers feel that they are being seen as 'no good' officers when some one from outside was selected as our new CEO. Many of them took this issue seriously and so they packed their bags and left. Yeah, they could do it as they are taking the optional retirement scheme. What about us who must stay on? You are lucky as you can escape all these disorders. Our loans with Palmyra shackled our legs. We must carry on with our lives here.

In simple terms, there are two classes of people in here, the special people and the commoners. The Kokosians are becoming a kind of Brahmins.[241] They are becoming the untouchable people. As Brahmins, they think they know everything. In their view, small people should not question their cleverness in managing Palmyra. They act as if small people have no useful ideas. Worse, if you show your cleverness you could even end up being branded as a villain by the management. Why? Firstly, you disrupt their plan. Secondly, it makes the management think about what you said. Such action makes their brain 'confused'. Ha ha ha.

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[241] The highest caste in the Hindu caste system

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You know Longman? I used to work with him. He said the management ego is insulting to our professionalism as officers here. He gave me an example of how we do our publishing work here. He said those powerful decision-makers up there often do not know really what they are doing. Often their way of doing work is really an insult to our professionalism as an editor. He gave me an example. A manuscript arrived → the clerk recorded it → it was given to the Head → he decided who is the editor to work with the manuscript → the editor suggested a reviewer → received a reviewer report → the editor writes a report → presented to a Publishing Committee and the committee decided the fate of the manuscript without reading it. If I write a good report, there will be a novelette in a few months time. Thus, the decision to publish or not is totally dependent on my report. Therefore, what is the point of those long red tapes? The majority of the committee members know nothing about the subject that they want to decide. If their reason is to filter bad things in the manuscript, they should remember that an editor is a professional worker. They must trust the worker. Yet, they are talking about empowerment. I do not know what type of management book they are using.

I think people up there do not realise that we small people are lighthouses. To Kakang, small people are lighthouses. He used the term during the departmental meeting with the management. Every department must have that meeting with the CEO. In that programme, the Head must give a speech. Some Heads used the opportunity to buy the heart of the CEO and his cohorts. He did story telling. Have you heard the story? It is a story about a ship in a foggy weather.

Once there was a big ship. On one dark foggy night, the right hand man to the captain saw so many small lights. He believed that all those lights were coming from various small boats in the area. Even though he was just a senior officer, crews believed him to be the true captain. To the senior officer, small boats must follow the big ship. He cried aloud. "Give way! Give way!" Yet, the lights remained unmoved. The man was very angry, as the so-called small boats did not take his order. As he approached the lights, it was apparent to him that those lights were coming from various small lighthouses in the area. Those lights were actually helping the big ship to enter the harbour of dreams. However, the man ignored their importance. To him only the light of the big ship was important. He refused to enter the harbour. He steered the big ship into dark waters.

I do not know what is the management reaction toward the story. The advice is "hot". As we Malays used to say, " who bite chillies will feel its hotness." [242] Anyway, Kakang's situation is different. He could say things without fear, as he was going to retire in a few months' time. He could escape the wrath of the untouchables. That is why he ignored advice from some quarters to be less vocal. They said to keep quiet is the best way to stay happy and out of

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[242]*Siapa makan cili dia berasa pedasnya* (Malay proverb)

stress. Kakang could have done that; "relaxing" prior to retirement. However, he landed himself in management's bad book. I am sure he will not get a contract job with Palmyra if he applies for one.

Kakang told me he had nothing to be afraid of as he was telling the truth. Furthermore, according to Kakang he had been in Palmyra for a long time before the present management team[243] arrived. He loved Palmyra and its people. That is why he dared to speak. He was concerned, as the majority of people in the Palmyra have no other place to go, people go except in here.

You know most of us here are tied here with various loans. For the first five years, you are tied with a car loan. Then you are tied with housing loans. By the time you are free from loans you are already forty plus. You have no chance of going to other places. If you want to get out you must have a lot of money to repay loans. Besides, by then you will already settled down with your family. There is something strange about doing the job here. You fall in love with it. That is why previously I even came to the office on most Sundays, and dared to go into the deep jungle for an assignment to complete my job. The risk of moving to new places is too high to bear. Perhaps, that kind of love is our main weakness. The management must not utilise our love to further their interest of bullying us.

You know, now the management is talking about change. They are telling us that we old-timers are so afraid of change. They say that we hate change. To them we are resisting change. I do no think so. I hear that they are telling some staff that we are clinging hard to our nostalgic feelings. From what I hear, most of my colleagues, even myself personally, we like change. We are expecting something big to happen under this new CEO. However, we do not get it. If this type of change continues, the real Palmyra will be down into the drain in five years time. I think if Laksamana, our great language warrior, is still around the present chaos could be averted. Under him, the Palmyra flourished. I believed things would be different. I believe there will be no chaos like the present. I never worked under his leadership. I feel I know him thorough my readings and stories told by seniors. He is a man of *perjuangan*.

The rainbow

Zakiah, female, K3

I have been here long enough. Well, I am wood at my age. You know I am too old to move out or get a new job outside. I have waited too long to see a positive change. For the past twenty-five years I served under several CEO`s. When they come, they say they would bring changes. You are happy to hear that. However, it is more like seeing a rainbow after a rain. It

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[243] The Cocosian at the top

is beautiful is it not? Then it disappears. However, you still hope for a much longer rainbow. Again, the rainbow disappears. After a time you do not really know whether you are waiting or not for changes. Your feeling of *tak kisah* [244] wraps you up. I have one or two years left before I am off. I cannot wait to be at home looking after my children and my family. I find happiness and calm at home.

Twist your tongue

Rahmat, male, K3

You know nowadays Kokosians rule our place. We must learn their dialect. You know, the other day I told my friend to ask Palmyra to conduct a crash course on how to speak the Kokosian dialect for non-Kokosians. I think his suggestion is right. Now we must learn to twist our tongue to speak that twang. We are expanding and the management say we are going to open a branch in the Kokos County. One day this city office will become a branch while the one in the Kokos County will be our new HQ. I am too old to learn the dialect. My tongue is not soft anymore. I am going to quit and work in a construction company.

Rizq

Ayub, Male, K1-2

Everything is OK here. Over all it is OK. Well some people are not happy with this new change. It is common for people when something is not of their liking. For example if you do not get a promotion while your friend gets it, all bad things about the said promoted officer are flying around. We never give any explanation to any unsuccessful candidates why they do not get a job. We just write saying that their application for the post is unsuccessful. Aha, thank you for applying. If we say that his/her work is not up to standard, he/she will say that the successful one is no better. Their question is why he/she is not getting the job. It will go on and on. As a worker, they must accept the idea that their turn will come soon. They should be patient and accept that their rizq[245] is not there yet.

I know many staff are unhappy with certain management actions. I have suggested they should write in the suggestion box. They never write. They are too happy to talk at the stalls and behind our back. They prefer to write *surat layang* or make graffiti in the toilets. For me, if they are sincere enough or brave enough, they should come, talk and tell us. I see that people, who are sincere and good, are not afraid to take risks. You know when you are good you are valuable even out of this organisation. Well if you are not happy but you are good, you have no problem getting a good job outside.

