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Liberational Justice in the Political Thought of Ahmad Boestamam

Teo Lee Ken*

This article reads Ahmad Boestamam's *Testament Politik API* (1946) to understand his political thoughts, especially on the notion of justice and freedom. The text was written as an agitation against the British and the social structure of Malay and Malaya society. This article also reads Boestamam's novel, *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (1969), to discuss his idealism and views on the political landscape of post-colonial Malaysia. This article argues that Boestamam's thoughts on justice have made important contributions to the discourse of the nation.

Keywords: justice, liberation, Marhaenism, socialism, Boestamam

Introduction

David Kelly, in his discussion of the meaning of the idea of freedom and the elements that frame its expression in the context of Asia, notes:

... there is a key cluster which seems repeated to claim centre stage and to describe itself as real freedom. This is the cluster centring around ethics, politics and law. . . . But for much of the time, freedom really matters in social history when it figures as social practice, an idea, indeed even a "shared vision of social life," but more specifically as the underlying source of criteria of legal, ethical, and political practices—human rights, the rule of law, civil society, democracy and so on. (Kelly 1998, 3)

Kelly's insights are important to understand how people and society in Asia conceive of freedom and justice beyond their daily experiences, on their own terms and practices. The leaders of these communities, in particular, are central to the articulation of these elements. Building on this, this article focuses on Ahmad Boestamam's articulation of liberational justice as freedom, and how he defined freedom as "an idea, indeed even a 'shared vision of social life'" in the context of Malaysian political history.

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A socialist revolutionary and nationalist, Boestamam¹⁾ is unequalled in terms of revolutionary fervor, rhetorical expression, and radical political ideology. He engaged in journalism, politics, and literary writing.²⁾ Boestamam started his career as a journalist. During that stint, he met individuals who provided the foundation for his political ideas and influenced his activism throughout his life. He helped form the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM, Malay Nationalist Party) and established its radical youth wing, Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API, Awakened Youth Movement), and later the Parti Rakyat Malaya (PRM, Malaya People's Party). He held steadfast to socialist idealism throughout his life.

Boestamam wrote extensively and possessed an expansive writing range.³⁾ Written from the 1950s to the late 1960s, his novels capture vividly the Malaysian political landscape and contestation of ideas. Among his significant writings are the political treatise *Testament Politik API* (The political testament of API) and his autobiographical trilogy *Lambaian dari Puncak* (Waving from the summit) (1983), *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak* (Carving the path to the summit) (1972), and *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang* (Seven years of prolonged nights) (1976).⁴⁾ As literary texts, they are invaluable for the study of Malaysian intellectual history, particularly the conception of liberational justice. However, Boestamam's articulation of liberational justice is strongest in the realm of politics. His *Testament Politik API* is a seminal political treatise on the political history and intellectual tradition of Malaysia.

This article starts with a discussion of how Boestamam articulated liberational justice as freedom. His thoughts on this matter are well recorded in the political manifesto *Testament Politik API* (1946). The article then moves to discuss the issues of society and time as articulated by Boestamam in his novel *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (Glass house shaken by tremors) (1969). This novel offers a window to his views and hopes on

1) Ahmad Boestamam (1920–83) was born Abdullah Sani bin Raja Kechil in 1920 in Tanjung Malim, Perak. He attended both Malay and English schools. The name Ahmad Boestamam is derived from Subhash Chandra Bose, a revolutionary-socialist and nationalist from India whom he read and revered.

2) Ibrahim Yaacob formed the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malays Union) in 1938. Boestamam's involvement in the radical Malay political movement began when he joined the Malay paper *Warta Malaya* led by Ibrahim Yaacob.

3) He used various pen names, including Ruhi Hayat, Hayati, Jiwalara, and Kamsani Karim. Boestamam wrote numerous novels, short stories, poems, essays, commentaries, biographies, and political manifestos. He also translated many works from English to the Malay language.

4) These have been compiled and published as *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam: Merdeka dengan Darah dalam Api* (2004). In the mid-1940s, Boestamam served on editorial boards and as a writer with several newspapers, including *Pelita Malaya* (Light of Malaya), *Suluh Malaya* (Torch of Malaya), and *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the people).

the political landscape of Malaysia. The article concludes by highlighting how the liberational justice discourse espoused by Boestamam emerged with the notions of society and time and was a pivotal discourse in the sphere of competing political discourses during the 1960s.

Liberational Justice as Freedom

A.P.I. mahu kepada satu Negara Merdeka yang berdasarkan demokrasi tulen, satu pemerentahan yang datangnya dari ra'ayat, di-jalankan oleh ra'ayat menerusi kerajaan yang di-bentuk oleh wakil2 ra'ayat, untok faedah, kebajikan dan keselamatan ra'ayat. (Boestamam 2004b, 9)

API wants an independent state founded on genuine democracy, a body politic constituted by the people, conducted by the people through a government instituted by people's representatives, for the interest, welfare, and security of the people.

Boestamam founded API in February 1946 (Boestamam 2004a, 143, 148, 253), and a few months later, in December 1946, he published the political manifesto *Testament Politik API* (*ibid.*, 193). The *Testament* is a political text that proclaims the strength of youth. It describes the global youth movement, the youth movement in Malaya, and API, including its political objectives. The *Testament* opens with the following statement:

Di-dalam-nya ada di-terangkan dengan sechara ringkas tetapi padat tentang tenaga pemuda, pergerakan pemuda di-dunia, pergerakan pemuda di-Malaya dan juga tentang pergerakan A.P.I. (Angkatan Pemuda Insaf) dan tujuan2 politik-nya.
Moga2 buku ini akan mendatangkan faedah kepada pemuda2 Melayu 'am-nya dan pemuda2 A.P.I. khas-nya.
Pemuda2 Melayu—Insaf-lah.
MERDEKA dengan DARAH. (Boestamam 2004b, Kata Pendahuluan)

In it is explained briefly but concisely the strength of youth, youth movements around the world, youth movements in Malaya, and also the movement API (Angkatan Pemuda Insaf) and its political aims. With full hope this book will bring benefit to Malay youth generally and youth of API specifically. Malay Youth—Awakened. FREEDOM through BLOOD.

