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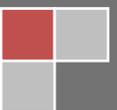
# Berita

## Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group Association for Asian Studies

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Eastern wall, Pudu Prison, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (built in 1891-95, and demolished on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2010).



## Chair's Address

Greetings! I am happy to introduce a sparkling new *Berita* newsletter edited by Derek Heng of Ohio State University. After the successful editorship of Ron Provencher from Northern Illinois University, we had a bit of a lull in trying to figure out how to restart the newsletter. Thankfully, Derek volunteered to take over and what you now have is largely due to his hard work.

The objective of this new series of *Berita* is to provide a forum for scholars of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei to share short articles about politics, society, history, literature, and the arts that will be of broad interest, as well as to provide useful information on fieldwork, archives, conferences, and other such resources for the scholarly community. Thus, you will find both substantive short essays and practical information about Malaysia and Singapore. (Unfortunately, Brunei is underrepresented, and I encourage anyone doing research on Brunei to write for our newsletter.)

I will leave the introduction of the essays to Derek, but I will just conclude by noting that *Berita* is now experimenting with various ideas to engage our audience. There is much that can be discussed in these pages and to the extent that you find something lacking in this edition of *Berita*, we are most happy to hear from you. Therefore, if you have any projects or ideas you would like to contribute to *Berita*, please email me ([erik.kuhonta@mcgill.ca](mailto:erik.kuhonta@mcgill.ca)) or Derek Heng ([heng.5@osu.edu](mailto:heng.5@osu.edu)). We are especially interested in publishing articles, book reviews, or views from the field from graduate students.

Lastly, please note that our annual business meeting at the Association for Asian Studies will take place on Friday April 1 in the Honolulu Convention Center, room 309 from 7:15-9:15pm. At this meeting we will also present the John Lent Award for best paper presented at the previous meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. This is the first time we will be presenting this prize, which will now become an annual event. After the meeting, we will have out customary dinner in a Southeast Asian (hopefully Malaysian!) restaurant.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Honolulu!

*Erik Martinez Kuhonta, McGill University  
Chair, Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group  
Association for Asian Studies*



## Editor's Foreword

The current issue of *Berita* kicks off an renewed effort to provide members of the study group with information pertaining to the latest topics of enquiry, fieldwork information, commentary on current affairs, and state-of-the-field reports. The newsletter also features a section on members' updates, the objective of which, hopefully, will not only be limited to highlighting the achievements of fellow members, but also to keep everyone updated about such issues as avenues of publication, fellowships, and institutional collaborations.

With that in mind, it is my pleasure to introduce the articles featured in this issue of *Berita*, which has a heavy emphasis on Malaysia. We begin with Claudia Derichs' article on the state of Malaysian studies in Germany, which provides us with critical insight into some of the pressing challenges faced by researchers of Malaysia. These experiences are by no means unique to Germany alone, reflecting the larger issues faced by Malaysian studies in the European Union, but more importantly the opportunities that cross-institutional collaboration can offer at the present time.

Kikue Hamayotsu and Netina Tan's articles provide insight and commentary into the upcoming election processes facing Malaysia and Singapore. Of particular interest is the examination of the role of multi-centrism in the body-politic of these two countries—multi-ethnic representation in the case of the former, and the possible rise of opposition representation in the case of the latter. Importantly, these processes are still on-going at this juncture, and it would be critical to assess the analyses here as Singapore and Malaysia's political affairs pan out over the course of the next several issues of this newsletter.

Pertinent to achieving a fuller understanding of such aspects of society as politics is the ability to conduct fieldwork in these countries. In this regard, Kazue Takamura's compilation of crucial nut-and-bolts pieces of information for the conducting of fieldwork in Kelantan, Malaysia is an important contribution to this issue of *Berita*.

Finally, Syed Muhd. Khairudin Aljunied's piece on microhistory in Singapore and Malaysia provides a glimpse into the use of such unconventional historical sources of information as legal records, as a means of reconstructing the voices of the marginal, dispossessed, alienated, and deviant.

As a final note, the committee of the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Study Group (Association for Asian Studies) and the *Berita* editorial team would like to extend our appreciation to all who have contributed to this newsletter. To provide balance to the content of *Berita*, we aim to provide a Singapore and Brunei focus for the next issue. Submissions are presently sought after, and we continue to look forward to the full participation of scholars in this collective endeavor.

*Derek Heng, Ohio State University*  
Editor



## Members' Updates

**Francis R. Bradley** (Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of History, Hamilton College), with support from the Fulbright IIE program and the Social Science Research Council for research in Malaysia and Thailand, recently completed his doctoral dissertation, entitled, *The Social Dynamics of Islamic Revivalism in Southeast Asia: The Rise of the Patani School, 1785-1909*. He has previously published articles in the *Journal of the Siam Society* and the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* on the history of the Patani Malays of southern Thailand. He is presently preparing a book manuscript on the role of the Patani diaspora in constructing transnational Islamic revivalist networks between the Middle East and Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century.

**Peng-Khuan Chong** (Chair, Department of Social Science, Plymouth State University) has been travelling annually to Penang, keeping a keen interest in the politics of the Penang Heritage Trust. He will be launching an anthology of his poems, entitled "Disana: Penang" in Penang, Malaysia, after the AAS/ICAS meeting in March.

**Kikue Hamayotsu** (Assistant Professor of Political Science and Faculty Associate at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University) has recently been awarded a fellowship to conduct a research project at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She has conducted research on state-Islam relations and political Islam in both Malaysia and Indonesia, and her current research projects include religious parties and electoral politics in democratic Indonesia. Her recent publications include "Beyond Faith and Identity: Mobilizing Islamic Youth in

Democratic Indonesia," *The Pacific Review* (forthcoming).

**Derek Heng** (Assistant Professor of History, Ohio State University) is currently researching on the developmental dynamics and trans-regional factors affected interstate politics of the Malay region during the first and early second millennia AD. His recent publications include *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy in the Tenth to Fourteenth Centuries* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009) and *Singapore in Global History*, co-edited with Syed M. Khairudin Aljunied (Amsterdam University Press, 2011). He serves as the North American representative of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

**Erik Martinez Kuhonta** (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, McGill University) has a forthcoming monograph entitled *The Institutional Imperative: The Politics of Equitable Development in Southeast Asia* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming in August 2011). He also has an article (co-authored by Allen Hicken) entitled "Shadows from the Past: Party System Institutionalization in Asia" with *Comparative Political Studies* (forthcoming, May 2011).

**Amrita Malhi** is currently Resident Visiting Fellow in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University (Canberra) and the inaugural Minerals Council of Australia Fellow at the National Library of Australia. Her current research includes the histories of environmental contestation, colonial subjectivation and Southeast Asian Islamic networks. Amrita's PhD research examined a forest uprising and holy war in 1920s Malaya, and she has written on contemporary constructions of Muslimness and identity



politics in Malaysia. E-mail:  
Amrita.Malhi@anu.edu.au.

