

has achieved its purpose by presenting Islamophobia as a phenomenon that stems from an identity conflict that promotes intense hatred for minorities and other religious groups. Therefore, the book would be useful for policymakers as well as those interested in knowing further about the rising anti-Muslim hatred in America.

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**Singapore Malays: Being ethnic minority and Muslim in a global city-state. By Hussin Mutalib. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012, pp. 204, ISBN: 978-1-138-84453-7.**

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Hussin Mutalib's depiction of the plight of Malay-Muslims in Singapore is as real as one can hope for; an august voice amongst the local Malay academics, having initiated and chaired the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) in Singapore, and tirelessly contributing to policy making with regards to the progress of the Malay community. The objectives the author has for *Singapore Malays: Being Ethnic Minority and Muslims in a Global City-State* were primarily to address the issue of the "Malay plight", and the community's progress (or lack thereof) in relation to the state's expectations; and to propound interventions at the community and state levels. In meeting its objectives, the book has succinctly outlined the malaise of the Malay community, bringing to the fore the two-fold quandary of their identity: the indigenous race (with constitutional recognition) but the minority in terms of population and relative progress vis-à-vis the other races, and Muslims in a city-state where secularism is enshrined as a state ideology. Recent events that call attention to increasing religiosity in Asia Pacific and concerns of Islamic radicalism to the national social fabric, point to the significance of Hussin's proposed recommendations and (regrettably) validity of the continuing "Malay plight".

The cogency of Hussin's premise that, "Singapore's Malay ethnic minority is still not progressing in tandem with the Republic's prosperity and ... without state intervention the Malay plight will not only continue

to haunt the Malays but render problematic the Republic's nation-building agendas" (pp. 12-13) lies on the foundation of a literature review structured as the backdrop to his analysis of the present Malay community. It is akin to a historical narrative underscoring the notion that, "the perennial and persistent plight of Singapore's ethnic Malay minority" (p. 4) has been brought forth and entrenched by the policies of the British colonials that consequently side-lined the Malays and their sultans. The Malays continue to be regarded as second-class citizens despite their indigenous "title" due to their lack of progress in critical areas like education and governance. The author subsequently implies that the Malays are second-class citizens not because of their underperformance, but because the state (read: People's Action Party) policies – with purpose or otherwise – have made the grounds uneven for the Malays, invoking the historical event when the Malay royal family was evicted from the *istana*. This circumspect tone resonates throughout the book as Hussin lays out the mediocrity of the Singaporean Malay community compared to their Chinese and Indian counterparts in undeniable statistics, and thereupon builds his arguments for the state as the primary source of the Malay plight. The enshrined state ideologies of multiculturalism, meritocracy, and secularism result in an "uneasy dialectical relationship... due to the competing motivations and interests of the state and the Malays" (p. 123) and "government tactics as crisis amplification, perpetual vulnerability, patriotism check, or historical, religious amnesia" (p. 126), which seem to be reserved for the "volatile" Malays. Moreover, considering their historical baggage and religious affiliation with the Malay-Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia, the Republic's *realpolitik* with regards to the Malays faces constant scrutiny and external interventions from the latter's ethnic brethren – an added tension to the stretching Malays-State "rubber band".

One can surmise another tangent to Hussin's analysis, which is the ambiguous identity of the Singapore Malay-Muslims. Although the author was not explicit, it is implied in the book's numerous citations of non-Malays voicing the mediocrity of the Malays, especially by those holding eminent posts in the Republic. This calls upon the fact that all the Prime Ministers since the late Lee Kuan Yew have been giving *Amanat Rapat Hari Kebangsaan* (National Day Rally Speech) in the Malay language, prior to their speeches in Mandarin. Not surprising that Lee Hsien Loong learnt the Jawi script when he was five, hinting on the