As a political treatise written in 1946, it is unparalleled. To this day, no work of political ideology matches its forcefulness, clarity, and radicalism. It addresses themes similar to other anticolonial leftist works of the late 1930s to 1950s. The *Testament* is a radical denunciation of the British and the social structure of Malay and Malaya society. Its blunt agitation for the violent overthrow of the British, Malay feudalism, and colonial capitalism, however, is a distinctive feature that differentiates it from other writings during that period.

API carried on the struggles initiated by the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM, Young Malays Union) and PKMM. The KMM was established in 1938 by the teacher and journalist Ibrahim Yaacob, who had been educated at the Sultan Idris Training College (Roff 1994, 222). As the first left-wing Malay political organization in Malaya (Rustam 2008, 25, 28), the KMM espoused a “strong anti-colonial stance” (*ibid.*, 30) in terms of opposition and non-cooperation against the British, and an opposition toward the Malay feudal and elite class (*ibid.*, 48–50) where the KMM arose as a “counterpart to the rightwing, quasi-political State Malay Associations then in process of formation” (Roff 1994, 235).

Rustam Sani (2008, 37) noted that two characteristics marked KMM’s distinctiveness in the political discourse and landscape of the 1930s and early 1940s. The leadership and members of the KMM were not from the traditional Malay feudal class, which consisted of rulers and the aristocracy. Instead, they came from the Malay non-ruling class and masses that had obtained a Malay- or English-stream education (*ibid.*, 47). Additionally, the KMM advocated the struggle and idea of Melayu Raya (Greater Malaya), a “nationalist ideology or sentiment based on the idea of a grand Malay (or Indonesian) nation perceived by its believers in its cultural or ethnic terms and territorially covering the Malayan and Indonesian archipelagos” (Ibrahim 1975, 20; Cheah 1979, 85, 89–90; Rustam 2008, 53).

The idea of Melayu Raya crucially informed Boestamam’s political perspective. The struggle against colonialism and the demand for independence embodied in the idea of Melayu Raya shaped Boestamam’s nationalist ideology and practice. Further, the shared culture and history of Malaya and Indonesia moved Boestamam to explore and embrace the ideas of nation, socialism, and liberation developing in Indonesia. However, simultaneously the influence of Melayu Raya led Boestamam to conceive a different view of the nation. Rustam (2008, 62) has emphasized that the KMM concept of Melayu Raya referred to “an ‘ethnicist’ notion of the nation.”

Boestamam’s idea of the nation and society, strongly influenced by the Marhaenism⁵⁾ conception of socialism, was based on popular sovereignty and liberational justice—specifically the ideals of freedom and political equality. Boestamam expressed this outlook from the mid-1940s with the establishing of the PKMM and API in tandem with changing political conditions where Indonesia had proclaimed independence and the British had returned to Malaya after the war (Boestamam 2004a, 133–135). In its relation to the

5) Boestamam adopted the idea of Marhaenism from the Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno’s use of the term. Marhaen was the name of a poor peasant Sukarno encountered. Subsequently, Sukarno conceived the term “Marhaenism” as the name for his political ideology and the ideology of Partai Nasional Indonesia, which sought to safeguard the welfare and change the social conditions of all oppressed classes in Indonesia.

PKMM, API saw itself as:

satu barisan yang bersedia mempertahankan kehormatan diri, kehormatan kampung dan kehormatan Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya yang menjadi barisan perjuangan ra'ayat jelata Melayu itu. (Boestamam 2004b, 21)

a front that is prepared to defend self-dignity, the dignity of the hometown, and the dignity of the Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya, which serves as the front of the Malay people's struggle.

The *Testament* as such embodied the culmination of a political struggle and idealism amassing from the KMM and PKMM, to API. Boestamam and API pursued a confrontational and militant struggle for radical social change and freedom. The dominant political-economic class, consisting of the British, feudal, and Malay elite and foreign capital owners, preserved the social-political order that exploited the masses.

Two key features arise in the nationalist and political activism of Boestamam. The most apparent was the adoption of socialist ideals and political fronts. Boestamam maintained close affiliations with the KMM, was a founding member of the PKMM, and led API, which was the youth and radical-militant wing of the PKMM. He adapted ideas enunciated by Communist and socialist-influenced nationalist movements in Indonesia (*ibid.*, 3, 15–16, 24–25, 27). Sukarno's conception of a localized version of socialism known as Marhaenism informed Boestamam (*ibid.*, 10). In 1955 Boestamam established the PRM, which was based on the political ideology of Marhaenism.

The second feature of Boestamam's activism was his focus on the youth as a force of radical social change. Only the youth could displace the ruling and dominant political-economic class:

Dunia memang tidak dapat melupakan tenaga muda. Dari semenjak dunia ada dan dalam masa dunia menempoh perubahan2 yang memang tuntutan oleh 'alam mengikut process-nya tenaga pemuda selalu terbokti. Dalam segala lapangan ada tenaga pemuda dan memang menghendaki tenaga pemuda itu. . . . Perhatikan pula barisan2 tentera, perkuliaan, pergerakan, pertanian, pertadbiran negeri dalam dunia ini, siapakah yang banyak menyumbangkan tenaga-nya di-dalam-nya baik dahulu mahu pun sekarang? Tidak lain dan tidak bukan ia-lah PEMUDA. (*ibid.*, 1)

This world does not forget the strength of youth. From the time the world existed, and during the time the world experienced changes that were certainly required by nature according to its processes, the strength of youth has always been proven. In all fields there is the strength of youth, and these areas certainly require that strength of youth. . . . Observe the military, laborers, movement, agriculture, state administration fronts in this world—who has contributed the most strength in them, whether in the past or the present? It is none other than YOUTH.