**Judith Nagata** (Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, and Senior Research Scholar at York Centre for Asian Research, York University, Toronto, Canada) has been awarded a post as Visiting Senior Research Scholar at the Asian Research Institute at the National University of Singapore, scheduled to be in January 2011. She will be collaborating with the religion and globalization research cluster, with an emphasis on Islam in Southeast Asia, and on trends toward "Shariah-isation" and compression of religious diversity within Malaysian Islam. She expects to be meeting and co-operating with a wide range of new (and "old") colleagues in Singapore, and would be happy to meet travelling scholars passing through the city-state.

**Michael G. Peletz** (Professor and Chair of Anthropology, Emory University). His most recent book, *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (Routledge) was designated by Choice as an "Outstanding Academic Title, 2009". His other works include *Islamic Modern: Religious Courts and Cultural Politics in Malaysia* (Princeton, 2002) and "Islamization in Malaysia: Piety and Consumption, Politics and Law" in *South East Asia Research* 19(1), 2011. He is currently working on a large-term collaborative project entitled "Ordinary Muslims' in Asia and the West".

**Ronald Provencher** (Professor of Anthropology, Northern Illinois University; retired) is presently completing a book manuscript about Rusamilae, a group of Malay fishing villages located at the end of Patanni, Thailand. Between 2003 and 2009, he was editor of *Berita*, the newsletter of the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group of the Association for Asian Studies.

**Daromir Rudnyckyj** (Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Victoria) recently initiated a research project on state efforts in Malaysia to make Kuala Lumpur a global hub for Islamic finance and banking. The project analyzes debates among *shariah* scholars, Islamic bankers, and others as they seek to resolve different *fiqh* interpretations to enable transnational commerce according to Islamic norms. Rudnyckyj's book *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (2010) was recently published by Cornell University Press. More information is available at:  
<http://web.uvic.ca/~daromir/index.html>.

**Margaret Sarkissian** (Professor of Music, Smith College, Massachusetts), ethnomusicologist, is currently working on the history of Straits Chinese musical culture in Melaka from the mid-1920s to the present day, and on life histories of selected Portuguese-Eurasian, Baba, and Malay musicians in Melaka. Her early work culminated in the book entitled *D'Albuquerque's Children: Performing Tradition in Malaysia's Portuguese Settlement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

**Patricia Sloane-White** (Assistant Professor of anthropology, University of Delaware). As Fulbright Senior Scholar to Malaysia in 2008, and as a research fellow at the University of Malaya in 2010, she has been conducting fieldwork on "Corporate Islam" in Malaysia, examining the Islamic pieties and practices of the corporate decision-makers, managers, employees, and customers of shari'ah-compliant businesses. She is currently conducting ethnographic fieldwork on the growth of shari'ah scholars and advisors to the Islamic banking and finance industry, a new group of shari'ah elites in Malaysia.



**Kazue Takamura** (affiliate member, Centre for East Asian Research, McGill University) presented a paper entitled “Informal Marital Relationships and Legal Status: Lives of Northern Thai Women at the Thai-Malaysian border” at the Canadian Asian Studies Association Conference in Ottawa in October 2010, and gave a public lecture entitled “Cognitive Map of Border-Crossers: An Ethnographic Analysis of Small-scale Chinese Traders in the East Coast of the Thai-Malaysian Borderland” at the Centre for East Asian Research, McGill University in November 2010. In January 2011, she was invited by McGill’s Department of Geography to give a lecture entitled “Ethnography at the Border: Small-scale Chinese Traders in the East Coast of the Thai-Malaysian Borderland.”

**Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied** (Assistant Professor, Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore) recently published *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009), *Reframing Singapore: Memory, Identity and Trans-Regionalism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009, co-edited with Derek Heng) and *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2011, co-edited with Maznah Mohamad). He is currently working on two major projects; a book manuscript on Malay anti-colonial movements in British Malaya as well as the history and social memory of the Jabidah massacre in the Philippines.

## Announcements

### *Conferences & Workshops*

*History as Controversy: Writing and Teaching Contentious Topics in Asian Histories*

**Organisers:** Humanities and Social Studies Education, National Institute of Education, Singapore; Singapore Heritage Society; and Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

**Deadline for call-for-papers:** 30 March 2011

**For more information, go to:**

[http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/events\\_categorydetails.asp?categoryid=6&eventid=1138](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/events_categorydetails.asp?categoryid=6&eventid=1138)

### *Fellowships*

*Asia Research Institute (Senior Visiting Research Fellow Appointment)*

**Post:** Three-month senior visiting research fellowship.

**Period:** Oct 2011, Jan 2011 & April 2011

**Application deadline:** 1 April 2011

**For more information, go to:**

[http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/article\\_view.asp?id=11](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/article_view.asp?id=11)

Spring 2011



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## State of the Field Report

### *The State of Malaysian Studies in Germany (by Claudia Derichs)*

Malaysian Studies in Germany are considered a part of regional studies or area studies. The latter have a long tradition in Germany and almost every region in the world is covered. There is, for instance, a rich corpus of research findings available on Japan, (Greater) China and the Arab World/Middle East. Korean studies are a comparatively marginal voice in the chorus of East Asian area studies. Much more has been produced on the region of Latin and North America as well as Sub-Saharan Africa. Southeast Asian Studies form a relatively tiny component of Asian Studies; Japanese and Chinese Studies are (still) the dominant regions in academia. European studies have, of course, become quite prominent in the course of consolidation of the European Union, but they would usually not be subsumed under the category of area studies.

Southeast Asian Studies including Malaysian Studies in Germany have seen hard times and are struggling to fight their ground. Frankly speaking, academic positions in area studies have constantly been reduced during the last ten (if not fifteen) years. That this development was not conducive to academic excellence and led to a brain drain is a pretty recent insight of Germany's Ministry for Education and Science. This is why the ministry launched a programme for the promotion and funding of area studies in 2009. Most Southeast Asianists in Germany took advantage of this opportunity and are by now receiving support for regionally and/or thematically focussed, collaborative research projects. To the best of my knowledge, an

exclusively Malaysia-oriented project is not among the group of the sponsored.

Since the majority of German universities are state-funded universities, the sustainability and expansion of area studies depend to a large extent on state sponsoring. With regard to research, public and private foundations are frequently addressed for funding. The fundraising market has become extremely competitive since universities as well as individual academics are nowadays evaluated and ranked according to their fundraising abilities. Although a great number of universities have introduced tuition fees, competition for third-party funding has not decreased. In contrast to former decades, when individual universities received funding for building up a distinctive academic profile through clusters of excellence, the recent trend of state-sponsored research funding is increasingly directed at the support of networks. Scholars are dragged into cross-campus and off-campus collaboration. The expected effect is to prevent further manifestations of ivory tower scholarship and, particularly with regard to area studies, to encourage cooperation between disciplinary oriented scholars and area specialists in the 'classical' sense (i.e. experts in script and culture).

