

Goh, Joseph N. ‘The Word was Not Made Flesh: Theological Reflections on the Banning of Seksualiti Merdeka 2011.’  
*Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 145–154.

# The Word was Not Made Flesh: Theological Reflections on the Banning of *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011

By Joseph N. Goh

**Abstract:** In November 2011, the Malaysian sexuality rights festival *Seksualiti Merdeka* was banned after being labelled immoral and subversive. The organizers insisted that the festival was a forum for the voices of sexual minorities and that the ban was politically motivated. By examining the rhetoric surrounding this festival in the Malaysian media, this article aims to uncover how the tensions between Malaysian politics and religion affect the lives of queer Malaysians in terms of human rights before providing a Christian theological response.

**Key Terms:** Malaysia, religion and politics, human rights, sexuality, queer theology

## An Honest Theology

It was necessary . . . for theologians to come out from their closets and ground their theology in a praxis of intellectual, living honesty.<sup>1</sup>

With unbridled candour, Marcella Althaus-Reid took the entire theological world to task in her ground-breaking *The Queer God: Sexuality and Liberation Theology* by exposing the insidiousness of heteronormality in shaping theological discourses. Central to her approach, which combines liberation, feminist, and queer theologies, is the primacy of personal experiences that affirm sexual human bodies and stories as godly scripts, notably bodies at the margins that are oppressed and shunned. The insights of Althaus-Reid are particularly poignant in

Malaysia, where “legitimate” theological ideologies are constantly and vociferously mapped according to heterosexual coordinates. The tyranny of silence on the part of those who have the theological capacity to affirm the intrinsic goodness of queer<sup>2</sup> persons and their forms of expression demands theological justice. In pursuit of a theological strategy that is honest, just, and relevant, I turn to the sexuality rights festival *Seksualiti Merdeka*<sup>3</sup> of 2011 as a case study. This festival, which celebrates gender and sexual diversity and provides a forum for issues in the lives of sexual minorities, was banned in November 2011 after being ferociously touted by several religious and political groups as being immoral, deviationist, and subversive. Consequent official statements by religious institutions decried the blatant violation of human rights, but substantial theological positions were absent in the aftermath.

---

Joseph N. Goh holds a Licentiate in Sacred Theology and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Gender, Sexuality and Theology with the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Monash University, Malaysia. He is a member of the Emerging Queer Asian Pacific Islander Religion Scholars and volunteers with PT Foundation, a Malaysian non-governmental organization promoting HIV awareness. Goh can be reached at [joseph@josephgoh.org](mailto:joseph@josephgoh.org).

By examining responses from Muslim and Christian circles in the Malaysian news media, this article aims to provide a Christian theological response to the furor over *Seksualiti Merdeka* from a human rights perspective, with hopes that this endeavor may be of assistance in the personal reflections of queer Malaysians who adhere to religious beliefs. My choice of the news media is due to the fact that condemnations of and comments on the festival were most manifest therein. Nevertheless, it is a naïve project indeed that seeks to expose sexual theological deficiency without concomitantly exploring the “spirals of power and pleasure”<sup>4</sup> in Malaysia that are sustained by religious discourses.

In what follows I first examine how concepts of God and sin that are both present and absent in religious rhetoric on *Seksualiti Merdeka* diminish human rights. I then explore the position that official proscription against queer communities to speak, and the weak defense of the rights of queer persons by institutional religions, lead to a situation that I posit theologically as a denial of the veritable mystery of the incarnation—that the Word was not made flesh. Then, by examining liberative Asian feminist theologies, aided by a touch of queer theology, I provide a theological framework for a discussion on the loss of human dignity through the foreclosure of space for expression by queer Malaysians and a dilution of theological support on the part of institutional religions. Finally, I argue in favor of an incarnational theology that affirms the godly goodness that is inherent in the lives of queer Malaysians.

## A Facet of Religion and Politics in Malaysia

Malaysia—known as Malaya in its pre-independence existence—gained independence from the British on August 31, 1957. The country comprises a peninsula stretched between Thailand and Singapore, and the two states of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo, which joined Malaysia on September 16, 1963.

As a multicultural nation, Malaysia is graced by a diverse blend of ethnicities, which includes the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples. Malaysia’s total population stands at 28.3 million. Out of its 26 million citizens, 54.6 percent are classified as Malay, 12.8 percent as non-Malay *Bumiputera*,<sup>5</sup> 24.6 percent as Chinese, 7.3 percent as Indians, and 0.7 percent from other ethnic compositions.<sup>6</sup> This richness of ethnic diversity has given birth to a plethora of religions, with the majority being Muslim (61.3 percent).<sup>7</sup> Malay and indigenous citizens, who collectively form the *Bumiputera* component, hold primacy of citizenship in Malaysia.<sup>8</sup> While Islam is recognized as the official religion of Malaysia, the freedom of all other faiths—including Buddhism (19.8 percent), Christianity (9.2 percent), and Hinduism (6.3 percent)<sup>9</sup>—is assured.<sup>10</sup> Constitutionally, all Malays are Muslims.<sup>11</sup> As a vast majority of Malaysians are Malay Muslims, it does not prove difficult to trace the pervading influence of Islam in the sphere of politics,<sup>12</sup> the considerations of which form the main thrust of this section.