Youth are at the forefront of the pursuit of radical change as “darah pemuda2 itu panas

dan di-dalam dada pemuda2 itu-lah tersimpul-nya semangat yang berkubar2 dan chita2 yang murni dan tinggi” (the blood of youth are raging, and in the bosoms of youth are entwined fiery spirits and virtuous and lofty idealism) (*ibid.*, 2). Their pure idealism for goodness, progress, beauty, peace, and justice in the world makes “tenaga yang ada pada pemuda itu ia-lah tenaga raksaksa” (the strength possessed by youth a colossal strength) (*ibid.*, 3). Boestamam differentiated two kinds of youth—radical and moderate:

Jiwa pemuda jika hendak di-bahagi2 dengan sechara besar boleh-lah di-bahagi dua—radical dan moderate, keras dan lembut. Pemuda yang berjiwa radical mahukan perubahan dalam segala lapangan dengan serta merta dan serentak, memakai semboyan KERAS LAWAN KERAS, SENJATA LAWAN SENJATA. Tetapi pemuda yang berjiwa moderate mahukan perubahan dengan perlahan2, dengan sechara evolutive, memakai semboyan biar lambat asalkan selamat. (*ibid.*, 2)

The spirit of youth, if it is to be divided, can be broadly divided in two—radical and moderate, forceful and amenable. Youths who are radical in spirit want immediate and simultaneous changes in all spheres, adopting the slogan of FORCE AGAINST FORCE, ARMS AGAINST ARMS. However, youths who are moderate in spirit want changes slowly, in an evolutionary manner, adopting the slogan of “slow so long as safe.”

Youth and nationalist movements around the world informed Boestamam’s view of youth as radical forces for change (*ibid.*, 3–6). Boestamam himself wrote that the *Testament* focused on the radicalism and idealism of youth. He made numerous references to youth movements, particularly in Indonesia (*ibid.*, 2–3, 14–18). Indonesia was undoubtedly the biggest influence on Boestamam’s statement on the role of youth in radical political change. Political consciousness and mass mobilization had begun early in Indonesia. A revolutionary and nationalist mass youth front in the form of the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) emerged in 1928 (Sukarno 2014, x). In the *Testament* Boestamam referred to a prominent radical youth leader, Bung Tomo, and mentioned his struggles as an inspiration to API (Boestamam 2004b, 27). In his excellent and pivotal work *Java in a Time of Revolution*, Benedict Anderson captures the central and revolutionary role of the *pemuda* or youth in the early stages of the Indonesian Revolution. Its basis was both traditional and modern, as on one hand “youth was itself an essential category of traditional Javanese society” (Anderson 1972, 2, 33). On the other hand, in the cultivation of popular nationalism during the Japanese occupation that “generated that sense of mass power, of fraternal solidarity, of immense possibilities,” the idea and mobilization of youth “were all created for an impending historical moment, the meaning of which, it became increasingly clear, was to be the destiny of the nation.” This idealism constituted the “character of youth experience itself” (*ibid.*, 30). Anderson’s pivotal work discusses how, in contrast to other modern revolutions, the Indonesian Revolution could not “satisfactorily be

explained through conventional Marxian analysis, or in terms of either an alienation of the intelligentsia or a frustration of rising expectations.” It was Indonesian youth who provided “the central thrust of revolutionary power” (*ibid.*, vii).

Youth, revolutionary change, and liberation were also directed toward the future. Anderson explains how youth and the idea of youth played a deep and profound role in the nationalist movements of Indonesia, where

one can see how much nationalism is tied to visions and hopes for the future if one looks at the names of the early organizations that joined the independence movement at the beginning of our century: Jong Java (Young Java), Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesia), Jong Islamietenbond (League of Young Muslims), Jong Minahasa (Young Minahasa) and so on. There were no organizations that called themselves Old Java, Eternal Bali, and so on. Their orientation was to the future and the social basis was youth. (Anderson 1999, 6)

To oust the ruling political-economic class, Boestamam pursued a combative and revolutionary struggle. He called for “force against force” and “arms against arms.” The nationalist movement and struggle was a process of rebellion:

Begitu pula dalam pergerakan kebangsaan. Kalau pemuda itu tidak dapat bergerak dan lambat berhasil-nya chita2 dengan sechara sehat, maka tidak ada keberatan bagi mereka untok memoleh jalan yang keras dan radical saperti memberontak. (Boestamam 2004b, 2)

Likewise in the nationalist movement. If the youth cannot progress and in adopting peaceful means are slow to realize their ideals, they are not indisposed to adopt forceful and radical means including rebellion.

This impetus for revolution has classical social origins. Judith Shklar (1990, 84) in considering the position of injustice in political thought explains that the sense of injustice and its “political dangers were always known, to be sure, since yesterday’s outcast may well be tomorrow’s revolutionary avenger. And so, Aristotle noted that perceived injustice stimulates revolutions, but his interest in the subject was limited to its ideological expression.” In the same way, the condition of colonialism produced a sense of injustice in Boestamam that stirred him to seek a revolutionary struggle. But nationalist and political movements in neighboring Indonesia also inspired this intent.

Hence, Boestamam emulated the slogans of the youth movement in Indonesia when he wrote in support that “we confront colonialism with revolution. We are not afraid to soak this earth in blood” (Anderson 1972, 52; Boestamam 2004b, 3). In many ways Indonesian revolutionary and nationalist politics and Sukarno had a great impact on Boestamam and his *Testament*. Indonesian nationalist leaders declared the independence of Indonesia in 1945, while Boestamam published his *Testament* in 1946. Many of the

themes and rhetoric of *Testament* seem to resemble Sukarno's 1933 essay "Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka" (Achieving an independent Indonesia) (Sukarno 2014, 354–463).