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[244] Do not care. Que sera sera

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You know we give workers various venues to air their grievances. We make sure everybody talks in meetings. We note down their points. Heads of department can bring it to inter-departmental meetings. If the issues are serious enough, we brought them to the attention of the CEO. For me, workers should not feel afraid or fear to tell their opinions about the right and the wrong in here. What I see now are too many passive people around. They do not want to talk. They must be brave to speak the truth. The problem is people around here are sceptical with the management sincerity. The management should do something about it.

The female snakehead

Mek, female, K3

In recent times, I cannot comprehend what the people up there are going to do with us. The weather around here is hazy. We cannot see things clearly. We hope for change. The management say change is on the way. However, we cannot see the seed of change except for shifting of offices and re-positioning staff. They introduced Priority Work targets but not enough information was given to the staff. They talked about all the best things in the world in this programme. I think they are very good in playing politics. They have this magnificent skill in writing a planning programme. If you want to take a loan from a bank for a project, you must present them with a good working paper. Yet, how many of the projects survived?

I heard the management want to move Siti and me[246] to another place where our ex-boss now becomes the Head. A female boss. Ha ha ha, females working under a lady. There is nothing special about that. That lady 'eats' me. She behaved like a snakehead. You know that fish? It eats its own fries![247] We do not really understand that lady boss. For her others are not as good as herself. She gave us low appraisal marks for one year. At that time, we did not know the consequences. Then a promotion exercise was in the air. We were not called up for an interview. Many of our juniors were called, but not us. In our opinion, some of them are far worse or no better than us. However, their boss wrote good grades on their sheets. Why should she do that to us? If we are just coming to office to sleep, we do not feel bad at all.

Well, after a while we realised that both of us were not 'frequenters' to her room. Sometimes I feel I waste my time for not escorting her and following her buttocks. Ha. Ha. Ha. We must try that trick on our present boss. Ha haha. Again, we have no luck doing that. Our present boss is almost an invisible lady. Whenever we have an important meeting she vanishes. The usual excuse, emergency leave. As such, our voices are not heard properly at the highest level. Often Kim, a Kokosian lady, goes to the meeting as her representative and as her reporter.

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[246] Female K3 officer; 15 years with Palmyra

[247] An expression derived from Malay proverb: Haruan makan anak. In reality, the male snakehead eats his own fries rather than the female. A contradiction to many feminists who thought about the tyranny of patriachy.

Kim is just another K3 like us. She is there to listen. She could not make decisions. She is just a reporter to our lady boss.

At present, Kim is the most favoured K3 officer around here. Mariam, the most senior of all, is not a favourite, as many believe she knows too many secrets about our boss. Both of them are more or less contemporaries. Esah, a Kokosian, is being sent to further her studies. I heard she was asked by the management to do it. I believe the management has something in their mind planned for her career.

By this reorganisation, they are putting Kokosians everywhere. They are rearranging staff so that Kokosians can be heads in the future. I heard Kim does not receive any allowance for being the reporter. Why does she want to be a 'reporter' all the time? She could ask some one else to do the job. I think Kim is being groomed for the future. You will see the outcome in five years time when our boss and Mariam retire. Those people at the top are very smart. This reorganisation is a political game of promoting associates now or in the future. This action is what we Malays call 'sembunyi dalam nampak' (visible hiding). It is like when you want to conceal your embarrassment, but people can see your blushed face. They are promoting Kokosians.

I would like to narrate you a story, as told by Siti, about how the management make their selection concerning the excellence reward. One of Siti's friends was selected to be a member of the committee. Upon receiving all the names, the management team would sit down and decide who would be bestowed with the award. According to Siti's friend, when they came to one Kokosian name, one of the *tali* men exclaimed, huh, *orang kita*. (That person later was awarded as an excellent staff). Little did they realise that Siti"s friend is non-Kokosian. Personally, I think I am in their list. To the management, I am not a pure breed. Even though I have Kokosian ancestry, I was fed with waters from different rivers, not from the Kokos River.

You know sometimes I would like to come to the office and turn myself into one of the 'frequenters' to the boss. However, I view that type of behaviour as immoral. You may see such high moral behaviour as our strength, but it is also our weakness. At times, we feel that we are being manipulated for being 'clean.' By doing work, I am doing *amanah*. It is trust and responsibility. In my view, taking a salary without doing a job is a sinful behaviour. *Haram*. [248] You may call it my strength in confronting this chaos, but it is also my weakness. I think the management knows this little secret. They know that we will work hard due to our ethical conscience. Thus, when we do some lagging, the management will remind us that work is *ibadah*. They will say that we are an ungrateful lot. Then back in your room you feel guilty about your bad behaviour.

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[248] Sinful deeds; punishable. Taking a salary "illegally" would cause your liver to go black which in turn would corrupt the soul. See Chapter 4 for brief explanation about the issue of the liver.

I feel at times I am being manipulated for being honest, 'clean' and being in love [with Malay language and literature]. The management is very clever in 'playing' around with our conscience. They know we will not tool down due to our religious conscience. The management always advised us to look into the long mirror before going home. They said it is part of *muhasabah*, a kind of auditing about your day in the office. Now, when I look at the mirror, I see my distressful face.

The paracetamol is not enough!

Siti, female, K3

Hmm, a *bahtera* (ark) or no *bahtera* we are going to be the same post, K3, next year. Whenever there is a promotion exercise, the management tell us in advance how many vacancies are available. What is the point behind that? It means that they have already someone to fill the post. More often than not, that interview is just a formality as the successful one has been chosen earlier. Imagined or real our 'information' about it so far has turned out to be true. Therefore, why should we bother to go for an interview? The management on the other hand would blame us for not attending it. At times, we go for an interview because we want to see what it looks like. We have no hope at all of getting a promotion.

In here, if you want to go up you must put the softest cushion under the buttocks of the people in power. You must very good at impressing the management. Perhaps, you should turn yourself into an ingratiating person. It is a paradox, I think. When we were under the Headmaster, we waited for someone to come over for a change. We were waiting for a new CEO to do a good change. Now, it seems to be a vicious circle. It is as if we are going into the crocodile's mouth after being for so long under the claw of a tiger. Clinically, this organisation is sick. A paracetamol is not enough to cure the pain. We need a doctor. Not bogus doctors like Dr. Zainal[249], eh.

We want a good change. The management should plan the change efficiently. They should explain clearly to us what is going on. The CEO should be a strong and brave man. He must not 'fly' all the time. He must not be too dependent on his circle of advisers. We believe they only tell him all the good stories.

For me, this organisation is like a big country with uneven development. Thus, a certain department is much better and much more loved than others. Here, toilets also have grades. Some of them could be classified as of first class standard. I think sometimes, if you are good worker, you are going to die early. You will be given more jobs, and then you have so many responsibilities. As such, you are prone to more mistakes. More mistakes mean you will get

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[249] It is a name of the famous bogus doctor in the city of Kuala Lumpur. The story about him appeared in the local newspaper years ago.

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low appraisal marks, and less chance of going up. So now what should I do? I think we should stop work. Ha ha ha.

You tell the management, I am a dead duck!

Hajar, female, K3

Work for me is a responsibility. It is an *amanah* (sacred trust). Now, work around here is no more based on the spirit of *perjuangan*. Nowadays, work is seen as a way to earn a living. I believe everything that happens here is rooted deeply with the leadership issue. Staff are looking to the top for guidance. Ha ha ha. Do you see the big slogan outside there, Leadership by Example". He heh heh.