In terms of institutions offering study programs in Malaysian Studies, the field is not too densely populated. In fact there is not a single university in Germany offering Malaysian Studies as a bachelor or master program. Even Southeast Asian Studies as a format of its own is considerably rare. A quick view through the spectrum of higher education programs reveals less than ten universities that have included Southeast Asian Studies as a part



of their subject repertoire. Big universities such as Passau and Freiburg in the south of Germany, Frankfurt and Bonn in the middle, and Hamburg and Berlin in the north are the most prominent ones. The University of Passau is unique in its distinction between mainland and insular Southeast Asia; all the others simply refer to Southeast Asia as one coherent region.

In Cologne, Heidelberg, Göttingen, and Trier, classes relating to Southeast Asia are integrated into departments of Anthropology, Social Science (Political Science; Sociology), Geography, Religious or Language Studies. The proportion of Malaysia-oriented classes as a subject within these disciplines depends on the individual teacher. In general, Malaysian Studies loses out to Indonesian Studies in terms of frequency and quantity within the range of offerings. Bahasa Malaysia is rarely available as a language of choice; apart from the University of Konstanz, where Malay is taught, universities and other academic institutions resort to Bahasa Indonesia as the core language of the Malay world.

In terms of disciplinary approaches to Southeast Asian Studies including Malaysia, anthropology and cultural studies (including religious studies) top the list. Social Sciences have been catching up over the last two decades or so, but the bulk of study programs in the field of Southeast Asian Studies is shaped by the former two approaches.

### ***Why Malaysian Studies?***

The question of what makes Malaysian Studies in Germany particularly interesting and worth promoting within the bigger framework of Southeast Asian studies is easy to answer: Malaysia has for several decades served as a model of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, as an example for political stability regardless of the intensity of ethnic and religious diversity, and as a 'microcosm' of a

plural society that easily manages to progress and develop. The years following the *reformasi* period of 1998 brought political scientists like myself to speak of (or more honestly, to expect) political transition in Malaysia.

Change was not a borrowed word but a term matching the real situation. In my personal view, these features of a Malaysia in transition are constantly fading away. As a political scientist, I am worried. I ask myself, what kind of change is taking place these days in Malaysia? It frightens me to see that rather primitive patterns of behaviour have surfaced which do not fit the image of a progressive, advanced nation.

Concretely, it frightens me to see cow's heads and pig's feet being carried around, or places of worship being set to fire. This is not the Malaysia I used to know, and I fear I have to rethink the transition that I was expecting to take place. Of course this is also something that renders Malaysia an interesting case to study, but I admit I would be much more motivated if things looked less bleak. As an optimist and a devoted scholar, however, I will continue to promote Malaysian Studies in Germany and not give up my hope of establishing a full-fledged Malaysian Studies program in the future.

*Claudia Derichs is Professor for Comparative Politics and International Development Studies at the University of Marburg, Germany. She has studied Japanese and Arabic in Bonn, Tokyo and Cairo and holds a PhD in Japanology. Her research addresses the topic of nation-building in Malaysia, political Islam and transition in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, as well as gender and development studies in these regions. She has published various books and articles on Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and the Arab world, and is an advisor to several academic and political institutions, journals and think-tanks.*



## Focus on Politics: Malaysia

### *Whither Identity Politics: The Rise of Multi-Ethnic Opposition in Malaysia (by Kikue Hamayotsu)*

The remarkable electoral gains of the avowedly multi-ethnic opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* in the 2008 general elections has generated a lively debate over the future course of Malaysian politics. Are the identity politics that have characterized Malaysian politics since independence (if not before) in decline? Are ethnicity and religion no longer relevant sources of political organization and mobilization?

This article advances two broad arguments. First, identity—either in ethnic, religious and cultural forms—will remain as relevant and prominent in the immediate future as it has in the past. The greater prominence of universalistic norms, values and practices, framed as core facets of democracy in opposition manifestos and political debates in civil society, do not necessarily mean that the old patterns of politics—identity politics—has been subdued. Second, in order to understand the salience of identity politics, we have to look into the cause and political foundation of the multi-ethnic opposition comprised of the three major ethnic/religious-based parties: Malay<sup>1</sup>-based *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (People's Justice Party, PKR), Islamist *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS) and Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP).

Although demands and aspirations for democratic rights and practices are certainly sincere and vital within *Pakatan*, it is the

<sup>1</sup> Malay and Muslim are interchangeably used in this article.

incentives of the individual parties for political survival that shapes the substance and tone of their agendas. In order to keep the coalition alive and gain greater access to state power and policy-making, the opposition parties must avoid catering to religious and ethnic demands despite the continued presence of powerful institutions and organizations based on these special interests.

### *The Rise of Multi-ethnic Pakatan Rakyat: Democratic Aspirations and Denial of Identities*

The remarkable performances of the opposition coalition in the 2008 general elections have brought about phenomenal changes in politics at both the national and state levels including the loss of a two-thirds majority in parliament by the ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional* (National Front, BN), and their removal from state governments in four states, Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor. In addition to these electoral defeats PAS continues to rule the state of Kelantan since 1990.<sup>2</sup> The catalyst for what has become known as a "political tsunami" is currently a subject of debate (cf. Pepinsky, 2009; Weiss, 2009). However, apart from the roots of voter discontent, it is clear from the election results that Malaysians desired some fundamental change and viewed voting for the opposition as the answer. There are nonetheless a few questions that remain unanswered. To what extent is *Pakatan*—and the component parties more specifically—willing and capable of change? Along these lines, what change do Malaysians really want

<sup>2</sup> In 2009, BN has regained control over Perak after defections of three *Pakatan* assemblymen.



and how far are they willing to go? And finally, are they on the same page as the politicians concerning the future of the nation they aspire to rebuild?

One problematic area that has previously divided the opposition parties and could still be a potential source of contention is the issue of communal interests, particularly Islam. In the run-up to the 2004 elections, divergent views over identity issues caused irreconcilable friction among the opposition parties, especially between PAS and DAP, and ultimately precluded an alliance necessary to challenge the incumbent BN regime. This discord, among other factors, resulted in massive electoral losses of the opposition, especially PAS which reiterated its commitment to fashioning an Islamic state based on a conservative interpretation of *Syariah* as had been advocated under the leadership of the conservative *ulama* in the past few decades. In light of electoral losses, it became evident that PAS's vision of an Islamic state was not working to attract both Muslims and non-Muslims. The 2008 elections marked a significant paradigm shift in this regard; PAS chose to put aside its Islamist agenda to join forces with the DAP as well as the PKR led by Anwar Ibrahim (who is now out of jail). The electoral rewards resulting from PAS's ideological compromise were greater than even the opposition parties themselves expected and provided an adequate political incentive for them to remain together. However, PAS still appears divided over the role of Islam in its future, as illustrated in the controversy caused by the attempts of some top PAS leaders to negotiate with the Muslim-based ruling party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), to form a "Muslim only" alliance.