Sukarno, for instance, enunciated the call for revolutionary struggle in the form of *massa-aksi* or mass action. To Sukarno, "massa-aksi adalah pergerakan massa yang radikal" (mass action is a mass movement that is radical) (*ibid.*, 395). The formation of a mass movement was necessary as the politics of the *kaum lunak* or moderate groups were futile and the demands for justice would always be ignored (*ibid.*, 421). This demarcation of revolutionary and moderate politics was also used in Boestamam's differentiation of two kinds of youth. Thus, mass action connotes:

aksinya rakyat djelata yang sudah terluluh mendjadi dijiwa-baru, melawan sesuatu keadaan jang mereka tidak sudi pikul lagi. Memang, massa-aksi adalah selamanja radikal. Memang, massa-aksi adalah selamanja membuka dan mendjebol akar-akarnya sesuatu keadaan. Memang, massa-aksi adalah selamanja mau menanam akar-akarnya keadaan yang baru. (*ibid.*, 427)

the action of the common people who have changed to a new spirit, fighting a condition that they are no longer willing to accept. Indeed, mass action is always radical. Indeed, mass action is always the exposing and penetrating of the roots of a condition. Indeed, mass action is always intent on planting the roots of a new condition.

The essence of mass action is total change, involving the removal of the old and the construction of a new social order. It totally rejects "sikap setengah-setengah jang tidak berdjoang tetapi hanya tawar-menawar" (the outlook of some who do not struggle but only negotiate) (*ibid.*, 424).

Boestamam adapted this urgency and radical politics. In Boestamam's mind, violence, rebellion, and blood all converged and were encapsulated in revolutionary change. Boestamam and API manifested this through the form of revolutionary movement:

A.P.I. sedar untuk mencapai hasil-nya chita2 ada dua jalan besar yang terbuka ia-itu . . . Jalan chepat, radikal dan serentak . . . Jalan yang pertama mendatangkan perubahan dalam segala lapangan dalam masa yang singkat. . . . Jalan yang pertama menuntut perjuangan. . . . Jalan yang pertama meminta pergorbanan tenaga, harta dan darah. . . . Maka di-antara dua jalan ini A.P.I. memilih jalan yang pertama. Keyakinan A.P.I. hanya ada pada jalan yang pertama itu sahaja. Sebab itu-lah A.P.I. memakai semboyan: KERAS LAWAN KERAS. LEMBUT LAWAN LEMBUT. (Boestamam 2004b, 11)

API is conscious that to achieve its ideals two approaches are open, that is . . . The swift, radical and outright approach . . . The first approach brings changes to all spheres in a short time. . . . The first approach demands struggle. . . . The first approach seeks the sacrifices of effort, property, and blood. . . . Therefore, between these two approaches API selects the first approach. The conviction of API rests only on the first approach. It is why API adopts the slogan: FORCE AGAINST FORCE. COOPERATIVE AGAINST COOPERATIVE.

The ideal of freedom spurs this radical social change, revolution, violence, rebellion, and the cry to drench “this earth in blood.” The articulation of justice stems from conditions of injustice, but it also develops from the basis of an ideal, for “any society is by definition a system of rules that distinguish right from wrong and better from worse” and “it is thus in justice itself that the sense of injustice begins” (Shklar 1990, 86–87).

For Boestamam, freedom meant, first, freedom from injustice. In the *Testament* Boestamam defines injustice as referring to the construction of a class-based society, and social justice as referring to the absence of man and socially constructed classes in society:

A.P.I. mahu kepada satu susunan masyarakat yang adil atau yang di-katakan keadilan social. Keadilan social ada-lah satu sendi, suatu syarat yang utama dan penting untuk menentukan tulin atau tidak-nya demokrasi yang di-jalankan oleh satu2 negara itu. . . . Kepada A.P.I. keadilan social itu ia-lah susunan masyarakat sesuatu bangsa yang di-dalam-nya tidak ada lagi pembahagian tingkatan yang di-ada-kan oleh manusia yang di-antara satu sama lain bertentangan dalam faedah, hak kepentingan dan kewajipan-nya terhadap negara. Kepada A.P.I. ada-nya orang2 bangsawan dan ada-nya ra'ayat murba, ada-nya yang mulia dan ada-nya yang hina itu ia-lah kerana masyarakat tidak adil, kerana di-adakan oleh manusia yang kerana tipu muslihat-nya dapat mengadakan klas2 dalam masyarakat manusia itu. (Boestamam 2004b, 10)

API wants an arrangement of society that is just or that is said to be social justice. Social justice is a principle, an essential and important requisite that determines whether the democracy implemented in a state is genuine or not. . . . For API, social justice refers to the social order in a nation in which there are no class divisions made by men who have conflicting benefits, rights of interests, and obligations toward the state. For API there exist the nobility and common people, the honorable and the abject because of an unjust society, because it is made by men who through deceit are able to establish classes in that society of men.

In British Malaya the populace was divided between the elite who possessed pure authority and wealth, and the masses and dispossessed, thus forming an unjust society marked by political and economic inequalities. On one hand, there were ruling classes who dominated political power and economic capital. On the other hand, there were the urban and rural masses that had neither political nor economic power. As such, according to Boestamam (*ibid.*, 11), social justice could be attained only if these divisions were abolished.