The management does not set a good example to the staff. At one time, they spent and spent our money in the name of attending various book festivals around the globe. Now, the same globetrotting is happening but under a new name: signing memoranda of understandings for the advancement of Malay language and literature. Now we are waiting for results. We do not want to end up as money providers to certain parties by virtue of signing a memorandum of understanding. They have the meat, we have the water.

Now outsiders govern us. We have many good internal candidates, but they are pushed aside. People outside there can see who is a 'jewel' or a 'stone' in here. One of our senior officers now is a big man in one of the biggest daily papers in the country. I heard if he had stayed on, he would have been sent to the Borneo office. This is an act of pushing someone from the centre of power. This is dirty politics.

Nowadays, people do not want to put themselves in the line of fire. Every one wants to be safe. That is why many people just keep quiet and do not speak about the spirit of *perjuangan* at work. Perhaps, they speak about the perjuangan when the management is around. It is just a kind of performance. If they were unhappy with the management, they would say it behind their back. They write *surat layang*, they write short stories or even an editorial.

Why do you want to take risks and have difficult times? You want to be a hero. This is not a Hindustani film where the villains will be shot dead and the hero will triumph at the end. What counts here is the perception. If the management think you are good, you can climb the ladder. That is why many people take the attitude of more listening and watching more and less talking. I am going to be dead if you go up there and tell management what I am saying. (*Mati saya*). I am going to be a dead duck.

For me to become a K3 officer is a hard long way. I took an off-campus course on my own initiative. The management at that time did not appreciate my effort. They did not give me a scholarship. They did not give me any leave. I took my annual leave to attend lectures. Hmm, like other off-campus students here. However, some staff do get facilities. I do not why. I felt discriminated against at times. Thank God, when I got the degree, they gave me this position. *Mati saya.* By telling all these, I am dead.

This reorganisation programme creates a lot of confusion. The management believe that what is wrong with this organisation has something to do with their staff. As you know when one finger is pointing to others, three other fingers are pointing back at you. Only the thumb remains neutral. I observe that the real problems come from many Heads. Sometimes I wonder whether they are fit enough to be there? Whatever, the most visible thing that I can see from this reorganisation is the enlargement of the empires of many people at the top.

Many people said that I got this K3 job because I told the management people about my Kokosian ancestry. I do not know about that. In the interview, I told them about my family background. I told them in passing about my 'small drop' of Kokosian blood. Then I heard one of the interviewers said to another man. "Oh, she is *orang kita*". I do not know whether that is my high point. I believe my experiences and my qualifications speak for me. I would not like to inflate myself. I think I was the only candidate in there who could draw and knows literature. Some people made a story out of that. One of my friends, Jawa, even implied cynically that he could not get the post as he is from the land of Shifting Sand not from the land of the White Sand.[250] I think many still believe that I attained my position largely due to the Kokosian factor. What can you do to make them not speak about it? Take a gun and fire them?

This organisation is sick. The management behaviour makes it worse. Why do I say so? The management talk about the culture of excellence. They say that staff must make efforts to increase their stock of knowledge. Yet, when you are seen to be too clever, you will get trouble. Often, you will be given more work. In return, you will get more stress. Nevertheless, often with the same pay.

If you have talent, they (the management) will open the ground for your creativity. However, if you shine too much, it will land you in a pit. Often, they will say that you are neglecting your office work in pursuing your creativity. In order to be safe, you must release your talent in some place where they cannot cut you down with their long knife of power. Many old people who like ingratiating themselves do not like you if you overshadow them. However, many younger staff often fall into the trap unknowingly. The youngsters feel great when the management gives them the additional task. They believe that it could be used as a bonus in the promotion interview. The management gives them hope. However, if you live with that

hope you will despair, as the outcome of an interview will be different. That goes for many people who go to further their studies. On return to the office, they expect they can use the new knowledge personally and organisationally. Often they are returned to their old 'table.' Then they feel useless. They withdraw themselves deeper into the sea of antagonism. A vicious circle, I think.

Here, you must not be too visible in order to be safe. As such no matter how much you hate ceremonies, you must make an effort to be there. Ha, when you are in the circle, you are seen as a loyal citizen. In this regard, the management always remind us that we must not criticise Palmyra in public. People outside there still see us as great. I believe they base their perceptions on our past glorious history. In other words, you must not spill beans in the market. Please, do not tell the management what I am saying. If you do, I am dead.

I am not born to ingratiate

Din, male, K3

I had been awarded twice for excellence. I was very happy as the management appreciated my hard work. However, when it came to the promotion exercise I was sidelined. Someone with less experience, much junior than me got the post. This is like a hard slap to my face. If I am no good, why did they give me awards? Now my motivation to work hard is low. I have even closed my heart on wanting to go up the ladder. I do not want to think about it anymore. Otherwise I will get sick and stressed out. From what I gather at present there is no standard promotion policy in Palmyra. In most cases outsiders who sit on the interview panel decide who is going to get the post. In the recent exercise for a K3 post, some old-timers were unhappy as newcomers got most of the jobs.

I know what is wrong with me. I am not so good at "showing" myself to the top people. That is my mistake. I thought working hard pays. However, I was not born to caress someone's buttock. I was not born to ingratiate. Well, the best way now is to make do with what I get. I must learn to accept the reality of this political place. I must live with the idea that in here career development is low although, in the matter of looking after the welfare of the staff, Palmyra is the best in this city. For example in terms of medical assistance, car and housing loans.

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[250] The Shifting Sand is a title of an old melancholic Malay song. It is a place in the southern part of West Malaysia. The White Sand, meanwhile, is a place in the Kokos County, where the CEO, was born.

The ship of sages

Lily, female, K3

One day while the captain and foreign sages were talking, the sail of the ship broke down. The captain immediately asked one of the crew to repair it. Meanwhile the captain felt unhappy, as most of his right hand men were not in the meeting. He could only see three 'right' sages. The probation sages were not invited to the ceremony, as they must work diligently for the sake of achieving the ship's excellence. He asked the Chief sage about the senior sages' whereabouts. Then the Chief sage asked the Deputy sage and the Deputy asked the crew. The Captain tried hard to make sense of the situation. Then, a probation sage came to the deck with a letter. He wanted the Captain's signature. The sage wanted to explain about the letter to the Captain, but he was ignored.

A sage from Balakistan came forward and asked the captain about his 'busy-ness'.

"It is not busy-ness with work which is the sign of an excellent worker?" asked the captain.

"Indeed. However, busy-ness could lead to wasting energy, time and money, as busy people have no time to think. Thinking in a calm condition leads to the path of truth that is with the help of our God. Remember, we are just a speck of dust in the eyes of God. As a human being, we make mistakes, but we must not repeat the same mistake twice.

The captain felt an indirect hit on his face. After a while the Deputy sage came back reporting about other sages' absence. "They were busy".

The grand meeting went as planned. Suddenly another crew member turned up telling the captain about the state of the navigator. "He has fainted in his office". A Chinese sage brought along his herbs and went to the office. At that moment, the same probation sage arrived. He told the captain about his work. The captain looked a while and asked him to show his work to the senior sage for review.

"He is not in the office at the moment. He has lost interest in work," said the probation sage.

The captain's mind was chaotic.

A sage from Pakistan came near to the captain. He asked about the ship's collection of classics. To him every sage in the ship should read Malay classics (*hikayats*) as they contained jewels of examples.