### The Role of Islam

Extant records show that pre-colonial Malaya was ruled by Malay sultanates, notably the Melaka Sultanate in the fifteenth century, which “established a set of traditions that crystallised into what may be justifiably termed the ‘political culture’ of the peninsular Malays,” and which Kay Kim Khoo contends was the cradle of other peninsular Malay sultanates.<sup>13</sup> To this day, sultans are accorded the role of head of Islam in states that have sultans.<sup>14</sup> Azman Aziz and Shamsul A. B. posit that Islam was deeply assimilated into these early models of political leadership and used both as an identity marker for the Malay society as well as a “political instrument” against inimical non-Islamic forces, including British intervention, which began in the nineteenth century.

Anti-British sentiments gradually escalated, particularly with the introduction of the Malayan Union in 1946, which was seen as an insult hurled in the direction of Malay sovereignty and

governance, as well as Islam. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), “a loose grouping of . . . Malay-Muslim political associations,” was born in that same year as a form of retaliation.<sup>15</sup>

Two important considerations emerge from this historical overview. First, antagonism toward the British was channelled by the Malay society through Islam as a successful tool of resistance toward “Western imperialism.” Islam proved potent not only in its role as an “ethnic identifier” for the Malay society but more importantly in the eventual excising of what was seen as unsolicited invasion and violation.<sup>16</sup> Second, the political leadership of Malaysia continues to evince strong Islamic traits in all facets of its administration.<sup>17</sup> *Barisan Nasional*, Malaysia’s current ruling coalition since 1957, of which UMNO is a leading component, claims to represent all ethnic groups and ensure freedom of religion, but demonstrates preferential treatment in its constitution, whereby it upholds the objective “to strive for . . . spiritual development and maintaining Islam as the religion of the Federation.”<sup>18</sup>

Another important consideration deals with the centrality of moral integrity in Islamic political leadership. This noble barometer of suitability for governance harbors a dark side, as it has been deployed in political maneuvers to bring about the downfall of political enemies. One poignant example is in the case of the sodomy charges that were brought by former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad against his deputy Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 and 2008 as a moral imperative, which pundits touted as a strategy “to destroy Anwar’s credibility in the eyes of conservative Muslims.”<sup>19</sup> Mahathir once said that “gay people should not govern mostly Muslim Malaysia.”<sup>20</sup>

Another example deals with the call for electoral reform. The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, or *Bersih* 2.0, chaired by the former president of the Malaysian Bar Council Ambiga Sreenevasan, staged a public demonstration on July 9, 2011. Sreenevasan’s call for ethical and fair elections was decried by the government as illegal as well as a potential threat to national security. Despite assurances from the Home Minister and UMNO member Hishammuddin Hussein of the right of

*Bersih* 2.0 to “voice their concerns,” police eventually fired teargas and detained hundreds, including Sreenevasan, on the day itself. Hishammuddin played the Islamic morality card again by discouraging Malays from participating in this event, which he claimed was a manipulation of race and religion for power gains.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Malaysian politics bears strong Malay-Islamic textures. The delineation between religion and politics is a shadowy one. Involvement in political exercises that are frowned upon by the government, or any perceived form of sexually deviant activity is tantamount to political and religious subversion. Total, unquestioned obedience to the extra-legal decrees of the ruling party as well as to popular religious opinion has become the ultimate yardstick for measuring true Malaysian citizenship.

## Religio-Political Debacle: Seksualiti Merdeka 2011

It is against this backdrop of religio-political tensions that I now segue to the thorny issues surrounding sexuality in Malaysia through a brief treatment of queer issues, notably homosexuality and transsexualism. In general, the policing of sexuality is sanctioned and codified in the laws of country.<sup>22</sup> Homosexual acts in particular are condemned by Islamic authorities and Christian churches in Malaysia.<sup>23</sup> Sexualities and gender identities that are not congruous to heteronormative expectations face layers of discriminatory resistance from many religio-political quadrants.