Hence, freedom also meant the elimination of colonialism and feudalism. The British colonialists and feudal and Malay elites with the support of foreign capital owners defended this unjust social order. Boestamam denounced the ruling political-economic class and their supporters. They were enemies even though from the Malay community. They obstructed the struggle for freedom:

Sekali pun pemuda2 itu daripada bangsa Melayu sendiri, daripada adek abang kita sendiri, mereka itu juga ia-lah musuh kita; setidak2-nya ini-lah dia disiplin A.P.I.—ini-lah dia undang2 perjuangan yang harus ada dalam satu2 badan politik yang mempunyai tujuan besar hendak merebut kemerdekaan bangsa dan tanah air. (*ibid.*, 16)

Even if those youth are from the Malay race, from among our brothers, they are also our enemies; at least this is the discipline of API—this is the precept of our struggle that has to be in a political body that aims to attain the monumental aim of seizing the freedom of the nation and motherland.

To Boestamam, the construction of a class-based society constituted injustice as it resulted in the colonizers and ruling elite depriving the masses of political power and economic wealth possessed by and conferred on the former. Colonialism denied the masses political-economic sovereignty through domination. Freedom entailed removing these hierarchies to realize justice and to uphold the people's sovereignty.

Second, freedom to Boestamam meant freedom from oppression. In the *Testament*, Boestamam identified five types of oppression. These encompassed oppression by the colonialists, oppression by Malays themselves who become the tool of the colonialists, oppression by the feudal class, oppression by traditional religious teachers, and last, oppression by capital owners among both the Malays and foreign races (*ibid.*, 20–21). Boestamam cited the political standing of the Islamic scholars who formed part of the ruling class. They were conservative and condoned oppression, hence perpetuating the existing social conditions.

Local and foreign owners of capital also came under the sharp pen of Boestamam. The *Testament* not only instigated the overthrow of the existing political order, it also demanded a total transformation of the economic forces at play. The existing economic system benefited only the ruling political-economic class. It gained from the exploitation and oppression of the masses. Boestamam called for an economic system that not only profited and privileged the ruling class but also catered to the welfare of the people. He urged for a planned economy where “segala sesuatu yang mengenai soal ekonomi haruslah di-pegang oleh Negara—atau *State*” (everything that is related to the question of the economy must be governed by the state—or *State*) (*ibid.*, 9–10).

Then there is freedom of expression. To Boestamam the British colonialists and ruling government enforced rules to curtail protest and dissent in order to prevent the spread of subversive ideas and movements. These threatened the existing political order. Boestamam and API were among many groups seeking to end colonialism, oppression, and exploitation. These prohibitions safeguarded the power of the British and colonial government. In the *Testament* Boestamam called for the abolishing of these rules. On this issue, Boestamam insisted on

kemerdekaan berpidato, bersuara dalam surat2 khabar, bersidang dan lain2. Menghapuskan undang2 yang menetapkan boleh menghukom surat2 khabar kerana berani menegor pemerentahan dan kerana menyiarkan tulisan2 yang dikatakan menghasut. (*ibid.*, 23)

freedom to speak, voicing out in newspapers, to have meetings and others. Remove laws that stipulate the penalizing of newspapers that dare to criticize the government and that publish writings that are said to be seditious.

These rules repressed the nationalist movement and struggle for independence. The restrictions on expression and the perpetuation of colonialism signified injustice.

Finally, freedom referred to the unity of all youth in Malaya. To be free was to be united. It was irrelevant that youth in Malaya were of various races. Commitment to revolutionary change and devotion to the ideals of the national-political movement and struggle were paramount. Allegiance to the idealism of the struggle and movement overcame differences of race, religion, or background:

Maka demikian-lah pula kita. Kita mahu berikat dan bekerja sama dengan pemuda2 segala bangsa yang ada di-Tanah Melayu ini, tetapi kita tidak akan begitu bodoh mahu bekerja sama dan berikat dengan pemuda2 segala bangsa yang menggalang2 perjuangan kita, yang tidak suka bangsa kita mulia dan merdeka bahkan mereka itu ia-lah musuh kita. (*ibid.*, 16)

Thus, so are we. We want to fraternize and cooperate with youth of any races in Tanah Melayu, but we are not so ignorant as to want to cooperate and fraternize with youth of any races who impede our struggle, who do not want our nation to be esteemed and sovereign—indeed they are our enemies.

Boestamam strived to build a common platform embracing all communities. For him the conflict and struggle were not against other ethnic and religious communities. Rather, they were based on political values and ideals against those who caused injustice, such as the colonizers:

Kita harus mengetahui bahawa kita pemuda2 Malaya sama ada Melayu, China, India atau lain-nya tidak-lah ada perbezaan-nya—tidak ada lebeh kurang-nya. Kita ada-lah sama2 pemuda anak tanah jajahan yang hidup-nya terbiar, yang pelajaran-nya tidak di-peruahkan dan sangat sedikit yang mendapat peluang melanjutkan pelajaran-nya dan memetik buah pelajaran yang tinggi2, yang hanya di-galakkan menjadi alat (perkakas) dan berkuli dan lain2, yang hanya di-tidur2 dan di-buai2kan dengan segala macham kepalsuan dan kepelesiran hidup. (*ibid.*, 17)

We must know that we the youth of Malaya—whether Malay, Chinese, Indian, or others—have no differences: nothing more and nothing less. We are all youth sons of a colonized land whose lives are abandoned, whose education is not provided, and very few get the opportunity to advance their education and pick the fruits of a good education, who are encouraged to only become tools and laborers, and are being put to sleep and lulled by all forms of life's falseness and pleasure.

Boestamam made it clear that the colonizers and ruling order had no moral concern for the various communities. The condition of injustice in this case can be said to be the deprivation of intellectual consciousness, and the coercion and indoctrination of the people to merely serve the interests of the colonial and ruling order. Boestamam continues:

. . . sebab itu kita ada mempunyai tujuan yang sama sekarang ia-itu menghapuskan angkara2 yang menghimpit kita itu, dan untok menghapuskan angkara2 itu maka perlu-lah kita mendirikan satu benteng—benteng waja—untok menghapuskan segala puak dan pehak, segala gulungan yang menyebabkan angkara2 itu. (*ibid.*, 17)

. . . that is why we have the same purpose, that is, to eliminate the evils that repress us, and to eliminate those evils we need to build a bastion—a staunch bastion—to eliminate all clans and sides, all groups that cause those evils.