"In managing this ship, we must not rely on the Japanese way of management or Peter Drucker ideas alone," said the sage. "I myself have read the Malay Annals more than ten times. In there, the story of Kitul[251] is very relevant. In every place, Kitul exists. As Heads, we must be careful".

The Chinese sage came back to the captain telling about the condition of the navigator.

"Too much work?" asked one sage.

"Not really. He did not know how to do work," answered the Chinese sage.

"What do you mean by such statement? He has been the navigator for the last 15 years. It is impossible that he did not know to navigate this ship", replied the captain.

"Actually he had severe tension. Every sage asked him about the destination. He could not answer, as he had no answer. An answer must come from the top".

"I have asked every sage to make this ship move. That means the ship is moving", said the captain with a heavy breath.

"Moving alone is not enough, captain. Its destination must be clear. It must come from the head of the sages and intellectuals like you, captain. That is why we must not be too busy. I am not saying that all sages here are not working. As far as I could see, every sage here is working very hard, but the ship moves sideways, to and fro, and not forward.

The captain, with a loud voice, then asked all sages regardless of their status to attend the meeting. The sages gave the meeting many good ideas. The foreign sages were surprised with their intellect.

"Why they are still in probation?" asked the sage from Balakistan.

"They are not excellent in their works," said the captain.

Later the probation sage came over with a trolley of documents.

"My captain, you could have shown to our foreign sages the big projects. They were all there".

Another disaster struck while all the sages were talking. The anchor of the ship was broken.

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[251] One of the characters in the Malay Annals. His involvement with corruption among high places played a significant part in the downfall of Malaccan kingdom in 1511.

"How could that have happened?" asked the captain.

"We do not know," said one of the crew.

"You mean the anchor has never been inspected."

"We have no directive to do it"

"Everything needs a directive, eh. Where is your senior sage?"

"Fishing", said the crew.

The captain then asked the crew to find Deputy sage 15.

"He is sick as the engine is too loud", answered the crew.

"The engine has never been serviced before?"

"Occasionally."

"What are you doing all this while?" asked the captain.

"There is no directive for us to do it. So, we played carom".

The captain breathed heavily. His face was white. The ship was floating in the ocean with no anchor and destination.

Myopia

Sari, male, K1-2

The climate here is very much related to the personality of the management. From what I see there is a communication gap between the top and the middle level. Often what is preached at the top is lost along the way before reaching the bottom of the line.

I do not want to say bad things about the management but, at present, our organisation is very sick. You must *pandai-pandai* in doing this research. I believe in you. This issue is very sensitive to the top people. You must be careful. You can make up your mind about the state of the climate here. My suggestion is that this Palmyra needs a surgery. However, the management people are so afraid to admit it. They always say this organisation is OK. You do

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not have to do deep research to see it. In here, editors are expected to write or do reading. Now, how many editors do write?

If you go to the Documentation Centre, you could count how many K3 browse through all those magazines and journals. Even such glaring examples cannot change the management's belief about the state of Palmyra. I believe such myopia is related to management's unclear understanding about our mission. Yet, they are talking about knowledge workers, knowledge management. They should not behave like that. I am sure they know how dangerous it is to pretend everything is all right. If my reading is right as shown in various speeches, they read a lot of management books. Sometimes I wonder what are they getting out of the various management books. I gather various authors give good ideas about management. Yet, why has the present climate prevailed?

I think it is very difficult to tell people up there about mismanagement if all the time they say we already know what it is. I take, for example, conducting a meeting. From what I see many managers do not know how to do it. At the end, the meeting turns into a conversation stable. As such, many nitty gritty things consume more time than the actual agenda. Is it not awkward? People used to say that if you want to bend a bamboo you should start from a shoot.[252] It is hard to change when you are old. In one of our religious texts, a scholar wrote that there are many types of ignorant people. Among others are people who know they are ignorant but do not want to accept their ignorance.

As an organisation, this Palmyra must be nourished all the time. It is like the Tomaguchi cyberpet. You must make sure the pet is looked after. If you fail to do that, the pet dies. For me this organisation must be the voice of wisdom and the centre of Malay advancement. I mean through language and literature in the widest sense, not merely restricted to all those linguistic things or literature theories.

I do not want to pull their *sarong*

Tengku, male, K3

Last month, the praying hall (*surau*) was upgraded into a mosque. It is a sign of seriousness for the CEO to bring religion in the workplace. I do not want to pray behind some of them. Many of those *imams* (prayer leader) are not 'clean'. In my understanding, it is pointless to pray behind an *imam* where you do not believe their sincerity. Do you agree? They were masquerading behind their cloaks. I know about their sins. I do not want to say they are hypocrites or not. I do not want to say they are manipulating religion for their own gain. I do not

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[252] Malay proverb.

want to pull their *kain* (*sarong*).[253] It is not good to tell bad things about others. They know what they are doing.

Palmyra needs vitamins

Desa, male, K1-2

This organisation is very much related to the Malay race. We are the last bastions of the Malays. Nevertheless, sometimes I wonder how could we pursue the idea if many staff now see this organisation as just a place for *cari makan*.[254] If I think along that line, I think computers came late to Palmyra. In 1983, I made an effort to write a paper on the importance of computers to Palmyra. That was one of my greatest happiness in my working life. Today, almost every K3 officer has a computer on his or her table. I think, at present, Palmyra is sick although 'not too sick'. It is like an old man that needs a lot of vitamins. However, many people at the top are pretending that everything is fine. Now, trust is becoming an issue. I think trust is one the fundamental issues that the management must look at. Without trust, an organisation will decline. In my office, I do not really like 'yes-sir' officers. I prefer people with opinions.

The game of *halus*

Bo, male,K1-2

I have worked here for more than 35 years. I am going to retire soon. Last week they gave me a farewell party. I gave them a speech. Some staff were moved by my speech. There was nothing important in that speech. Just the usual stuff. However, I talked with honesty, pure from my heart. After all, what could the management say if they do not like it? My time here is up. I am going to retire. I am on the rush today. However, I would like to tell you that there is a grand design by someone to kick someone out and put another in. It is a real game. *Halus*.[255] Now, the climate in Palmyra is no more like it was before.

I think Timbalan is being skewed in the game. Prior to some organisation structural changes, he was asked to go to the United States. While he was away, they made changes to the organisational chart, so much so that his power base was eroded. He was weakened by the calculated move. I think Timbalan is not smart at playing this game. Naive maybe. I think Ayub, the Director, will be the next man to be outplayed by these 'crazy-for-power' people. I told both Ayub and Timbalan that they must use their networking if they want to go up. They

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[253] Literally to make someone naked by pulling down his/her sarong. In the above context, it relates to revealing to someone a bad thing.

[254] To earn a living

[255] Refined or skilfully manoeuvred moves

said to me why not give that advice before. I laughed aloud. I thought both of them knew how to play the game. After all, they were graduates compared to me who must work hard from one rank to another in order to go to the top.

In my opinion, both Ayub and Timbalan must follow the example set by some X party politicians of how to go up the leadership ladder. First, they fix their men at the branch level, the grass root. After that, they make sure their men control the division level. He/she must make sure all these people are well fed. They give projects, whatever to these people. Then when they come to the nomination for the divisional representative to the general meeting, your name would be up. At the meeting, this type of people plays another game. This time it is more professional. They brush their shoulders with people in the corridor of power. Thus, when you go up, those people at the bottom would dare not to say anything bad. They feel *terhutang budi*.[256] This playing game is really like playing cards. When some one throws the diamond, you must know which card to throw back. If you have no knowledge about it, you become a loser. During the coffee-break session, the Timbalan told me his secret of 'no-fighting' with those 'crazy-for-power' people. He said he is a tired man with all this shadow-boxing game. He told me that he no more bothers whether he can go up anymore.