Ambiguity about identity issues within *Pakatan* is evident in the common policy platform "Change Now, Save Malaysia!" The platform is conspicuously silent regarding the

roles of religion and ethnicity. And although the platform acknowledges the supreme position of Islam, the monarchy, and the Malay language in the constitution, it is obvious that these are not core issues for *Pakatan* at the ideological and policy levels. Instead of addressing such issues, the platform emphasizes universal defense and expansion of democratic rights and institutions; creation of a just and fair society that allows all people fair opportunities based on merit regardless of ethnicity, religion and culture; elimination of corruption and other unfair and discriminatory practices that hinder equal and fair distribution of public resources; growth with equity; elimination of undemocratic apparatuses and practices, most notably the Internal Security Act (ISA), and strengthening of democratic institutions such as the independent judiciary (*Pakatan Rakyat*, 2008).

In 2008 PAS also produced a new party manifesto titled "A Trustworthy, Just and Clean Government: A Nation of Care and Opportunity" to articulate a universalistic agenda similar to the *Pakatan's* common manifesto (*Islamic Party of Malaysia*, 2008). As with the coalition manifesto, this document puts aside divisive issues such as religion, an Islamic state and *Syariah*. It instead advocates creation of a just and more caring society, fair distribution of public resources, clean government, and most importantly, harmonious inter-ethnic/religious relations as well as the empowerment and improved welfare of women. According to this manifesto, Islam merely provides guiding principles to promote morality and regulate the ways of life.

### ***Malaysian Politics as Usual? Examining the Complexities of Identity Politics***

Recent changes appear to bode well for the future of Malaysian politics, particularly in



light of the historically divisive role of identity politics. Such politics in the past have hampered the emergence of a strong multi-ethnic opposition that could have otherwise offered an alternative vision for the nation. It is therefore pertinent that we identify the pitfalls, if any, of this new democratic national vision.

Unfortunately, communal issues continue to represent the greatest obstacle for this new national vision. *Pakatan* elites have skillfully framed their primary goal, expansion of democratic rights, in universalistic terms such as the provision of rights, privileges and opportunities for all Malaysian *regardless of ethnicity, religion and culture*. In reality, however, these agendas are readily interpreted in zero-sum terms among various communities against the backdrop of politicized and institutionalized identities; from the perspective of Malays, the provision of fair opportunities and public resources for all Malaysians means that they will have to compromise special rights and privileges constitutionally reserved for them. For example, according to public surveys conducted by the Merdeka Center between 2008 and 2010, a large majority of Malays strongly favor the reservation of special rights and privileges. Furthermore, developments over recent years have also fueled anxiety that Malay special rights were being threatened. In contrast, minority non-Malays such as Chinese and Indians express overwhelming support for the positions and policies advanced by *Pakatan*.<sup>3</sup> In short, the universalistic values and practices advocated by *Pakatan* are not seen in universalistic terms, but rather from the perspective of particular communal interests. This contrast between opposition leaders on one hand and an ethnically divided public on the other indicate that the *Pakatan's* visions and agendas mentioned above do not entirely address the interests and aspirations of all

Malaysians.

Such contradictions can be best understood if we take into account the motivational role of political survival for the opposition parties. At least two factors merit special attention. First, the massive electoral losses of the BN and electoral gains of the opposition in 2008 are attributed to deep-seated grievances and a sense of alienation among non-Malay communities, especially Indian, in urban constituencies. *Pakatan* was able to exploit such sentiments to their electoral advantage and win more votes in the urban non-Muslim constituencies. Considering that Malay votes were more or less constant between 2004 and 2008, it is apparent that the political survival of the *Pakatan* regime depends primarily on non-Malay votes. Therefore, it is imperative that the opposition parties keep non-Malay voters happy. This is of particular importance because the BN government desperately wants to reclaim non-Malay support for their own survival and has been offering a range of policies and benefits favoring non-Malay constituencies such as financial support for Chinese/Indian schools and curriculums. Second, PAS's ideological moderation is similarly attributable to an electoral incentive rather than a genuine ideological shift among the party's religious elites. Some members of the highest echelon of the party leadership remain uncertain, if not unhappy, about Islam being largely neglected in the *Pakatan's* national visions. This discontent is further exacerbated by displeasure with their secondary position in the coalition after Anwar took over the helm of the *Pakatan* leadership (Hamayotsu, 2010).

In conclusion, identity politics will remain relevant and prominent in Malaysian politics in the immediate future. The new democratic visions of the nation are certainly noble and attractive as a binding ideology for an otherwise ethnically and politically polarized

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.merdeka.org/>

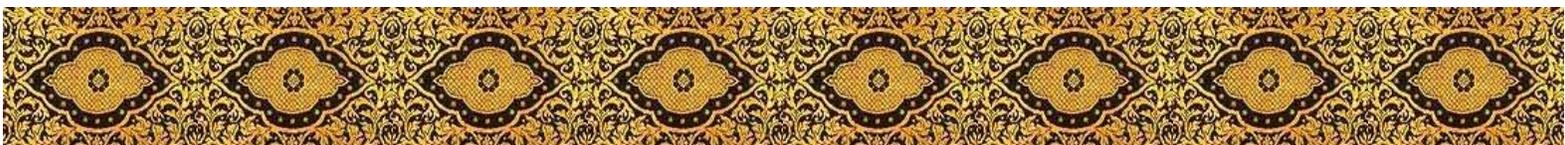


Malaysian nation. However, whether—and how long—this vision can hold the coalition partners together may depend on their ability to reconcile diverging communal interests in order to continue winning elections. It is, after all, the electoral incentives and political aspirations for power of each party that motivate them to stay together. Moreover, their attempts to eliminate preferential policies (e.g., NEP) to achieve their universalistic goals could entail significant risk since it will threaten the birth rights of Malays and be interpreted in zero-sum terms.

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*Kikue Hamayotsu is Assistant Professor sat the Department of Political Science at the Northern Illinois University (DeKalb). She can be contacted via e-mail at: khamayotsu@niu.edu.*



## Focus on Politics: Singapore

### *Singapore Revs Up for Elections (by Netina Tan)*

The anti-government protests in the Arab world have raised concerns of contagion effects in Southeast Asia. While Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo assured us that the Arab crisis is unlikely to have a direct impact on the political dynamics in the region (*Today Online* 2011), his People's Action Party's (PAP) government has turned to carrots and sticks to prevent any spillovers. Indeed, as Singapore revs up for its coming General Election (GE), due to take place by Feb 2012, the PAP Government is doing all it can to maintain its hegemonic rule.