The only solution to this, for Boestamam, was unity and struggle. In this struggle, the solidarity and idealism of youth sustained their unity. Through unity, freedom could be realized. When freedom was realized, justice could be attained:

Saudara2 pemuda A.P.I. dan pemuda2 Melayu di-seluruh Malaya! Menilek kepada kepentingan2 ini mari-lah dari sekarang kita menyusun barisan kita menyusun perpaduan bangsa Melayu, kemudian mari-lah kita menyusun barisan perpaduan pemuda2 Malaya segala bangsa yang sukakan democracy, kemudian mari-lah pula kita menyusun barisan perpaduan pemuda2 Asia dan akhir-nya perpaduan pemuda2 sa-dunia. Hanya dengan jalan ini-lah sahaja keamanan keadilan dan democracy dapat di-jamin di-dunia ini. (*ibid.*, 18)

Fellow brothers, the youth in API and Malay youth in the whole of Malaya! Considering this significance, let us together from now amass our front, amass the unity of Malays, then let us amass the youth of Malaya of all races that cherish democracy, then let us amass the united front of the youth of Asia and finally the unity of youth around the world. It is through this way only that peace, justice, and democracy will be guaranteed in this world.

The *Testament* served as the ideological basis for Boestamam and API to overthrow the status quo and establish a free and united society. The commitment to build a democratic Malaya on the principles of democracy in accordance with the spirit of popular sovereignty (*ibid.*, 8) underpinned this ideological struggle. Society obtained its basis and legitimacy from the people by popular consent and not from feudal rule. A society based on democracy, where government representation was directed toward the interest, welfare, and security of its people (*ibid.*, 9), was a free, and thereby just, society. As he wrote:

A.P.I. mahu kepada satu susunan masharakat yang adil atau yang di-katakan keadilan social. Keadilan social ada-lah satu sendi, satu syarat yang utama dan penting untok menentukan tulen

atau tidak-nya demokrasi yang di-jalankan oleh satu2 negara itu. Selagi keadilan social tidak ada selama itu-lah demokrasi itu tidak tulen saratus peratus. (*ibid.*, 10)

API wants an arrangement of society that is just or that is said to be social justice. Social justice is a principle, an essential and important requisite that determines whether the democracy implemented in a state is genuine or not. So long as social justice is absent, there will not be one hundred percent democracy.

The *Testament* was groundbreaking in terms of its content. But equally important was its call for revolutionary change. It called for a total, violent, and militant social change. The principles of democracy, freedom, and social justice articulated in the *Testament* were radical when compared to the dominant political ideas of the period. These political ideas were merged with a rhetorical bent and praxis that was confrontational toward the ruling class and social order. Thus, the *Testament* was radical not only in terms of content but also form. It expressed a language that was fiery, forceful, direct, and vernacular in the form of the words and sentence structure that Boestamam used.

In this Boestamam was very much influenced again by Sukarno, who was known for his fiery oratory and rhetorical language. In the *Testament* radical political ideas combined with rhetorical language and a revolutionary call. For Boestamam liberational justice referred to freedom seized through revolutionary change. So influential and pathbreaking was the *Testament* that the British banned the manifesto and API. Boestamam was found guilty of sedition in his pursuit of the oneness of all peoples, of a free and just society through revolutionary change.

Society and Time: *Rumah Kacha DigeGAR Gempa* (1969)

For Boestamam liberational justice ultimately entailed the freedom of self and society. And this freedom was seized through revolutionary change. Boestamam's articulation of liberational justice as freedom accompanied the emergence of self and society. The onset of self and society in turn ensured the relevance and need for freedom of self and society. This break and continuity in history marks the significance of Boestamam and liberational justice as freedom.

With the emergence and articulation of liberational justice as freedom, and the self and society, a third concept develops: time. Within this context, movement and social change occurs. Freedom is possible only with time, specifically a future. Movement and social change is directed toward the future. Thus, in the works of Boestamam we identify the combination of freedom, self and society, and time. Boestamam's period marks

the beginning of the history concerning liberational justice. It encompasses the struggle for liberational justice, and freedom in particular, and the groups and ideologies opposed to it. His novel *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (1969) reflects this. In *Rumah Kacha*, Boestamam sketches, first, the landscape of political and social life in Malaysia, and second, the ideological currents and conflicts underlying that background.

The novel tells of three students—Rahmat, Su Sian Lock, and Ratna—in London and their return to Malaya upon graduation. Sian Lock and Ratna are good friends who read law. One day they meet Rahmat, also a law student, at a function. Sian Lock and Ratna develop feelings for Rahmat and make a deal to compete fairly for his affections. Sian Lock wins his heart in the end. The three return to Malaya upon completion of their studies. In Malaya, Sian Lock converts to Islam and marries Rahmat as Susaniah. One day Rahmat meets Ratna again. Soon after, he takes her as his second wife. Rahmat with both his wives, Sian Lock and Ratna, form a *rumah kacha tiangnya tiga*, or a “glass house with three pillars.”

At first glance the novel appears to be a simplistic and frivolous story of Rahmat’s polygamous marriage mixed with historical themes and mere sexual acts and erotic scenes. However, at a deeper level *Rumah Kacha* is a biting, unhindered, and carefree satire of the Perikatan coalition consisting of the racial-based UMNO (United Malays National Organization), MCA (Malayan Chinese Association), MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) parties. These three political parties, representing the communal interests of the Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities respectively, formed the Perikatan in 1954 and led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the president of UMNO, negotiated with the British for Malaya’s independence that was proclaimed on August 31, 1957.