In that farewell speech, I gave a lot of advice to the management. For example, the importance of being compassionate to the staff. To me bosses should be like military commanders. They must make sure that their soldiers are all right. They must protect their soldiers in any condition. Without such behaviour, those soldiers would never give you their true support. They may say yes out of fear. If they have an opportunity, they may desert you.

I told them that, as Muslim, we are given two most important sources of guiding light, the Quran and the Tradition of Prophet Muhammad. As such, they should not stray from those lights. I told them; we might escape beautifully with our bad behaviour in here but never in the hereafter. Both Timbalan and Ayub were in tears then. I do not know what overwhelmed them. Haji was there. He laughed. I do not know why. I barked at him to listen to what I am saying. I have no fear. They knew that I am not after a post or what. I love this place. Sometimes I wonder why, when you are going to retire, people start to say you are very good. The CEO even persuaded me not to resign and offered me to head any department I want. Ironically, why before this do they think I am not so good? After this optional retirement, I want to work in one electronic publishing company as a director. You see, people outside there know what is a jewel and what is a stone.

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[256] Indebted.

Let us laugh

Specky, male, VIP

I laughed aloud when the staff said I was acting CEO when Kaypi went to Mecca. I was just a caretaker. I was not given any power to behave like one. I love doing humorous things. For me laughing reduces pain. I think one the former CEO knew it. That is why he gave me a book entitled How To Cope With Hearing Loss. I knew he searched every bookshop in the city just for me. I like it. He makes fun of me because I have this hearing problem.

Now, many changes have happened in Palmyra. To me it is good to a certain point. You know why? At least I am a VIP. On the other hand, if a change is made for the sake of making changes, I am not with that. The management should see this change as a new point of departure in doing things. I see staff career development is still like a *hantu* (ghost) here. It is an issue that really haunts us. For the last 15 years or so, the issue still cannot be solved. The management should think of a way to solve it. The personnel department should be more professional. I heard all this while people in there work based on memories and conventions rather than following a clear guideline.

I cannot understand why the communication problem between the management and the staff is happening here. This place is very small. It seems something must be wrong between them. The management actions are based on our Palmyra Act. Maybe the way the Act is implemented should be analysed. The present management realise it. That is why the management have embarked on many social programmes such as religious meetings and Q(uality) workshops. I believe resistance and acts of defiance are rooted very much in misapprehensions about the management actions. Thus, if you tell them what is going on, staff could understand it. Some Heads, I hear, do not show their leadership transparently to their staff. If this issue is not rectified, departments could turn into a battlefield. Heads should realise it.

You know, sometimes when I am in this room, I can contemplate many things. Maybe because my office is a bit isolated from others, not so many staff come and see me except on office matters. Before, many would say hello on their way to the toilet or to the canteen. From my observation, the number of old-timers is becoming small. As such, the spirit of language struggle (*perjuangan bahasa*) needs to be re-lived to a certain point by the management. We have many challenges. I think political leaders do not show a strong will to uphold Malay language as the national language. In here, many people are talking about the paradigm shift. No doubt, the term is very powerful but this way of looking at things still needs a lot of work. Until now, to many staff the relevance of producer-customer relationship is still in an infancy state.

For me managing is just a matter of sense-making. The most important of all is the human being. A human manager must know his fellow human being. In Malay culture, such things are clearly spelled out. Let take the Total Quality Circle as an example. That stuff for a long time dominated us. You could see it through various proverbs and old sayings. I talked about it in front of many people in a meeting about QCC. The only thing is that people nowadays do not bother to read or do research on their own culture.

Like a man, an organisation after a long time needs a vitamin to energise itself especially when you are sailing in the turbulent waters like now. This Palmyra is not sinking yet but the stormy weather is everywhere. Even Iacoca needed support in order to survive. Therefore, the management needs every one to support the visions of the Palmyra as enshrined in the new Act. In my view, differences of opinions should be there as that is a point of dynamics. Otherwise the place is full "yes men".

I love to write short stories. Recently I wrote a story with the title, One Satire. The story is about a king and his ministers. In one of their briefings, one minister tells the king about the situation of the state theatre. In the coming months I would like to write a story about how dangerous it is for a minister to give a good advice. In that story, the king killed the minister for being so good.

Jentayu

Musa, male, K3

Jentayu is a kind of bird that emerged from Ramayana. The bird is a symbol of freedom with many hidden meanings. It flies everywhere. To the bird, freedom is for every soul on earth. The Bird in the text is not just to make the text more interesting to read, but to convey meanings to humans. The mythic Bird is a very strong bird. It could destroy the entire world with its might. However, the Bird remained humble. It allowed small birds to fly from one stalk to another. Its strong iron beak was not used to destroy people. Yet, hypocrites who talked about freedom killed their brothers. Jentayu is a bird of thought, full of reasons and rationales. To hypocrites, Jentayu must be killed.

People at the top and people at the bottom

Musa, male, K3

Elders used to say: "The silk flag will not be merrily waving with the wind if there is no pole." It means, people at the top will not be there if there are no people at the bottom. Thus for people with brains, they will not have air if they think as such. In the beginning, people at the top are people at the bottom. When they go up, they become poor souls. They make no effort to look at their previous footprints. They just love to caress the ceiling above their head. Worse still,

they close their mind from remembering people at the bottom. Do they think of people at the bottom as just another stumps? Do they think people do not care less when being inflicted with pain? A point to remember, people at the bottom, some of them are very polite since birth. Yet, they can turn into *kurang ajar* (rude) if they are pushed to the wall.

Bijaksana

Tengku, male, K3

Many changes have happened since you left Palmyra. The new Act of 1995 really marked a new beginning. However, people up there were myopic. They could not translate it very well. There are many noises saying that the Act does not give adequate power to prosecute errand users, especially those who use ungrammatical Malay in their advertisements. What they want is some sort of 'police-like' powers. For me the management should think along strategic lines. They must be *bijaksana*.[257] Interestingly they put this word in their description about how they govern Palmyra.[258] If they could not think *bijaksana*, that showed how clever they are.

They gave the impression that the Act is no good. Many staff agreed with the point and became the management's parrot. People up there must know the beauty of law discourses. They must work and play around words in the Act. In the Act, Palmyra is given the power to persuade, to advise, and to suggest that the concerned parties should use correct Malay language. They must see things behind those words.

In our culture, there is a saying if you cannot take something by the horn you must take it by the ears.[259] Thus if you are not given the power to prosecute people like the police, you must use others to do that for you. For example, Palmyra could utilise the relevant bodies related to the advertisement industry. Who is the boss? Go and talk to him/her. If possible, use some strong politicians to voice your ideas. You know it is not my job to spell out one by one the various strategies. Those responsible for that job should be creative enough to do it. Those people up there must realise this language thing is political. In one way or another, they must adopt political strategies.