*Homosexuality* is a concept that remains nebulous for many Malaysians as homosexual men and transsexual persons are often amalgamated. In April 2011, sixty-six male Muslim students in their teens were sent for *anti-gay* counseling in a four-day camp after being accused of being *effeminate* by their teachers.<sup>24</sup> Persons whose gender and sexual identities are perceived to be improperly aligned to sharp definitions of heteronormativity frequently experience serious persecution. They become unfortunate heirs of legitimized criminalization for being

perpetrators of crimes “worse than murder,”<sup>25</sup> and are “viewed as objects of fun and ridicule, and face discrimination in their daily endeavours.”<sup>26</sup>

Closely connected to such issues of identity are those of gender roles and characteristics. Michelle Lee Guy explains that in Malaysia, men are expected to assume roles as fathers or husbands and possess strength and dominance, while women are identified as demure and gentle. Furthermore, “since gender roles and characteristics are subsumed in social interactions and expectations, men and women are presumed to behave and act according to what was expected of their gender,” which encompasses sexual roles. It is this deterministic poise that allows “gender behaviours and identities [to be] coded by one’s sex [as] assigned at birth.”<sup>27</sup> The Malaysian view of sexual orientation and gender roles often is predicated on genital assignments that afford no space for variance. Little wonder then that *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011 was assaulted with considerable savagery.

## Banning Seksualiti Merdeka

*Seksualiti Merdeka* is a coalition of non-governmental organizations, activists, artists, and individuals that has celebrated “the human rights of people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities” since 2008 through “forums, talks, workshops, book launches, art exhibitions and performances.” *Seksualiti Merdeka* aims at creating a safe space for the exchange of expression and experience wherein queer Malaysians are rendered opportunities to lend voice to issues affecting them as sexual minorities, and to dispel misinformed accusations and unwarranted fears. In 2011, the theme of the festival, “Queer without Fear,” was a battle cry against the persecution of queer people.<sup>28</sup> It was due to be launched on November 9, 2011, by none other than Ambiga Sreenevasan.

Nonetheless, pressure from several political and religious groups succeeded in banning the festival. Some of the rhetoric that was deployed in assailing the festival included labeling it as deviationist and accusing it of damaging the moral fabric of society, promoting free sex, promoting sin, increasing the

transmission of HIV, and allowing an infiltration of Western influence, among other things.<sup>29</sup> Criticisms of the festival reached their zenith when parliamentarian Ibrahim Ali construed it as a culture of animals that was uncivilized and degrading.<sup>30</sup> Islamic religious rhetoric further exacerbated the demonization of the festival when Aznan Hasan, the chairperson of the Council of Scholars of the Malaysian Muslim Solidarity, issued a media statement saying that “the involvement of Islamic adherents in this festival is . . . unlawful and forbidden, and should be avoided. [It] will only promote liberal and inverted beliefs among Muslims in Malaysia under the guise of ‘human rights.’”<sup>31</sup> Potential Muslim participants were also reminded that they could be prosecuted under the *Syariah* law.<sup>32</sup> The steady stream of antagonistic discourse on homosexuality perpetuated the theme of surveillance, control, and subjugation of sexual minorities in Malaysia.

*Seksualiti Merdeka* responded to its opponents by officially reiterating its original intent of providing an avenue “to dialogue and share information and knowledge on human rights.” Furthermore, “all we want,” said the co-founder, Khee Teik Pang, “is a chance to speak up.”<sup>33</sup> Pang also was quick to point out that the real issue was not so much about religion as it was about manipulating the event to “further discredit Ambiga [Sreenevasan] and Anwar [Ibrahim], leaving *Seksualiti Merdeka* as ‘collateral damage.’”<sup>34</sup> This claim of the festival being a convenient subterfuge for greater political interests and a covert operation of bio-power<sup>35</sup> to feed political interests was supported by Anwar,<sup>36</sup> and well reflected in Malaysian Muslim scholar Asri Zainul Abidin’s emphatic declaration that “any political party that voices support for the ongoing festival would not be eligible to helm the Malaysian government.”<sup>37</sup> Evocative of erstwhile dynamics, Islam once again was deployed to fend off what was perceived as negative Western imperialistic influences for the sake of maintaining a vice-like grip on political security, leaving queer Malaysians behind as unfortunate casualties. Moreover, Malaysia may paint an image of political leadership that is ethnically and religiously inclusive, but the symbiotic affinity between religion and political power unveils an unmistakably conservative Islamic portrait. Random

gauges of Islamic adherence on the part of politicians are used to sustain or undermine political eligibility.

### *Precarious Human Rights*

Human rights have assumed a precarious position in the debacle. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes explicit mention of the inextinguishable link between human dignity and human rights that are accorded to every human person upon birth.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, it is steadfast in its defense of the right of every individual to freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>39</sup> Malaysia ostensibly demonstrates resonance with the second notion, whereby its federal constitution guarantees “the right to freedom of speech and expression.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Deputy Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar noted his support for freedom of speech, but stated in the same breath that *Seksualiti Merdeka* could cause “disharmony, enmity and [a threat to] public order.”<sup>41</sup> The outcome that ensued was, of course, a blanket prohibition that devastatingly curtailed the very freedom of speech of which he spoke. Evidently, the law and religion worked “hand in glove” in the success of the ban.