The background of the novel covers the political and socioeconomic landscape of Malaysian society. The narrative of Rahmat’s marriage to Sian Lock and Ratna represents the process of friendship and hostility, and the culmination of the union of a Malay with a Chinese and an Indian. The marriage of three different races is a sly and mocking reference to the history and formation of the Perikatan coalition (Ruhi Hayat 1969, 6, 22, 26–27, 117–118; Cheah 2002, 1–7).

Boestamam includes themes that allude to the nature, inclination, and social-political culture of those political parties, the coalition, and its leaders. In the first instance the novel highlights the privileged and affluent background of Rahmat, Sian Lock, and Ratna. Sian Lock and Ratna come from rich families. The former’s father is a business tycoon who owns vast acres of rubber plantation and several shophouses. The latter’s father is the manager of a massive rubber plantation. There is no mention of Rahmat’s financial source, but it is possible that he is from either an elite and aristocratic background or the educated class for him to be able to pursue his law studies in London. Such origins reflect

the general background and upbringing of the Perikatan leaders.

In the second instance there is a strong Western and colonial influence on the three characters. Rahmat and Sian Lock, in particular, are inclined toward Western culture in the form of songs and dancing, and indulge in drinking. Consider the scene during Rahmat and Sian Lock's meeting with two other students, Ruzihan and Senawi:

“Kalau begitu kita minum2lah dulu,” Ruzihan menetapkan. “Minum bir, jadi?” Semuanya memberikan anggokan. . . . Sesudah menjamu selera mereka kini menjamu telinga pula. Ber-bagai2 lagu dibunyikan Ruzihan tetapi kebanyakannya lagu2 moden, lagu2 angkatan sekarang, lagu2 gelek dan lagu2 gila. Sebuah lagu “You Are Always in My Heart” yang dinyanyikan oleh Dean Martin paling disukai sekali oleh Rahmat sehingga dimintanya Ruzihan memainkannya semula beberapa kali. (Ruhi Hayat 1969, 53, 57)

“In that case let us drink first,” Ruzihan stated. “How about beer?” All of them nodded. . . . After feeding their appetites, now they feed their ears. All kinds of songs were played by Ruzihan, but most were modern songs, contemporary songs, dancing songs, and upbeat songs. One song, “You Are Always in My Heart,” sung by Dean Martin, was Rahmat's favorite, and he told Ruzihan to play it repeatedly.

It should be noted that Boestamam neither makes a moral judgment nor implies the immorality of their behavior. However, it illustrates the pervasiveness of colonial culture among the educated class—in this case students from the elite and capital-owning class who study in the colonial motherland. More concretely, it is an indictment of the colonial conformism and mindset of political leaders from the ruling Perikatan coalition. Syed Hussein Alatas would later deliver a penetrating analysis of this colonial conformism in *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977) and *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (2010).

Last, the friendship and subsequent marriage of Rahmat with Sian Lock and Ratna highlights the polygamous marriage of a Malay, Chinese, and Indian. It represents the racial communal-driven compromise between UMNO, MCA, and MIC. It is a race-based partnership based on the intent and struggle to preserve each racial community's culture, power, and wealth. The partnership is founded upon and promotes racial identity. The segregation and understanding of each racial group relies on colonial constructed essentialist cultural values and traits. Consider the conversation between Rahmat and his parents-in-law regarding his legal practice and career prospects:

“Tentang itu jangan susah,” orang tua Susaniah segera memberitahukannya. “Berapa saja engkau mahu saya boleh adakan. Berapa saja, katakan. Apa lain yang saya boleh tolong, sedia akan saya berikan. Bangunan untok dijadikan pejabat? Saya ada kawan kenalan untok mengadakannya bagi engkau dan dimana saja. Pendeknya satu pun tak ada susahnyanya. Saya tak minta engkau bayar balek. Asalkan sharikat engkau sendiri itu terdiri, saya sudah puashati.” (Ruhi Hayat 1969, 69)

“About that, don't be troubled,” Susaniah's parents told him. “However much you want, I can

settle it. How much, just say. Whatever else I can help with, I am prepared to do. A building for the office? I have a friend to settle that for you, and in whichever place. In short, there is no trouble. I don't ask you to repay me. As long as the company is yours, I am satisfied.

And elsewhere, in another conversation with Ratna, who offers to establish a law firm with him:

“Kau tahu, Su, dia ajak abang berkongsi dengannya dipejabatnya tu. Ratna & Rahmat namanya, katanya. Abang tak payah keluar modal apa2 sedang kira2 pendapatan dibagi dua . . .” (*ibid.*, 83)

“You know, Su, she asked me to join in a partnership with her at her office. Ratna & Rahmat would be the name, she said. I won't have to contribute any capital, while the earnings will be divided by two . . .”

The offer of capital to Rahmat by both his parents-in-law and Ratna is characteristic and represents the relation between Malay feudal political power and non-Malay economic capital. It is the political arrangement that underlies the Perikatan coalition and guides its pursuit and dominance of political power. In *Rumah Kacha*, Boestamam exemplifies this political expedience through narrative and characters.

The ideological conflict contained in *Rumah Kacha* makes it an important work. This conflict is not explicit: Boestamam does not position the ideology of the Perikatan coalition against those of the nationalist-socialist movement. That is not the intent. The work is meant as a caustic satire of the Perikatan and its leaders. If we move beyond the text and locate the work within the social and political landscape of the period, the work and the themes it highlights are at the center of an intense ideological contestation. The novel is a protest against the dominant political ideology of the Perikatan and its leaders. It encompasses Boestamam's political struggle. It is a resistance and struggle in the form of the written letter.