However, many people in Palmyra now lack creativity in doing their job. That is why we have so many ad-hoc activities. I give you one example that is often associated with Palmyra. When someone makes comment about ungrammatical Malay, many people in here behave like a 'panic soldier'. He/she would start to run to the arsenal house to find ammunition but the

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[257] Clever, thoughtful and wise

[258] See the third paragraph on Palmyra homepage: ... *As a corporation, the Palmyra is given the autonomous power to ... plan language and literature development and building according to bijaksana of the management* ...

[259] A Malay proverb.

enemy is already at the gate. It was no surprise to me when someone told me about our telephone lines not working when someone wanted to know something about the Malay language. On one hand, I think the officers concerned are in a dilemma themselves as Malay language is riddled with language politics. Each *mahzab* (school of thought) tries to outdo each other. Palmyra is their appropriate fighting ground. At the end of the day, the users are confused and the Palmyra is being blamed and the 'fighting' academicians kept cool in their campuses.

Really, those who claim themselves to be experts mess up our language. They are changing many terms and the spelling system. They fight among themselves on small issues that I would say are more related to taste. Cleverly or otherwise, people in Palmyra are merely a secretariat to these experts. As the final part in this fighting process, we are becoming the scapegoat in their miscalculations. You know if we are going to tell the public, we are opening an assortment of problems. The repercussion is bad on everyone. It is like smacking water in a pan. At the end of the day, your face will get wet too.[260] It is like when we cannot sell many academic books. Everyone knows that such type of books take years to clear off from the shelves. To publish such books is our social obligation to the Malays and our local universities. Which publisher outside there wants to take this unprofitable job? You cannot make money with university textbooks. Again, we are on the firing line. Various universities never come to our rescue by defending us.

You see, when you are in that precarious position, nobody out there wants to become your friend. Sometimes I wonder why certain people out there are manipulating our good behaviour. Maybe because we are weak. We have no 'real' expertise in language and literature that is recognised by academicians. Maybe the management wants us to be in that position of mediocrity. If you are too clever, you are seen as a threat. That is why they are not happy when I say many linguists are not real researchers. This issue became an agenda item in one of the management meetings.

Now, we are returning to our roots. Now the emphasis is on language and literature. Both departments are to be the flagship of Palmyra. Such importance is seen through various language development programme such as MOU's with almost all Malay Studies department here and abroad. Now, even there is an issue of making Malay language the language of ASEAN. Many staff do not understand these changes. In the new Act 1995, we are legally able to develop and promote the Malay language and literature in full force while the publication work is seen just as a supporting mechanism for both of them. This is a decision made by the government. Now, people up there see this organisation as an institute. At least in their translation from Malay to English. However, many staff and outsiders do not realise it. I do not know why they say this Palmyra is an institute. For me it is misleading. Maybe they

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[260] A Malay proverb.

want to impress foreigners. This translation change is almost a new thing to me, and it could be a secret. Well, sometimes you only know something is happening here through newspapers.

Fathers do no wrong

Tengku, male, K3

To me the issue of paradigm shift in Palmyra is an issue about *manusia*.[261] In Palmyra, the shift creates much confusion. Such confusion is happening due to the special character that is embedded in *manusia* Palmyra. Once they are given a job/post on their first day, the *manusia* claim it as their first and last in the Palmyra. They do not want to move or change. They feel that they are specialist and expert in that area of their job task. Therefore, no new knowledge is needed. Moving into different disciplines is something rare here. They say a rolling stone never gathers moss. If he/she is doing literature work he/she must be there until he/she retires. That is the special character of *manusia* Palmyra.

When changes are made, they must face reality. They do not have the bravery to learn new things. All this while they thought they were experts. I think it is the familiarity of doing routine works over the years that make one feel safe to be in one's place. In reality, an expert must rest their claim on the power of knowledge. I myself have moved four times. Yet, I could do my job. Everyone knows that my interest lies in literature but, right now, I am doing something else. Without commitment to your job, you always find something to justify your negativity. This type of people sees change with closed minds. I hear so many officers want to take early retirement. Luckily, we have this economic meltdown. Otherwise, we could face a human resources problem.

In relation to change, I am not sure people at the top are ready or not to embrace it. I have the feeling that management see the problem only coming from the bottom. Often, many in our society still think that our father could not do wrong. If it is a mistake, our uncle will clear the mess for him. Therefore, to many people at the top, the management is always right and does no wrong. They are very good in doing *gegaran* (shaking thing), at least in language promotions. It is like a volcanic eruption. Every eye is focusing on them. After a while, the shaking dies away. This type of shaking is not knowledge shaking. What Palmyra needs to do is knowledge shaking. A shaking which enables one to build *manusia* and the nation. A shaking that would make our identity strong. At present, many Malays feel 'small' to talk in their language.

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[261] Human being. One must note that orang (people) is not used here. The former is less intimate than the later. Often it is used in critical term.

You know a strong race is a race that never distances itself from its roots, culturally at least. What we need now is a strong sense of love toward our own language. We must discard thoughts that say our Malay language is not great. It is an idea which springs from a colonialised mind. I wrote explicitly about that in one of our journals. That is why, when I was asked to join the Malay History and Culture project, I was very happy. That is a knowledge-shaking project, which could elevate the status of Malay language and culture. However, the management at that time could not see it in that light. The project was rigged with so many problems, which in many cases were due to management faults. The management was not sincere about the project. They gave us a big project with less than K3 officers, and at the same time asked them to produce the encyclopaedia in a short period. Upon facing difficulties, the management did not bother to listen to the truth about the project and believed reports made by some envious people who liked to stab us from behind. I presumed it was related to a struggle to kick out our boss from the department. Our boss was not in their good books because he was telling the truth. Our morale was descending into the gully. Luckily, I could channel my frustration by writing short stories and poetry. During that time, I felt so sick. As such, I often went to see doctors. One of our staff even took pills to make him 'healthy.' The other guy did his personal project while working with the project. He left Palmyra after serving more than 20 years for another publishing house. I heard the new company pay him handsomely. You know, when you are seeing things from different lenses, you are often sidelined.

The emergency midwife

Tengku, male, K3

I do not know how the management interpreted the Palmyra Act. From my observation, they see things as more visual rather than between the lines or hidden behind those legalistic words. They are so proud with their achievement in building the new office block. Yet, they are not so smart in manipulating those words in the Act. Many departments other than language and literature thought the Act were not so relevant to them. There is no centralisation of ideas between departments on this important issue. The management should realise the importance of a strong team to work out the idea, which is enshrined in the Act. They should not make noise when they are no 'police power' in it. They must think creatively and strategically.

Sometimes I think the management is so good in doing physical things rather than in *pengisian*.[262] That is why there is no research and development unit in Palmyra. Without R&D, this organisation is depriving itself of a clear vision. Are they up there thinking they know everything? You see some of these senior managers are not keen readers. They make many trips to foreign lands, but if you asked them how many bookshops they visited, you will be

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[262] To fulfil the real work of making the Malay language and literature great.

surprised. Yet, they work in a book-place. You can ask our librarian downstairs how many K2 officers like to go to read or borrow books from there. I believe the number is very small. If you do not read how can you become creative and strategic in thinking?

It could be very much related to the nature of the senior officers' appointment. Most of them are 'accidental' managers. They are not the products of human development. They are emergency midwives.[263] They applied for the post as a way to go up the ladder. That is why you could hear voices saying that if you put the wrong person into a job, you should await the destruction. Actually, such words are taken from the Tradition of our last prophet. Many departments in here are having 'accidental' managers as their Head.