Persistent unemployment, poverty and rising food prices pushed the frustrated Arab youths to the streets. Singapore does not offer similar socio-economic structural conditions to bring about similar mass movements. In fact, it has just rebounded from its worst economic recession, posting a growth rate of fifteen percent in 2010, surpassing China. Unlike Vietnam that has to battle with double-digit inflationary pressures, Singapore has eased its inflation rate from a high of 4.6 per cent in 2010 to 2.9 percent in early 2011. Unemployment has also dropped to 2.2 percent this year from a high of three percent in 2009. A recovering global economy and the opening of two integrated casino resorts are expected to boost employment by adding 35,000 more jobs and raise tourist arrival goals to 17 million by 2015. In anticipation of the growing dissatisfaction with rising inflation and income inequality, the Government's Budget in February has promised more goodies and monetary handouts to sweeten the ground for the GE.

As the PAP government keeps punters

guessing on the election date and its slate of candidates, opposition parties have started recruiting and galvanizing the voters. Unlike Egypt or Tunisia, Singapore does not have deep social cleavages or structural inequalities that define its partisan alignments. Instead, everyday "bread and butter issues" such as rising cost of living and employment opportunities are of a concern. In the coming election, debates over the Government's unpopular immigration policy, rising property prices and income inequality are expected to dominate the party platforms.

Since 2008, five new political parties have sprung up, boosting the total number of registered parties in Singapore to around twenty-seven. Most newcomers like the Reform Party (RP), Socialist Front (SF), United Singapore Democrats (USD) and Singapore United Party (SUP) are splinter groups from older opposition parties such as the Workers Party (WP) and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP). For example, according to *Channel NewsAsia*, the Reform Party was founded by longtime WP leader, JB Jeyaretnam. Since JB Jayaretnam's death in 2008, his elder son, Kenneth Jeyaretnam and a few other ex-WP cadres have taken over (2011). Active on the blogosphere and diligent in meeting constituents, the RP was well poised to win some seats until a recent public split threw the party into disarray. Meanwhile, the nearly bankrupt SDP has received a boost of life as former WP candidate Dr. James Gomez and Sociologist Dr. Vincent Wijeyesingha decided to run under the SDP flag. With the help of social media, SDP's party leader, Dr. Chee Soon Juan avoided jail time by raising S\$20,000 through an online donation drive to pay for his fine (*AsiaOne* 2011). Chee was earlier convicted of "making an address in a public place without a



license" in 2006.

The Internet is now accessed by more than seventy-eight percent of Singapore's population (3.4 million people). Changing demography and internet accessibility mean that the PAP will face a more demanding electorate and organized opposition. The few public opinion surveys available show that the younger, educated Singaporeans want more political participation and pluralism. The heated exchange between 13 journalists and Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, broadcasted live on 12 Apr 2006 was perhaps indicative of the desire for change. As one journalist said to MM Lee:

"What we want is a choice...What we want is political vibrancy. What we want is a media that could reflect both the views of the opposition as well as of the ruling party fairly. What we want is to see that the opposition is being given a level playing field. What we want is fairness in the political sphere (*New York Times* 2006)."

To appease the new group of internet-savvy and socially mobile "swing voters", the PAP leader has cautiously loosened control on the media and civil freedoms. In 2008, PM Lee announced that he would allow Singaporeans to make speeches and demonstrate at the Speakers Corner in Hong Lim Park. Besides, police permits were no longer needed for indoor political demonstrations. The ban on political films and videos (those that meet the censorship board standards) and political podcasts and vodcasts before elections was also lifted. To ensure more opposition voice in the House, the Government has institutionalized the Nominated Member of Parliament scheme that appoints non-partisan "distinguished" citizens into the House for a three-year term. The number of the Non-Constituency Member of Parliament or "best opposition loser" was raised from six to nine. As promised, the Government

has also reduced the large sizes of the Group Representative Constituency scheme and increased the number of single member constituencies from nine to twelve (*Straits Times* 2011). With the changes that seemed to have somewhat leveled the playing field, we ought to see more opposition faces in the House.

Critics have dismissed the recent liberalization as mere window dressing than sincere attempts to permit more dissent. Indeed, the Singapore government likes to dance to the "one-step forward, two-steps back" reform routine. After lifting the ban on the demonstrations at the Speaker's Corner, a Public Order Bill (*Ministry of Home Affairs* 2009) was passed in 2009 to give the police more powers over the control of outdoor political events. To prevent "emotional voting" and "risk of public disorder" (*Channel NewsAsia* 2009), another rule was introduced in 2010 to ban campaigning on the eve of polling day. These moves reflect the PAP's insecurity and fear of dealing with the large crowds that have turned up at the past opposition rallies. Nervousness over the role of social media has led to the gazetting of a social-political website, "The Online Citizen" (TOC), as a political association last month. As a political association, the TOC is now bound by the Political Donations Act, which among other things, forbids donations from foreign sources.

Performance legitimacy, incumbency advantage and electoral engineering have extended the PAP's rule for five decades. It is unsurprising if it remains in power in the next election. What would be surprising is if the opposition bungles, and the PAP reverses its trend of sliding vote shares in the face of a more demanding electorate.

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*Netina Tan is Social Science and Humanities Research Council (Canada) Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asian Institute, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto.*



## Methodology and Field Work

### *A Guide to Research Fieldwork in Kelantan (by Kazue Takamura)*

This guide aims to provide researchers with local information on Kelantan, especially related to government institutions, political parties, and other organizations. This guide is largely based on my field trips to Kelantan between 2002 and 2006. Most of the data is updated based on my local informants in Kelantan as well as through the internet. However, some information may have changed since then.

Below is the list of government offices and other related organizations. Be aware that government offices, museums, and libraries in Kelantan are usually closed on Friday, not on Sunday.

#### Research Related Organizations

##### *Arkib Negara Malaysia, Cawangan Kelantan (National Archive Malaysia, Kelantan Branch)*

The Kelantan branch of the National Archives is located in the Kota Bharu Municipal Government Compound, or *Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu*. There is a small reading room where you can access various Kelantan related archives, Kelantan state government documents, and books. However, their collection is mainly related to post-1945 documents. For the pre-1945 documents, one is likely to find them in Kuala Lumpur. A research pass may be needed to access archives and documents even at the Kelantan Branch. (Personally, I was able to access the archives in Kota Bharu without a research pass. But I had to show an affiliation

letter issued by a Malaysian university.) Copy service is available at the Kelantan branch.