Boestamam opposed the values the Perikatan embodied. His opposition stemmed from a socialist perspective. Boestamam represented the poor and exploited class. He struggled for economic equality and protection for this class. For Boestamam, the causes of injustice were political domination and economic exploitation. To achieve freedom for both self and society, British rule had to be eliminated. This included changing the status quo composed of the ruling political-economic class who cooperated with the British. And further, the political ideology and mobilization of race obstructed freedom. It caused and perpetuated the existence of different political and economic classes in Malaysian society. So long as these classes remained, there could be no freedom and justice.

Boestamam opposed these social conditions on the basis of socialism and justice. He articulated liberational justice as freedom, which referred to freedom of self and

society. In *Rumah Kacha* there is a striking passage that sums up the conflicting ideologies of Boestamam and the ruling coalition, and hence justice against injustice, and freedom against unfreedom. In this passage, Ratna speaks to Sian Lock of her dislike for Veluatham Davidson:

“Hanya itu saja yang menyebabkan engkau tak suka padanya?” Sian Lock bertanya, mahu tahu se-banyak2nya. “Banyak sebab lain,” Ratna Devi menerangkan. “Dia orang politik, mabokkan politik, dan politiknya itu politik kiri pula. Sudah tentu saja faham politiknya itu, faham sosialis, bertentangan dan berchangah dengan faham politik ayah saya. Dan saya pun tak sechochok dengan faham politik itu.” (*ibid.*, 17)

“Only because of that you don’t like him?” Sian Lock asked, wanting to find out as much as possible. “There are many other reasons,” Ratna Devi explained. “He’s into politics, obsessed with politics, and also his politics is Left politics. Surely his political view is a socialist view, in opposition and conflict with the political view of my father. And I am also not compatible with that political view.”

In this narrative, Boestamam captures the ideological contestations that occurred in the 1960s. He focuses on the political discourse of the ruling government and state, revealing its values and characteristics but presenting not much of his own political idealism and discourse, which he elaborates more in other novels such as *Sorong Makan Tarik Makan* (Sliding and pulling, eating both ways) (1967) and *Malam Tak Berbintang* (Night without stars) (1968).

However, *Rumah Kacha* is crucial because, in addition to depicting the dominant political discourse, Boestamam captures the emergence and development of self and society. This is an emergence and development that is significant because within its backdrop is the articulation of liberational justice as freedom. This narrative arises from a discourse of liberational justice. Boestamam articulates liberational justice as freedom, and this discourse of justice competes against other prevailing political discourses.

Conclusion: The Political Discourse of Liberational Justice

In a revealing essay on the ideological origins of the French Revolution, Keith Michael Baker (1990) writes that several main discourses existed in France beginning from the mid-eighteenth century. Baker notes that these consisted of “three strands of discourse, each characterized by the analytical priority it gives to one or the other of these terms”:

What I shall call the judicial discourse emphasizes justice. What I shall call the political discourse emphasizes will. What I shall call the administrative discourse emphasizes reason. These three

competing vocabularies structure the language of opposition to monarchical authority, just as they define the efforts and claims of its defenders. (Baker 1990, 25)

For Baker, these three discourses “defined the political culture that emerged in France in the later part of the eighteenth century and provided the ideological framework that gave explosive meaning to the events that destroyed the old regime” (*ibid.*, 27).

In the same way, in Malaysia various political discourses emerged, developed, and contested one another. Central to this was the conflict between the racial-capitalist discourse of the ruling regime and the liberational justice discourse Boestamam represented. The former discourse owed its origins to feudal culture, British colonial ideology, and ethno-nationalism. The latter discourse attempted to integrate popular sovereignty, socialist thought, and Malay literary culture.

This article shows that Boestamam articulated liberational justice as freedom. His revolutionary political manifesto *Testament Politik API* outlines his meaning of freedom. For him freedom meant freedom from injustice, freedom from oppression, freedom of expression, and freedom as the unity of all races. This freedom was seized, for Boestamam, through means of revolution, radical social change, and even violence and blood.

In addition to that, this article shows that Boestamam’s articulation of liberational justice as freedom accompanied the emergence of self and society. With freedom and self and society emerged a third concept, time. These concepts made movement, social change, and the future conceivable. *Rumah Kacha* demonstrates the reality of these concepts and depicts their interactions in social life. This novel explicates the social and political landscape of Malaysian society and the ideological contestations that occur within it. It is essential to relate the concepts of freedom, self and society, and time, and the process of movement, social change, and the future because it enables us to derive Boestamam’s articulation of liberational justice as freedom and identify the emergence of the liberational justice discourse.

In *Russian Thinkers*, Isaiah Berlin praises Alexander Herzen and writes that “Herzen, despite his brilliance, his careless spontaneity, his notorious ‘pyrotechnics’, expresses bold and original ideas, and is a political (and consequently a moral) thinker of the first importance.” Herzen was, in Berlin’s estimation, “an original thinker, independent, honest and unexpectedly profound” (Berlin 1994, 83, 111). Another Russian thinker, Mikhail Bakunin, on the other hand,

stood for ceaseless rebellion against every form of constituted authority, for ceaseless protest in the name of the insulted and oppressed of every nation and class. His power of cogent and lucid destructive argument is extraordinary, and has not, even today, obtained proper recognition.

Berlin further adds that Bakunin is “morally careless, intellectually irresponsible, a man who, in his love for humanity in the abstract, was prepared, like Robespierre, to wade through seas of blood” (*ibid.*, 106, 113). In other words, Bakunin was the direct opposite of Herzen, in both temperament and sense of social responsibility. Although Berlin’s description of Bakunin is less than complimentary, Bakunin remains absolutely instrumental to the history of nineteenth-century Russian social thought. Boestamam was in many ways the “Mikhail Bakunin of Malaysia.”

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