The organizers of *Seksualiti Merdeka* responded by highlighting the denial of “rights to . . . identity and self-determination” as Malaysian citizens.<sup>42</sup> The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism, as well as Roman Catholic bishop Paul Tan, also embarked on the trajectory of human rights and deplored any form of aggression toward queer folk. Moreover, they declared that human rights encompassed dignity, personal liberty, privacy, and entitlement to expression of speech.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, I find these advocacies of human rights insufficiently effective. The act of tagging the festival as a promotion of the “culture of animals” effectively renders all queer folk and their allies as little more than beasts. Consequently, queer folk are excluded from any form of human rights by virtue of their gender and sexual identities<sup>44</sup>—how could any effort in support of *human* rights

achieve real cogency if they are made on behalf of *animals*? If human dignity is intrinsic to human rights, would it not also mean that any threat to those rights, including the curbing of freedom of expression, would be an assault on human dignity? The contingency of human rights in this regard is alarming. It is my firm conviction that Christian theology can play a pivotal role in this regard.

### **Toward an Incarnational Theology for Queer Malaysians**

Despite the pathological political agenda under the guise of religious rhetoric, the fact remains that *Seksualiti Merdeka* has provoked a rethinking of theological issues related to queer matters and human rights. Ironically, I have been unable to find any substantial theological work that attempts to grapple with the issues emanating from *Seksualiti Merdeka*. Malaysian Islamic rhetoric on this matter largely has been a series of moralistic proscriptions calling for rehabilitation and threatening eternal wrath.<sup>45</sup> Christian churches and other religious institutions have provided only mild denunciations of violence toward queer communities. I have not encountered any theological initiatives to ameliorate the ambivalence experienced by those who either participated in or were affected by the events of the festival, those for whom a relationship with their God remains indissoluble.

The danger of religious solipsism that lurks among those who “pride themselves on their theological orthodoxy while showing little interest in getting to grips with the many-sided complexities of human experience”<sup>46</sup> must be exposed in the light of the Divine that resides within the core of each queer person. I contend that the belligerent rhetoric emanating from some conservative Islamic groups tramples on human rights and evokes images of God that promote fear and self-hatred. At the same time, insipid statements from Christian communities and other faiths rob queer persons of their rights as *imago Dei*. As a response, I wish to pursue a paradigm of incarnational theology

for queer Malaysians based on human rights and freedom of speech. Although Christian in nature, my proposed theological framework aims to aid the reflections of queer persons who subscribe to any form of religious faith.

Contemporary theology as God-talk seeks to emphasize the inseparable connection between human experiences and human relationships with God. Accordingly, in the mind of Fabio Baggio, theology “is deeply concerned with the totality of human experiences as revealing the transcendent God.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, inasmuch as lived experiences reveal the Divine, they also must serve to further inform notions of God for the purpose of providing more enlightened expositions of the role of God in human lives. In this, I find a resource in feminist theology, described by Kwok Pui-lan as “pluralistic and diverse, rooted in women’s religious experiences, struggles, action and reflection, dreams and hopes,”<sup>48</sup> as issues of women deprived of their rights bear an uncanny resemblance to the plight of queer persons. The goal is to contest discriminatory theological normativities and pave the way for a more inclusive and egalitarian theological paradigm in the incarnation of Christ.

### *The Imago Dei and the Incarnation*

I first foreground two considerations. First, any theological examination of human rights is rooted in human dignity, which in turn derives its genesis in the *imago Dei*<sup>49</sup> and “communion with God.”<sup>50</sup> This is of particular importance for queer persons who frequently are vilified by oppressive regimes, and whose inherent orientation toward the Creator is overlooked. The innate dignity of queer persons however, is made most visible when human rights are upheld and when there is recognition that “we are all part of humanity and deserving of the same dignity.”<sup>51</sup> Second, the establishment of these human rights necessitates a rupture in imposed, oppressive silence and the ensuing unveiling of human expression. The crucial symbiosis between human dignity and God-talk is paramount. With these two considerations, I now proceed to discuss the incarnation.

The incarnation conveys a truth much more important than the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures of Christ. First, the incarnation amplifies the reality that the Word of God who “became flesh” and showed us the image of God “and lived among us” (Jn 1:14) was the same divine Word by which God “has spoken to us” (Heb 1:2). Thus, the incarnation is the *communion* of God with God’s people, and it concretizes the existential intimacy and transcendental experience in each person’s relationship with God,<sup>52</sup> of whom Christ is the image (Col 1:15). The truth of this mystery is also the true source of human dignity, thus becoming the hermeneutical apparatus for understanding human rights. As Christ utters the speech of God, the incarnation is also the *conversation* of God with God’s people in varied forms. Consequently, as every human person is intimately bound up in God, freedom of speech is a divine activity. The right and freedom of every human person to *be* and to *express* is entrenched in the belief that God was corporeally manifested on earth.