I am not so well versed in this management thing but I read a lot. When they say they want to turn this place into a learning organisation, they must see human development as crucial. At present, I supposed our Training and Career Unit handles the task. The unit is small. The management should have a senior officer to lead the unit. Again, how they see it is related to the concept of *bijaksana*. I supposed that is their *bijaksana*. Even if there is a human development programme, it is not for everyone. Going for a spiritual development course is not the real answer. You could see the results when they came back. How do you expect this type of planning could cure the disease that enraged the Palmyra? This organisation is sick. In here, you must develop your own development. Many staff, after having successfully gained new skills and training, quit and join other organisations. They feel their intellect is not being recognised properly.

Boy

Tengku, male, K3

I would like to do many things as CEO. I believe, many people outside there still put their high hopes on us to do something big in promoting knowledge and defending the Malay language, literature and culture. I would sit down and identify clearly the perennial aim of this organisation. Then I would start a massive human development programme. I believe that not much gain can be reaped from going overseas if you do not really know what are you looking for. After the programme, a strategic and creative working team whose job to make our language and literature great would be created. If possible, this Palmyra should become a kind of royal institution. At present, we are too dependent on academics. Some of them are 'using' us. Even worse, they are making us their boy.

Anyway I wonder how long I will be here. Many people outside there, especially young writers, like to join the Palmyra. However, I would like to tell them some secrets if they really want to work here. First, if they want to build their career, please do not come to this organisation. The

politicking here is different from other places. We know that doing 'clowning' in order to go up is part of a culture here. We know that when the king is not in the palace, the clown sits on the throne. As a way to show people how powerful he is, he wanted to change everything. He is like Wak Long, the clown in puppet show. To Wak Long when the king is not in the country, he wanted to change everything. Even if it is possible, he likes to remove the pillar of thre palace. He wants to show off to people how powerful he is. However, if he/she is interested in language and literature, this is the place. If he/she wants something to stimulate the intellect, the Palmyra could not give that. Ha ha ha. Moreover, if the person wants to take their salary home at the end of the month and be relaxed, not bothered to be consumed by *semangat perjuangan*, this is the best place. What I can say is that for those who love to *makan gaji* and have no great ambition, this place is perfect. I am going away to do Ph.D. The management told me that upon my return, I should go up to the literature department. There is only one doctorate down there. I could see my chances of going up in that department.

Caressing buttocks

Hitam, male, K3

At present, I feel unhappiness is coming to swallow me. I mean the damp-working climate. This climate does not take place overnight. It is happening because staff are following 'leadership by example' model. Outside there, you can see how big the slogan is. Some staff tell me they are doing as the management wants them to emulate the idea. Well, it is not that simple. The issue here is what type of example to follow? Many people realise that the more you talk and less you do your job, the bigger chance you have to go up the ladder and get the senior post. That is what we call - work smart not work hard. Such work climate is a source of tension to us. If you really work hard but are not in your boss's good book, you are bypassed. Our union brought up the issue in their meeting with management. They ignored it. They have their own advisers who are often smart people.

Sometimes I keep wondering why I am so stupid by not becoming or acting like heroes. Here, a hero is a person who is so good in telling lies, nosing around, caressing the buttocks of the top people, 'and fanning' them with the biggest fan available. However, I realise that I have face and self-integrity. Some people do not care about those things. They are the busiest people in the world whenever the CEO is present. In the hall the previous day, they made themselves look as if they could not spare time in the ceremony. That is why they are bringing heavy files into the hall. Ha, ha, if they can drive a lorry (full of files) into the hall, they will do it. What is important is that the action caught the eyes of the CEO. Ha, that is how to be a successful person, you know.

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[263] Malay proverb

Regarding the Kokosian issue I would to state my position. For me it is not fair to say that Kokosians rule this place. I would like to deny it strongly. Those Kokosians in the management team worked their way up long before the coming of the present CEO. It is coincidental. Why, there should be no fuss when the CEO is coming from Johore? This is an issue of coincidence. I believe people who creates this seditious story could not accept the paradigm shift. I believe this group of people does not like change. Timbalan, a non-Kokosian, for a long time denied such existence a long time ago. Such bad story about Kokosians creates a climate of discontent.

I think, when there are so many smart people up there, we have problems. Often they work with no real strategy. You see when they are promoting our Malay language; they are targeting supermarkets and big companies. The next day you could see what is happening in there. The programme is just another public relations exercise to these companies. They trained many language expert helpers known as *munsyi*. Yet, as far as I know there is no *munsyi* from the municipalities. As you know, municipalities have a large area of control over advertising. Indeed, big companies give you big publicity but it is more for their own gain. Perhaps, the person involved also could be in the limelight. If you go to those places after a month, all the grammatical Malay advertisements are gone with the wind. The person involved in the project should learn how to bark up the right tree. Otherwise is like *masuk angin keluar asap*.[264] It is just a waste of time.

Chameleon

Japar, male, K1-2

Here, doing lakon is part of a culture. Perhaps it is a bad thing to do if you are promoting tawhidic paradigm. I would like to narrate you a story. It is about how an officer turned himself into a chameleon. One morning, the officer waited for the CEO near the lift. When the CEO entered the lift, he followed him from behind. He stayed in one corner. After a while, in unexpected manner he hit his own forehead, and gave a little cry. The CEO turned to him and queried. The man showed his worried face with lines of stress on his forehead. "What happened?" asked the CEO. "I could not sleep last night. I kept thinking about the Palmyra. I kept thinking how to make it great," answered the man. Naturally, such lakon would give a good impression. Later the CEO called the man to his office. In there, he showed his plans. The man was promoted. It does not matter whether you could deliver them or not. You must be clever to do lakon. Malim deman's principle is working here...That Malim Deman was a man full of impetigo. However, when he took his shirt off all that impetigo was shine and glitter. Nobody talk about his impetigo. Instead, he was hailed as a hero, smart, macho, and sexually active man. As you know Malim Deman is a well-known chameleon.

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[264] A waste of time and effort. A Malay proverb.

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Regarding the issue on Kokosians, I believe the story is more or less the same like a story about curly-haired boys in a classroom. All this while, it is just ordinary phenomena. All of sudden, one of them is selected to be a monitor. From that point on, curly-haired boys are seen to be everywhere. For me Kokosian tali men are just imagination. Our top people denied such existence, and I believed in them.

Appendix 6

Surat Layang: Power Rangers Tales

KISAH LIMA 5 UNIT POWER RANJERS

Diceritakan oleh orang banyak kononnya, pada zaman dahulukala tinggallah 5 unit Power Ranjers mentadbir negeri Antah Berantah. Negeri ini dulunya diperintah oleh ZoitanTua, dibantu oleh Power Ranjer Merah sebagai Mamak Bendahara dan Power Ranjer Hijau sebagai Laksamana yang tugasnya menjaga hal ehwal keamanan negeri jualah adanya. Apabila sudah genap usianya 55 nano, maka turun takhtalah baginda. Kekosongan jawatan tertinggi dalam kerajaan negeri Antah Berantah entah bagaimana diambil alih oleh Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan.