Address: Tingkat 3, Blok A, Bangunan Persekutuan, Jalan Doktor (Jalan Hospital), 15000 Kota Bharu

Telephone number: 09-7474927, 09-7442899,

Fax: 09-7474928

Web: [www.arkib.gov.my/kelantan](http://www.arkib.gov.my/kelantan)

##### *Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Kelantan (Kelantan Public Library)*

The Kelantan Public library is located just in front of the Sports Stadium on Jalan Mahmood and it is also next to the Cultural Centre (Gelangan Seni). On the second floor of the Public Library, there is a small section of the "Kelantan Collection" (Koleksi Kelantan) where you can access state government documents as well as Kelantan related academic journals and books. Internet service and copy service are available. It opens from 9am to 6pm, except Friday and public holidays.

Address: Jalan Mahmood, 15200 Kota Bharu  
Telephone: 09-7444522 / 09-7412522, Fax: 09-7487736

<http://www.ppak.kelantan.edu.my>

##### *Perbandanan Muzium Negeri Kelantan (Kelantan State Museum)*

There is a small library, attached to the State Museum, where you can purchase Kelantan related journals and books, including *Warisan Kelantan (History of Kelantan)*. The entrance to the library is not from the main entrance of the museum, but from the left. The museum is located in front of the Clock Tower and next to the tourism information center. The museum is open from 10:30am to 5:45pm except



Wednesday (open only from 12:00-2:30pm), Friday, and public holidays.

Address: Jalan Hospital 15000 Kota Bharu  
Telephone: 09-748 2266, Fax: 09-747 3366  
<http://www.kelantan.muzium.net>

### Federal Government Departments and Offices

#### *Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia Negeri Kelantan (Department of Statistics)*

Here you can access various statistics issued by the Malaysian Federal government. The counter of the branch office provides documents that can be purchased as well as a copy service. The office is located on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of *Wisma Persekutuan* (the Federal Government Building) in Kota Bharu. *Wisma Persekutuan* is located on the corner of Jalan Bayan and Jalan Dusun Muda. The building is next to the Police Department Building.

Address: Tingkat 8, Wisma Persekutuan, Jalan Bayan, 15514 Kota Bharu  
Telephone : 09-7475878, Fax: 09-7482142  
<http://www.statistics.gov.my>

#### *Other federal government departments at Wisma Persekutuan*

Most of the federal government departments and offices are located at *Wisma Persekutuan* (the Federal Government Building). Below is a list of government offices located at *Wisma Persekutuan*.

<http://www.kkr.gov.my/files/content/bangunan/wisma%20persekutuan%20kota%20bharu,%20kelantan.pdf> (accessed on January 12, 2011).

Pejabat Imigresen Negeri Kelantan (Immigration)

2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Wisma Persekutuan. Tel: 09-7482120

<http://www.imi.gov.my>

Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara (National Registration)

1<sup>st</sup> floor, Wisma Persekutuan. Tel: 09-7482793

<http://www.jpn.gov.my/alamatCawanganNegeri>

Jabatan Tenaga Kerja Semenanjung Malaysia (Labor Department)

11<sup>th</sup> floor, Wisma Persekutuan. Tel: 09-7485078

<http://jtksm.mohr.gov.my>

Jabatan Perhubungan Perusahaan (Department of Industrial Relations)

3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Wisma Persekutuan. Tel: 09-7441144

<http://jpp.mohr.gov.my>

Jabatan Perikanan (Department of Fisheries)

6<sup>th</sup> floor, Wisma Persekutuan. Tel: 09-7414773

<http://www.dof.gov.my>

Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (Orang Asli Department)

6<sup>th</sup> floor, Wisma Persekutuan. Tel: 09-733-3488

<http://www.jheoa.gov.my>

#### *Pejabat Pelajaran Kelantan (Department of Education)*

Jalan Hospital, 15000, Kelantan (Kota Bharu Municipal Government Complex)

Tel :09-7418000, 09-741-8020, Fax :09-7482554

<http://www.moe.gov.my/jpnkelantan>



## State Government Offices

### ***Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan (Kelantan State Government)***

Address: Kompleks Kota Darulnaim, 15503  
Kota Bharu  
<http://www.kelantan.gov.my>

### ***Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu (Kota Bharu Municipal Government)***

The Municipal Government is located very close to the central bus terminal in Kota Bharu. Arkib Negara, mentioned above, is also located within the municipal government complex.  
Address: Bangunan Persekutuan, Jalan Hospital, 15000 Kota Bharu  
[http://www.kelantan.gov.my/kerpenguasaneg\\_bi.htm](http://www.kelantan.gov.my/kerpenguasaneg_bi.htm)

## Political Parties

### ***Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS) Kelantan Pejabat Perhubungan PAS Kelantan Negeri-Negeri & Wilayah Persekutuan***

Tingkat 1, Bangunan PAS, Jalan Dato' Pati, 15000 Kota Bharu  
Tel: 09-7481141, 09-7478815, Fax: 09-7461873  
e-mail: [kelantan@pas.org.my](mailto:kelantan@pas.org.my)  
<http://www.pas.org.my/>

### ***UMNO Negeri Kelantan Badan Perhubungan UMNO Negeri Kelantan***

*Bangunan UMNO Negeri*  
Jalan Tengku Chik  
1500 Kota Bharu  
Tel: 09-7449533, Fax: 09-7486123  
\*Other local branch offices in Kelantan can be found at [http://umno-online.com/?page\\_id=3335](http://umno-online.com/?page_id=3335)

### ***Malaysian Chinese Association, Kelantan***

3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 5429 Jalan Kebun Sultan (in the building of the Chinese Assembly Hall)

Tel: 09-744-5693

## Others Institutions of Interest

### ***Royal Thai Consulate-General***

The Thai Consulate-General is located in Kota Bharu. The relationship between Thailand and Kelantan has a long history, particularly because Kelantan was under the political influence of both Pattani and Siam. Today's Thai Consulate-General in Kota Bharu symbolizes this historical connection.  
Address: 4426 Jalan Pengkalan Chepa  
15400 Kota Bharu  
Tel: 09- 744 5266/744 5934/748 2545