Queer Malaysians are by no means exempted from this privilege. Feminist theology further illuminates the mystery of the incarnation in a radical way. Laurel C. Schneider speaks of a “promiscuous incarnation,” whereby God is not bound to a singular, historical occurrence of incarnation, as that perspective contradicts the otherness and oneness of God that is concomitantly taught with the notion of God-becoming-human. God is present in multiple ways in the generations of shifting, porous, and diverse conditions of humankind, not in exhaustive religious taxonomies.<sup>53</sup> Dovetailing on this insight, queer scholar Thomas Bohache comments that “queerness is a part of creation,” and that Christ is incarnationally embodied again and again in the lives of all human beings, including the sexually diverse.<sup>54</sup> Thus, God is *always* and *continuously* corporeally manifested on earth.

### *“Weapons of the Weak”*

In the events leading up to *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011 and in the aftermath, conservative Islamic groups advocated a strong sense of repentance both for

those who did not conform to gender or sexual roles, and those who supported the festival. Despite their fervent pleas, the queer communities were denied their right to assemble in order to express themselves and share their stories. The theological reticence of non-Muslim religious institutions in Malaysia is tantamount to corroboration with this horrendous situation. This is particularly alarming for Christian churches whose foundational teachings insist on the contact between the Divine and human flesh in the incarnation. Yet, a theological lacuna remains as a glaring fact in the schizophrenic approach that upholds the rights of queer people but makes no attempt either to affirm their inherent queer goodness or to support their manifold queer expressions. Christ, who is present in each and every human life, is not permitted to be conceived in queer Malaysians. The disavowal of their rights and freedom of expression is a denial of the reality of the incarnation: *the Word was not made flesh*.

Malaysian religious institutions must continue to reassess their theological stances on issues related to queer individuals if they are to be pastorally effective to their queer members. This endeavor necessitates a theology that sets aside conventions, fears, and assumptions that have long been considered beyond question in order to arrive at a vision of honest discourse concerning God and the people of God in Malaysia. Indeed, such a theology can both locate the rights of queer persons to be queer persons and acknowledge their intrinsic goodness through the prism of the incarnation. Thereafter, it must foster the sacredness of expression—talk, conversation, speech, and stories by queer persons.

The insights of Asian feminist theologian Gemma Tulud Cruz further elucidate this idea. Cruz builds on James Scott's notions of speech acts and practices as "hidden transcripts" and "weapons of the weak" deployed by oppressed "everyday theologians" as unconventional but potent "weapons of liberation." Cruz detects theological potentiality in these weapons among women, which include humor, laughter, stories, songs, and dance. Humor and laughter are "prophetic" as they interrupt normative thought and increase faith consciousness, as faith in itself can be seen as provoking humor in

its paradoxes. Stories highlight contradictions that may appear between actual life experiences and theological musings, allowing the invisibility of the disenfranchised to shine through. Songs, as "the language" of the soul, are both celebrative and didactic vocal implements. Dance is a pathway of truth communication that unites people and discloses injustices and triumphs.<sup>55</sup>

These "weapons" form the major components of the *Seksualiti Merdeka 2011* events and convey the holiness that is embedded in human expression. They emanate from the reality that creation is sanctified by God and thus bears God's image and likeness, the same God who stands by those who are robbed of their rights and forced to be silent. If queer human beings gather to express themselves through humor, laughter, stories, songs, and dance, it is because they embody their Creator—as evidenced in the person of Christ, "the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15)—and allow themselves to be the means through which the incarnation is renewed upon the face of the earth.

## Conclusion

---

*Seksualiti Merdeka 2011* was the unfortunate casualty of the Malaysian political battlefield. The flagrant dismissal of heartfelt attempts to describe the festival as a space for sexual minorities to gather and express themselves revealed religio-political connections and complications. The queer bashing related to the ban by conservative Islamic authorities and the police, coupled with acute theological silence on the part of Christian churches and representatives of other faiths, have contributed to the diminishment of the rights of queer folk in varying degrees. This is of particular concern for those among them who place great value in their religious beliefs. There is thus a dire need for a theology that grounds itself in the synergistic relationship between God and human beings, particularly queer Malaysians. The locus of this theology can be found in the Christian mystery of the incarnation.

The terra firma for a theology of the incarnation for queer Malaysians is the goodness of each sexual,



human person who possesses the divinely ordained right to expression. The incarnation itself demands that the inherent queer goodness of persons be recognized and upheld, their freedom of expression honored, and their stories told and heard with the respect that is befitting of all God's creation.