importance of language in understanding the indigenous community of Singapore. It is noteworthy that the issue of Malay progress will always be mentioned specifically in both the Malay and English speeches. Yet, if one ponders closely, the Malay progress (and lack thereof) is always mentioned with a subtext of relative insufficiency to the overall state progress. It is also underscored in the book that despite how meritocracy is a cornerstone ideology, it remains an elusive one to practice in the Republic with regards to the Malays. The Malays are deemed as incompetent vis-à-vis their Chinese and Indian counterparts especially in Mathematics and Science, and it is irrefutable that there is no prejudice against the Malays in classrooms and in examinations. However, there is a glass ceiling in accepting Malays in elite schools, local universities, and upper positions in civil service as noted by Hussin, “a Malay student was accepted onto the law degree programme at Oxford University, but was unsuccessful when applying to study at local universities” (p. 122). Have the Malays been relegated to just symbolic mentions as “the indigenous ones” to the non-Malays? Significant also that it connotes backwardness.

Bearing in mind the identity of the Malays as second-class citizens as abovementioned, it is alarming that the Malays have charted the highest in surveys denoting high patriotism and loyalty to the state. Rather unfortunate that in highlighting this, the author dismissed mentioning a comparison with the result of the Malays in Singapore with their brethren in Malaysia. The *bumiputera* Malays in Malaysia registered lowest in comparison to the other races, in identifying themselves to the nation-state, correlating a higher loyalty to their own race – unlike the majority of the Singaporean Malays who see themselves as Singaporeans first. Yet, the Republic regards their Malays warily due to their religious aspirations; taken many under the Internal Security Act, and seeing the need of establishing a Harmony Centre at a mosque. Considering this, it is lamentable that there are also intra-Malay tensions, which Hussin implicitly noted in his arguments for a new leadership system for the Malay community. However, he was unsuccessful in delineating the dialectical relationship amongst the Malay-Muslim Organisations (MMOs), specifically the Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association (PERGAS) and Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), making the book’s analysis of Malay-Muslim leadership in Singapore myopic. His analysis of intra-Malay tension is limited to only the perception of the wider Malay community towards

their Malay politicians. It is noteworthy that both PERGAS and MUIS are dominated by the Republic's religious scholars. Yet they share an "uneasy relationship" manifested in PERGAS' repeated claims of MUIS as government clerics, as evident during the Iraq invasion by the United States.

It is also notable that the anthropological usage of "observer-participant (or 'author-activist')" (p. 147) as an analytical framework is misplaced; Hussin employed more appropriately the emic approach as his research framework. In light of the book's objectives and the author's own identity as an insider to the Singapore Malay community, we observe that the arguments and findings used to substantiate them are objective (quantitative sources), whilst Hussin's personal opinions as an insider to the subject is discernible as seen in the chapters discussing leadership contention and policy recommendations (with special reference to his involvement in AMP). Regardless, the "Malay plight" and its sources are hugely portrayed from non-Malay/Muslim sources and rendered through the lens of minorities' theoretical frameworks, giving them the outsider perspective – a successful attempt for objectivity. On another note, a humble recommendation (if revision is to be made), would be the inclusion of wealth indicators through comparison of debt accumulation between the ethnic groups in addition to housing and income indicators, considering that a relatively large number of Singapore citizens accrue high debit in Southeast Asia.

One would not be able to read a *heartlander's* (Singaporean) perception on *Being [an] ethnic minority and Muslim[s] in a Global City-State*, as Hussin remains a political scientist throughout his analysis whilst only declaring an anthropological tool to validate his subjectivity. Gearing more towards experts than the ordinary readers, we suggest complementing this work with Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied's *Muslims as Minorities: History and Social Realities of Muslims in Singapore* (Bangi, Malaysia: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2009) to gain a better idea of the *heartlanders'* stance. Yet, this is the precedent to any book portraying the socio-political scenario of Singaporean Malays along with charting a way forward. Hussin Mutalib has thrown down the gauntlet at the feet of the state and Malay leaders in the Republic, and he has done so with finesse.

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