### ***Dewan Perhimpunan Tiong-Hwa Kelantan (The Kelantan Chinese Assembly Hall)***

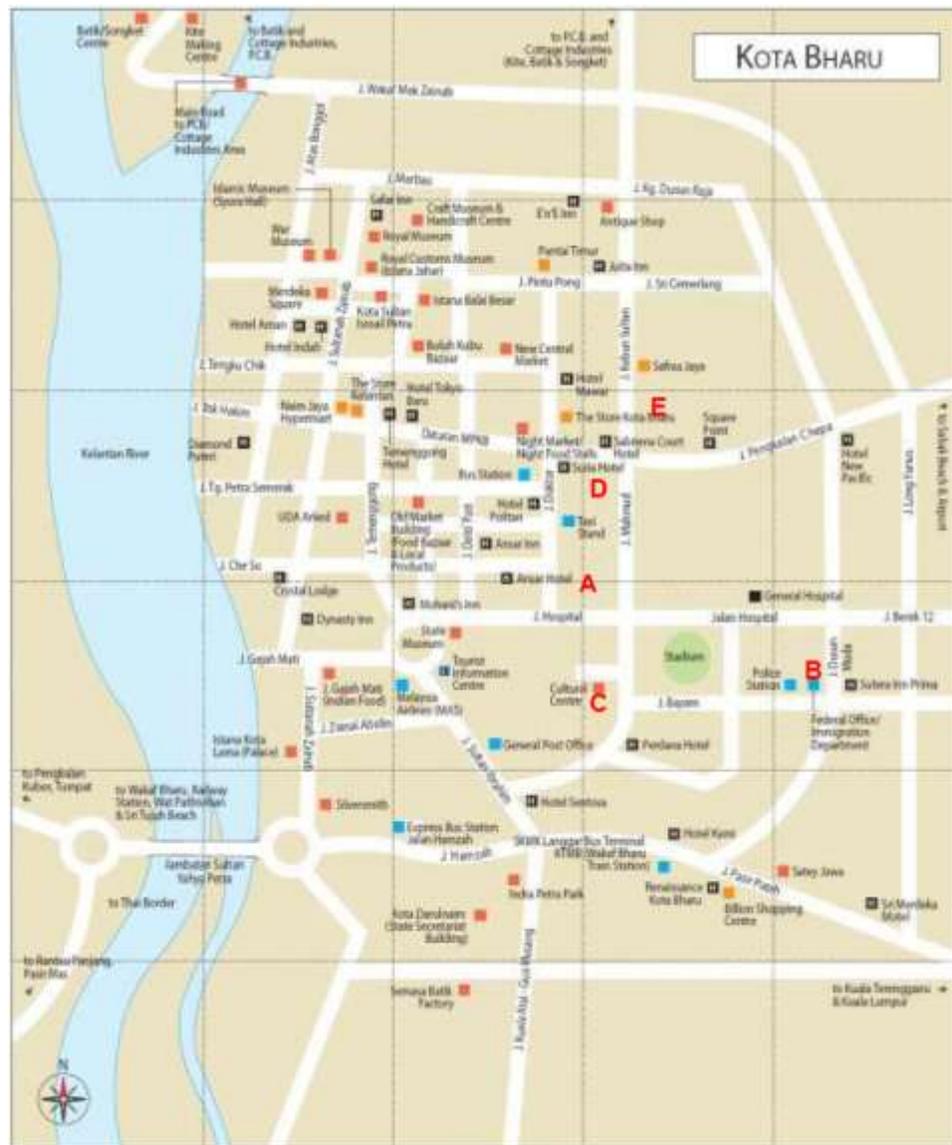
The majority of the Chinese population in Kelantan live in Kota Bharu. Kota Bharu's Chinatown is located on Jalan Kebun Sultan where Chinese restaurants, cafés, and inns are concentrated. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce and MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) offices are also located on Jalan Kebun Sultan.  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 5429 Jalan Kebun Sultan  
Tel: 09-744-3340

## Internet Access

Internet access in Kota Bharu is relatively convenient. Apart from the internet service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Public Library, there are numerous internet cafés available particularly near McDonald's and at the central market. Wireless network is available at the café next to the supermarket Mydah on Jalan PintuPong.



Map of Kota Bharu



- A: Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu (Kota Bharu Municipal Government)  
 Arkib Negara Malaysia (National Archives)  
 Pejabat Pelajaran Kelantan (Department of Education)
- B: Wisma Persekutuan (Federal Government Building)
- C: Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Kelantan (Kelantan Public Library)
- D: Chinese Assembly Hall (MCA Kelantan office)
- E: Chinatown



## Transportation

### *Between the airport and Kota Bharu:*

There are buses every hour between the airport and downtown.

### *Domestic Bus Terminal (Central Bus Terminal)*

There are frequent buses connecting other towns in Kelantan, including Pasir Mas, Tanah Merah, Kuala Krai, Tumpat, and Rantau Panjang (border checkpoint). Tickets can be purchased from the bus driver. Thursday afternoons are generally very crowded with students going home for the week-end. Buses are often delayed on Friday afternoon due to prayers. The Central Bus Terminal is located in the heart of Kota Bharu. It is also next to the central market.

### *Long distance Bus Terminals (Jalan Pendek or Jalan Hamzah)*

Several bus companies are available connecting Kota Bharu and major Malaysian cities, including Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Trengganu, Johor Bharu. There are two different bus terminals, namely Jalan Pendek or Jalan Hamzah. Bus tickets can be purchased at the ticket counters located at Jalan Doctor (next to the Central Bus Terminal). There is no bus going to southern Thailand. You have to get the bus or train from Sungai Kolok, the Thai border town.

## Territorial Borders

There are three border checkpoints in Kelantan, namely Rantau Panjang, Pengkalang Kubor, and Bukit Bunga. The most convenient border crossing point is Rantau Panjang which is located next to the Thai town of Sungai Kolok. Sungai Kolok is one of the major

commercial centers as well as a popular tourist destination in the southern Thai border region.

At the border checkpoint there is a bus service connecting Kota Bharu and Rantau Panjang. Bus no. 29 leaves from Kota Bharu's bus terminal and takes about 90 minutes to arrive at the border checkpoint. The bus also stops at Pasir Mas on the way to the border. If you are planning to cross the border, you should get off in front of the Immigration Checkpoint, which is the penultimate stop. The last stop of Bus no. 29 is the town of Rantau Panjang, which is a major informal border-crossing point for local inhabitants.

### *Sungai Kolok*

The Thai border town, Sungai Kolok, is a popular place for day shoppers from Kelantan. Sungai Kolok's commercial center is located within walking distance from the Thai Immigration Checkpoint (about 10 minutes walk). In front of the Thai Immigration Checkpoint there are motorcycle taxis waiting for customers that charge 30 Thai baht from the checkpoint to the commercial center or the train station. A small tourist information office located next to the Thai Immigration Checkpoint provides maps and other useful information. Several local internet cafés are found in the town. One of them is located next to the Genting Hotel. The owner speaks English and they provide copy and fax services too. If you are planning to visit other southern Thai cities, taking a van is a good option. There are a number of van services operating between Sungai Kolok and other southern Thai cities, including Hatyai, Pattani, and Narathitwat. It is easy to obtain detailed information from major hotels like Genting Hotel.