## Endnotes

1. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God: Sexuality and Liberation Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

2. In this paper, I use the term *queer* in reference to those who defy definitive notions of gender and sexual normalcy, chiefly gay men, lesbian women, and transgender persons. See Ger Zielinski, "Queer Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, ed. Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2007), 1188.

3. *Seksualiti Merdeka*, <http://www.seksualitimerdeka.org> (accessed November 28, 2011). This term will be italicized throughout this paper despite citations from various sources that do not necessarily do likewise.

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 45.

5. *Bumiputera*—literally "sons of the soil"—is a term used for Malays and non-Malay ethnic groups who are not of Chinese or Indian descent. These groups are held in positions of privilege by the government, particularly in the economic arena. See Articles 153, 160, and 161 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, available at [www.jac.gov.my/jac/images/stories/akta/federalconstitution.pdf](http://www.jac.gov.my/jac/images/stories/akta/federalconstitution.pdf) (accessed November 28, 2011).

6. Department of Statistics, Malaysia, *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics 2010*, 15. See [http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/download/Population/files/census2010/Taburan\\_Penduduk\\_dan\\_Ciri-ciri\\_Asas\\_Demografi.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/download/Population/files/census2010/Taburan_Penduduk_dan_Ciri-ciri_Asas_Demografi.pdf) (accessed November 1, 2011).

7. *Ibid.*, 9.

8. Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 153.

9. Department of Statistics, *Population Distribution*, 9.

10. Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 3(1).

11. Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 160(2).

12. For more information on Malaysia, see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/my.html> (accessed November 20, 2011).

13. Kay Kim Khoo, *Malay Society: Transformation and Democratization: A Stimulating and Discerning Study on the Evolution of Malay Society* (Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1991), 15.

14. Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 3(2).

15. For more information on the Malayan Union, see [http://sejarahmalaysia.pnm.my/portalBI/detail.php?section=sm01&spesifik\\_id=459&ctrl\\_id=61](http://sejarahmalaysia.pnm.my/portalBI/detail.php?section=sm01&spesifik_id=459&ctrl_id=61) (accessed November 20, 2011).

16. Azman Aziz and Shamsul A. B., "The Religious, the Plural, the Secular and the Modern: A Brief Critical Survey on Islam in Malaysia," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 341–356.

17. For more information on Islam in Malaysia, see Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, "Bumiputera, Malays and Islam: A Historical Overview," *Kajian Malaysia* 21, nos. 1, 2 (2003): 105–121; Abdul Muati Ahmad and Saiful Nujaimi Abdul Rahman, "Civilizational Islam: Promulgating the New Approach of Islam in Malaysia," *Human Communication* 12, no. 3 (2009): 303–324; and Ioannis Gatsiounis, "Islam Hadhari in Malaysia," *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology* 3 (2006): 78–88.

18. Constitution of the *Barisan Nasional*, Article 5(B), available at [http://barisannasional.org.my/wp-content/plugins/page-flip-image-gallery/popup.php?book\\_id=2](http://barisannasional.org.my/wp-content/plugins/page-flip-image-gallery/popup.php?book_id=2) (accessed November 20, 2011).

19. James Chin and Chin Huat Wong, "Malaysia's Electoral Upheaval," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2009): 74.

20. S. Kanaraju, "Former PM Says Gays Should Not Rule Mostly Muslim Malaysia," *Advocate*, January 9, 2007, <http://www.advocate.com/article.aspx?id=38649> (accessed March 12, 2012); Associated Press, "Former PM Defends Gay Accusation," *Taipei Times*, April 15, 2006, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/world/archives/2006/04/15/2003302810> (accessed March 12, 2012).

21. More information on *Bersih* 2.0 is available at <http://bersih.org/> (accessed November 23, 2011). Also see Mohd. Farhaan Shah, "Bersih Should Clean Up Its Act, Says Home Minister," *The Star Online*, May 23, 2011, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/5/23/nation/8737547&sec=nation> (accessed November 23, 2011); Tashny Sukumaran, "Meeting King Doesn't Make Rally Legal," *Free Malaysia Today*, July 6, 2011, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/2011/07/06/bersih-still-illegal-says-hisham/> (accessed November 23, 2011); and "Malaysia Police Detain Hundreds at Rally," *The Guardian*, July 9, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/09/malaysia-opposition-protests-elections>.

22. Julian C. H. Lee, *Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 97–108.

23. See Evangelical Charismatic Churches of Malaysia, <http://www.eccmsia.org/articles/homosexuality>; National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia, <http://www.necf.org.my>; and Rev. Rufus Bruno Pereira, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/141982> (accessed September 10, 2010). One notable exception is the Good Samaritan Metropolitan Community Church of Kuala Lumpur, which considers itself an inclusive church; see <http://gsmalaysia.com/GSMCC/Home.htm> (accessed November 23, 2011).