Arakian adapun bulan pun mengambang penuhlah dan Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan pun ditabal menjadi Rajalah. Dilantiknya Power Ranjer Hitam (dulunya Shahbandar negeri yang kerjanya hanyalah menguruskan hal ehwal perlabuhan dan mengutip cukai jua) menjadi Penasihat Peribadi dan Power Ranjer Merah Jambu sebagai Kerani Kanan istana. Dan nasihat dan tunjuk ajar daripada Power Ranjer Merah dan Power Ranjer Hijau tidak mahu didengarnya lagi. Mengingsut ketepilah mereka berdua hatta hanya layak membuat kerja-kerja yang ringan-ringan sahaja katanya. Apa yang diwar-warkan oleh Power Ranjer Hitam maka diangguk-angguk jualah baginda Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan. Jika Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan mengangguk dua kali maka Power Ranjer Merah Jambu akan meganggukkan kepala berkali-kalilah pula. Tiada tertahan jualah rambutnya bertahan dikepala lagi. Hitam kata Power Ranjer Hitam, hitam jualah kata Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan. Tiada diusul periksa lagi walau satu hun pun. Mentadbir memkhinzir buta, dan kuku besi jualah baginda.

Maka Beraja Di Mata Bersultan Di Hatilah baginda Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan. Menderitalah rakyat dan mundurlah negeri Antah Berantah itu. Hatta tiada lagi dipandang mulia oleh negeri-negeri jiran. Lama kelamaan rakyat yang sedar mereka ditindas pun bangun memberontak. Beraraklah rakyat keistana lagak barisan semut mencari rezekilah mereka. Bertombak berkeris hatta kukur kelapa pun dijadikan senjata. Minta baginda Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan turun takhta jualah. Maka berkata Power Ranjer Kuning Kekunyitan: "Biar diacukan pistol di depan batang hidung beta, namun tidak mahu beta turun jua dari takhta. Kalau berani, cubalah. Ahh! **Kail panjang sejengkal mahu diduga lautan dalam.** Beta ini jangankan mati, tergaris pun tidak oleh senjata. Ha ha ha ha ha"

Lantas berita itu segera sampai ke telinga Power Ranjer Merah. "Apalah aku ini sudah tepok, jika masih ada sisa tenaga akan aku sendiri mengamuk di istana. Dari runtun jiwa biar tubuh rebah tuntas dan darah aku mengalir menjadi sungai kecil di halaman istana. Hendak mati, matilah. Raja zalim harus turun dari takhta." Kata Power Ranjer Merah sambil mengenggam erat keris yang sudah lama tidak berlimau dan diasap cupa.

"Uhuk! Uhuk! (batuk kecil) Sabarlah Power Ranjer Merah. Kita ini orang Islam jualah. Tidak baik berbunuhbunuh. Perkara ini kecil sahaja tetapi sengaja dibesar-besarkan oleh rakyat negeri. Biar dipijaknya jemala kepala putik ini. Itukan raja kita. Menderhaka namanya. Hah! Kesihatan aku pun sudah mula terganggu dik persengketaan yang tiada penghujungnya ini." Kata Power Ranjer Hijau, tangan kanannya mengurut-urut dada yang sesak dan tangan kirinya menepuk-nepuk bahu Power Ranjer Merah.

"Ah engkau! Walaupun sering dikatakan engkau bodoh dan lembap, masih jugakah mahu menyembahnya. Engkau hendak menjadi Tuah kah? Tidak tahukah membezakan yang mana kaca yang mana intan? **Belalang mahu menjadi Helangkah?** Engkau selalu sahaja berlagak songsang." Berdengus Power Ranjer Merah dan telinganya menjadi bertambah merah.

Akhirulkalam, dimasa yang sama rakyat negeri sudah berjaya mengusir keluar Power Ranjer Merah Jambu dari bilik menteri-menteri kanan. Duduklah Power Ranjer Merah Jambu di halaman istana. Rambutnya makin jarang jualah. Rakyat negeri semakin terdesak...

Akan bersambung lagi...

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Appendix 7

Surat Layang: A mousedeer and his friends

SANG KANCIL BERSAMA SANG HARIMAU DAN KERBAU YANG MALANG

Pada suatu hari semasa Sang Kancil sibuk mencari makan, dia bertemu dengan Sang Harimau yang duduk dengan kawan baiknya, Sang Kerbau.

"Mana taring engkau, Sang Harimau?" Tanya Sang Kancil kepada Sang Harimau yang telah banyak merosakan keamanan kepada hutan di pinggir kampung itu.

"Sudah hilang dan aku akan dihalau keluar dari hutan ini setahun lagi" Jawab Sang Harimau yang semakin lemah itu dengan sedih.

"Sang Kerbau... ooo... Sang Kerbau!" Panggil Sang Kancil.

"Kenapa kau mengira setiap rumput yang dikunyah tu?" Tanya Sang Kancil kehairanan.

"Nak tahu berapa banyak rumput yang telah aku telan pada setiap hari" Jawab Sang Kerbau dengan megah.

"Makan rumput segar hanya untuk kenyangkan perut, sudahlah" Cadang Sang Kancil.

"Aku memang suka susah-susahkan perkara yang mudah" Jawab Sang Kerbau.

"He... he... he... Patutlah Sang Harimau sayang sangat dengan kau" Kata Sang Kancil.

Lalu satu kampungpun riuh rendahlah dengan cerita dua ekor haiwan yang malang itu.
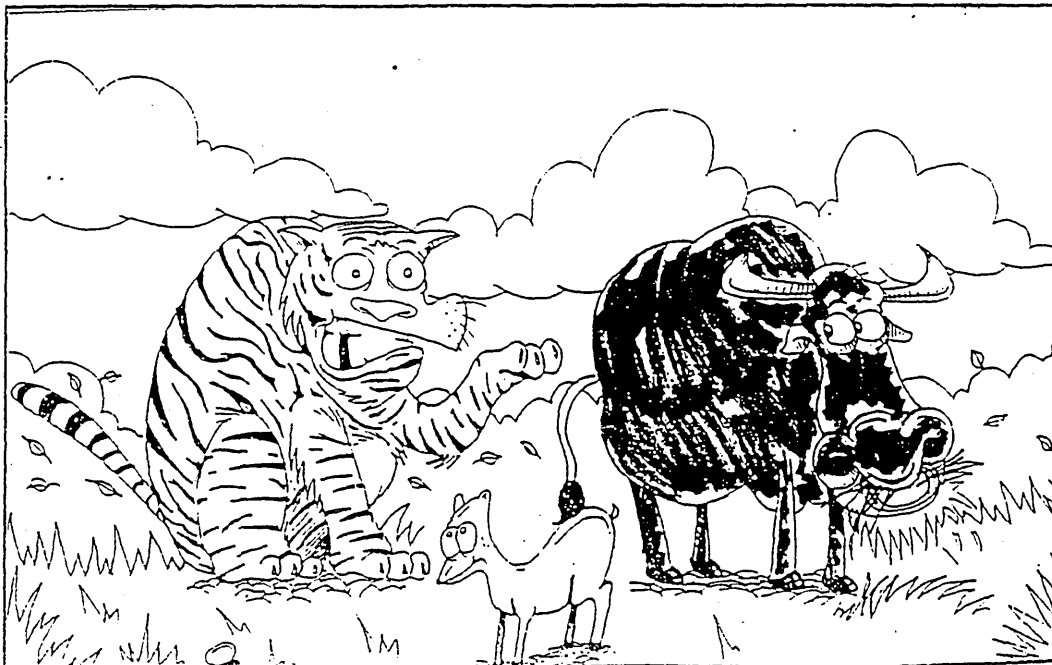
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