*Kazue Takamura is an anthropologist by training. She is presently a research affiliate at the Center for East Asian Research, McGill University.*



## Feature Article

### *Microhistory, Legal Records and Minorities in Singapore and Malaysia (by Syed Muhd. Khairudin Aljunied)*<sup>1</sup>

20 September 1929. A Sikh moneylender who worked as a watchman for the British firm of Paterson Simons and Company was reported missing. Tall, muscular, bearded and approximately twenty-six years of age, he was described by a widely-read newspaper as wearing a yellow turban on the night that he was last seen alive. The mystery of his disappearance was solved on the following day when a corpse was discovered by a Malay gardener at the Botanic Gardens in Singapore. Unclothed and badly bruised, the body lay some twenty feet away from the decapitated head, which was covered by a gunny sack. Both of the watchman's arms had also been severed, with the right arm found lying on the left side of the body, while the left arm was missing. On the same evening, the watchman's fifteen-year-old widow, Nehal Kaur, and her father, Sunder Singh, along with three other Sikhs, were detained at the Central Police Station. A reward of \$1000 was offered to anyone who could provide crucial information leading to the watchman's death. Thus began a sensational murder investigation and trial that evoked emotions, feelings and myths in Singapore, as it did abroad (*Malaya Tribune*, 20 September 1929).

It is not the intention of this brief article to provide a fictional account of this gruesome incident or a narrative that would probably share some affinities with crime and mystery

<sup>1</sup> This article is an excerpt from my essay published in *Social History*, Vol. 36 No. 1 February 2011: 1-14. I thank Taylor and Francis, publisher of the journal, for allowing me to reproduce some parts of the essay for this publication.

novels. Rather, the circumstances surrounding the murder and the testimonies of persons implicated in the gruesome incident offers us new angles of vision to the study of Sikhs and other minorities in Singapore and Malaya. To date, historians writing on the history of minorities in Southeast Asia have generally confined their investigations to several overarching themes, namely: the development of institutions, identity formation, religious rituals, political activism, immigration patterns, occupational choices and biographies of prominent personalities. An indirect consequence of these trends in scholarship is the generation and representation of minorities as a collectivity which shared similar aspirations, behavioural patterns and practices. There have been very few detailed studies of the daily tribulations of ordinary people hailing from minority backgrounds as they endeavoured to co-exist alongside other communities in colonial Southeast Asia. The individual voices of the marginal, the dispossessed, the alienated and deviants have been summarily negated.

A way out of this quandary is to the employ the methodology of micro-history – an approach which could well be applied to the study of other ethnic minorities and creoles, such as Armenians, Babas, Hadramis, Jews and Tamils in the same social context. Pioneered by prominent historians such as Carlo Ginzburg, Le Roy Ladurie and Natalie Zemon Davis who drew upon the works of social anthropologists, microhistory is the study of minor events and insignificant peoples with the object of validating and/ or refuting commonly held historical assumptions. In the words of Giovanni Levi, a leading micro-historian:

“The unifying principle of all micro-historical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal



factors previously unobserved. . . . Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation. It is then possible to use these results to draw far wider generalizations although the initial observations were made within relatively narrow dimensions rather than examples (1991: 97 & 98).”

The murder of the Sikh watchman, the Coroner’s inquest and the court trials that ensued were examples of what micro-historians have termed ‘social drama’. That is to say, when scrutinized with meticulous care and framed against the background of larger historical processes, such a series of events could provide us with inroads into uncharted terrains of minority pasts, particularly of those Sikhs who can be broadly categorized as members of the working class. Among the much glossed-over themes that can be uncovered are the extent of personal animosities, everyday rivalry and occasional acts of violence, the state and position of women, the relational structures within the family, occupational pursuits, the domestic environment and modes of communication, as well as the networks of social acquaintanceships that existed among ordinary Sikhs in Singapore and Malaya in the 1920s and 1930s.

For example, we learn that prior to his demise, Jewa Singh was involved in money-lending business aside from deriving income from his job as a watchman. Like all businesses, money-lending was fraught with tribulations. Squabbles, discord and dissensions arising from late payments and outright refusals to furnish the loans were common occurrences. In most instances, a peaceful settlement was reached between parties, which meant that life would return to normal. Sunder Singh, as a case in point, had settled some of his debts by marrying his stepdaughter, Nehar, to Jewa even though Nehar was not too keen on the arrangement

and had problems coping with marriage life. On other occasions, Sikh moneylenders resorted to sending warning letters to the borrowers which from different ethnic groups and from all walks of life through the intercession of legal representatives. Jewa was a regular client of one of Singapore’s largest legal firms, Drew and Napier, and he would request his lawyers to issue warning letters to labourers, clerks, small shopkeepers fellow watchmen, taxi drivers, household maids and even close relatives (*The Straits Times*, 15 November 1929). In the event that all parties could not reach a compromise, violence became the arbiter – which, in Jewa’s case, led to the premature end of his life at the hands of his own father-in-law, Sunder Singh.

Such observations however beg a crucial question: what are the materials that are readily available to fully reconstruct the history of the working-class minorities in Southeast Asia? It is my contention that Southeast Asian scholars have yet to make effective use of a genre of sources that have been utilized in a most impressive manner by social historians such as James Francis Warren, a prominent historian of Southeast Asia who has made effective use of coroners’ reports and legal records in the study of Malayan societies (1986 & 1993). While these sources serve as antecedents for law enforcement officials, criminologists and legal experts in the formulation of legal rules and principles, they can also provide historians with fascinating stories of crimes, petitions and suits pertaining to debts and probates of wills. Indeed, a close contextualized reading of coroners’ reports and legal records forces us to consider new questions in regard to Sikh and other minority histories. What was the total number of murder cases involving Sikhs in Singapore and Malaya in the 1920s and 1930s? Do these separate incidents have any common features? What were the gender compositions of the people involved, and what were the specific circumstances that led to these homicidal incidents? How did the colonial justice system deal with homicide among the



Sikhs? How did other ethnic groups respond to these violent crimes? To address these and many other related questions, it is important to juxtapose the coroners' reports and legal records with other government records and official publications, as well as local newspapers. Only then can Gayatri Spivak's oft-cited query 'Can the Subaltern speak?' be answered in a less abstruse way (1995: 24 – 28). The Subaltern *can* speak, and the mundane trivialities of the everyday life of minorities could be recovered if scholars of the human sciences are willing to experiment and refine methodologies introduced to us by microhistorians with the aid of unconventional sources.

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*Syed Muhd. Khairudin Aljunied is Assistant Professor of Malay Studies at the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore. He may be reached via e-mail at: mlsasmk@nus.edu.sg*

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The editorial team is presently seeking submissions of articles, research and field reports, book reviews and announcements (including calls for grants, workshop announcements, and call for papers) for the next issue (scheduled for September 2011).

All enquiries and submissions should be directed via e-mail to:

Chair: Erik Kuhonta (erik.kuhonta@mcgill.ca)

Editor: Derek Heng (heng.5@osu.edu)