24. Associated Press, "Malaysia Sends 66 Teen Boys to Anti-Gay Counselling," *Intelliasia News Online*, April 21, 2011, <http://www.intelliasia.net/news/articles/society/111322186.shtml> (accessed March 12, 2012).

25. Mageswary Ramakrishnan, "Homosexuality is a Crime Worse Than Murder," *Time Asia*, September 26, 2000, <http://edition.cnn.com/ASIANOW/time/features/interviews/2000/09/26/int.malay.gay2.html> (accessed September 27, 2011). According to Che Mat Che Ali, Director of the Islamic Department of the Federal Territories (JAWI), "Muslim men can be investigated and charged under Section 25 of Act 559 [in the Syariah law] for men who engage in same-sex relations (sodomy) and Section 26 of Act 559 for women." See "JAWI sedia siasat program Seksualiti Merdeka," *Act for Malaysia*, November 4, 2011, <http://www.actformalaysia.com/2011/11/04/jawi-sedia-siasat-program-seksualiti-merdeka/> (accessed November 6, 2011). Section 377A of the Malaysian Penal Code also makes provision for the prosecution of persons who engage in *liwat* (sodomy) and is often used against homosexual men; see <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b5cf0.html> (accessed September 2, 2011). See also section 2 of Act 559 of the Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997, available at <http://www.agc.gov.my/Akta/Vol.%2012/Act%20559.pdf> (accessed September 2, 2011).

26. Suganthi Suparmaniam, "Where Faith Blurs Gender Lines," *New Straits Times*, August 22, 2010, <http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/>

new-straits-times/mi\_8016/is\_20100822/faith-blurs-gender-lines/ai\_n54876049/ (accessed February 13, 2011).

27. Michelle Lee Guy, "Ungendering Gendered Identities? Transgenderism in Malaysia," *Akademika* 63 (2003): 72.

28. This information is based on a booklet that was produced by the organizers of *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011, "Queer Without Fear: 4th Malaysian Annual Sexuality Rights Festival."

29. For an array of anti-*Seksualiti Merdeka* statements from various Malaysian Islamic organizations, see "Umat Islam jangan terlibat Seksualiti Merdeka," *Utusan Online*, November 4, 2011, [http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2011&dt=1104&pub=Utusan\\_Malaysia&sec=Muka\\_Hadapan&pg=mh\\_03.htm](http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2011&dt=1104&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Muka_Hadapan&pg=mh_03.htm) (accessed November 5, 2011); Clara Chooi, "Asri: 'Seksualiti Merdeka' must be rejected," *The Malaysian Insider*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/asri-seksualiti-merdeka-must-be-rejected> (accessed November 4, 2011); Hafiz Yatim, "Seksualiti Merdeka Ban 'A Tragic Day' for Malaysia," *Malaysiakini*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/180456> (accessed November 5, 2011); "'Seksualiti Merdeka' Programme A Deviationist Activity—Muhyiddin," *Bernama*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=624521> (accessed November 4, 2011); "Malacca to Amend Laws to Prosecute Homosexuals," *The Star Online*, November 9, 2011, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=%2F2011%2F11%2F9%2FNation%2F9863789&sec=nation> (accessed November 9, 2011); and "Seksualiti Merdeka Organisers to Explain Movement's Objectives," *The Star Online*, November 6, 2011, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/11/6/nation/9850686&sec=nation> (accessed November 6, 2011).

30. Hafiz Yatim, "Seksualiti Merdeka Ban 'A Tragic Day' for Malaysia"; and "Seksualiti Merdeka 2011 cuba promosi Budaya 'Binatang'—Ibrahim Ali" *Utusan Online*, November 3, 2011, [http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2011&dt=1103&pub=Utusan\\_Malaysia&sec=Muka\\_Hadapan&pg=mh\\_04.htm](http://www.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2011&dt=1103&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Muka_Hadapan&pg=mh_04.htm) (accessed November 4, 2011).

31. "Haram Muslim sertai Seksualiti Merdeka, kata Majlis Ulama Isma," *The Malaysian Insider*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/bahasa/article/haram-muslim-sertai-seksualiti-merdeka-kata-majlis-ulama-isma/> (accessed November 5, 2011).

32. "JAWI sedia siasat Program Seksualiti Merdeka," *Act for Malaysia*, November 4, 2011, <http://www.actformalaysia.com/2011/11/04/jawi-sedia-siasat-program-seksualiti-merdeka/> (accessed November 6, 2011).

33. "Stop Inciting Hatred against Us! We are Citizens of Malaysia," press statement by the organizers of *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011, November 5, 2011, <http://www.seksualitimerdeka.org/2011/11/stop-inciting-hatred-against-us-we-are.html> (accessed November 5, 2011).

34. K. Pragalath, "Seksualiti Merdeka a Collateral Damage," *Free Malaysia Today*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/2011/11/03/seksualiti-merdeka-a-collateral-damage/> (accessed November 12, 2011).

35. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 140.

36. "Anwar in Two Minds over Seksualiti Merdeka," November 8, 2011, <http://www.malaysia-today.net/mcolumns/newscommentaries/44791-anwar-in-two-minds-over-seksualiti-merdeka> (accessed November 8, 2011).

37. Clara Chooi, "Asri: 'Seksualiti Merdeka' must be rejected," *The Malaysian Insider*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/asri-seksualiti-merdeka-must-be-rejected> (accessed November 4, 2011).

38. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1; available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> (accessed December 4, 2011).

39. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.

40. Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 10(a).

41. Steven Daniel and Farah Fazanna Zulzaha, "Police Move against *Seksualiti Merdeka* Sparks Heated Debate between Groups," *The Star Online*, November 4, 2011, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/11/4/nation/9835994&sec=nation> (accessed November 4, 2011).

42. See "Stop Inciting Hatred against us!" Recent developments in the form of the new Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011, however, reveal a frightening regression in human rights as street protests, defined as "assemblies" which begin "with a meeting at a specified place," include "walking in a mass march" and geared towards "objecting to or advancing... particular... causes" are expressly forbidden. Freedom of expression as a basic tenet of human rights was abhorrently retracted in a bill that was formulated just four months after *Bersih* 2.0 and within the same month of the ban of *Seksualiti Merdeka*. See <http://www.parlimen.gov.my/files/billindex/pdf/2011/DR422011E.pdf> (accessed December 11, 2011).

43. See statement by Roman Catholic bishop Paul Tan, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia in "Bishop Takes Nuanced Stance on Seksualiti Merdeka," [http://www.majodi.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=116:bishop-takes-nuanced-stance-on-seksualiti-merdeka&Itemid=137](http://www.majodi.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=116:bishop-takes-nuanced-stance-on-seksualiti-merdeka&Itemid=137) (accessed November 5, 2011). Tan poses a caveat that Western concepts of human rights needed to be re-evaluated, thus intensifying the suspicion of queer rights as an occidental import. See also the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism, the umbrella body for major non-Muslim religions in Azura Abas, Mazlinda Mahmood, and Masami Mustaza, "Panel Says No to Ban and All Forms of Harassment," November 5, 2011, <http://www.nst.com.my/nst/articles/5azsxm/Article> (accessed November 5, 2011).

44. Ramakrishnan, "Homosexuality is a Crime Worse Than Murder." When asked about the rights of queer folk in an interview with *Time Asia*, Abdul Kadir Che Kob of the Malaysia Department of Islamic Development stated: "What right are you talking about? This is a sin, end of story."

45. Examples include Nasrudin bin Hassan, "Seksualiti Merdeka 201: Kembalilah kepada Fitrah," *Harakah Daily*, <http://bm.harakahdaily.net/index.php/columnist/ketua-pemudapas/6305-seksualiti-merdeka-2011-kembalilah-kepada-fitrah> (accessed November 30, 2011); and "Jakim: Help LGBT Group Return to Correct Path," *Malaysian Digest*, November 4, 2011, <http://malaysiandigest.com/news/34765-jakim-help-lgbt-group-return-to-correct-path.html> (accessed December 3, 2011).

46. Charles Cameron, "An Introduction to 'Theological Anthropology,'" *Evangel* 23, no. 2 (2005): 53.

47. Fabbio Baggio and Agnes M. Brazal, *Faith on the Move: Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), viii.

48. Kwok Pui-lan, "Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.

49. See International Theological Commission, "Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God," [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040723\\_communion-stewardship\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html) (accessed December 12, 2011).

50. Vatican: The Holy See, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," nos. 10, 12, and 26, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed March 13, 2012).

51. Audrey Edwards, "Overcoming Our Phobia over Sexuality," *The Star Online*, June 19, 2011, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/6/19/nation/8588167&sec=nation> (accessed December 4, 2011).

52. Karl Rahner, *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 222.

53. Laurel C. Schneider, "Promiscuous Incarnation," in *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, ed. Margaret D. Kamitsuka (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2010), 231–246.

54. Thomas Bohache, "Colossians," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache. (London: SCM Press, 2006), 666.

55. Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Interrupting Normal Ways of Thinking: Resistance and Asian Women's Struggle for Peace and Liberation," in *Practicing Peace: Feminist Theology of Liberation: Asian Perspectives*, ed. Judette A. Gallares and Astrid Lobo-Gajiwala (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2011), 101–119. I have deliberately excluded "silence" from the list of "weapons of liberation" in preference for other weapons that were more visibly used in *Seksualiti Merdeka*.