

and political interests in the region to establish and expand Southeast Asian studies in Japan during 1933–45. Such adaptation, in conjunction with an amalgamation of influences, rendered Matsumoto’s work an ambiguous compromise among diffusionist, evolutionist, and sociologist approaches. Many of his works cannot even be regarded as academic due to his literary style and lack of supporting evidence. Karlová does not shy away from the flaws in Matsumoto’s work, but instead details the significance of his ability to co-opt economic and political agendas to promote his cultural interests, establish Southeast Asian studies in Japan, and inspire the next generation of scholars to continue the pursuit of knowledge in the wide array of theories he presented during his career.

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***The Primordial Modernity of Malay Nationality: Contemporary Identity in Malaysia and Singapore***

HUMAIRAH ZAINAL and KAMALUDEEN MOHAMED NASIR

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*The Primordial Modernity of Malay Nationality: Contemporary Identity in Malaysia and Singapore* by Humairah Zainal and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir is an attempt at bridging what the authors have described as an “uneasy relationship between the primordial and modern which characterises the formation of identities in contemporary societies” (Abstract). In understanding and situating “Malay Nationality” in today’s milieu, they have reviewed and provided significant reference to past and contemporary literature on the Malaysian and Singaporean Malay/Muslim community. This includes works by Rizwana Abdul Azeez (2016), Andaya (2008), Barnard (2004), Kahn (2006), Milner (2011), Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (2012), Hussin Mutalib (2012) and Lily Zubaidah Rahim (1998), amongst others. More importantly, the book sought to address gaps in the literature which may not have been fulfilled by previous scholars. They described how some have not “thoroughly examine[d] the extent to which the lay Malay contest or conform to Malay customs and traditions” (p. 6), and that there was still a lack of works concentrating on the “development and forms of Malay identity that exists in the Singapore [or Malaysian] context” (p. 6).

As such, the book is an important update and contribution to the literature on Malays or “Malayness”—based on the authors’ close reading of previous writing, and a closer reading of the Malay community within Malaysia and Singapore. The authors presented two main objectives: (1) to describe “discursive constructions of Malay identity . . . based on discourse analyses of both elite and mass texts”; and (2) to “understand Malay identity more holistically by analysing how

multiple forms of modernity manifest in contemporary societies” (p. 8). These objectives have largely been fulfilled through the authors’ take on “primordial modernity” vis-à-vis their observations and assessment of the two societies, and studying primary sources signaling mass voices and agency alongside “elite” sources such as government speeches. The inimitable manner in which the authors presented their ideas and assessment of “Malay nationality”—conceptually and methodologically—reminds readers of the sociological leanings both authors have. This is significant, and arguably a different take from the corpus of literature (including those cited in the book) which have analyzed “Malayness” through more historical, political or ethnographic prisms.

However, there do exist several points of discussion. I will first provide a broad overview of the book and its chapters, before delving into some of the book’s strengths and/or topics for further consideration. These will be organized conceptually, operationally, methodologically, and lastly, contextually.

What I observe as a strength of the book is that it effectively sets the stage for a novel understanding of “primordial modernity,” before opening to a thematic discussion of this phenomena observed, one where Malays negotiate their identities, and its formation and construction, in Singapore and Malaysia respectively. From the outset, the book makes it clear that taking a transnational and comparative perspective in studying “Malayness” is necessary. While both Singapore and Malaysia have developed along similar modernization experiences and are confronted with identical pressures to their socio-political stability, Malays in each society “embody ethnic nationalism somewhat differently” (p. 145). Therefore, studying the points of convergence and divergence between the two contexts allowed suitable comparisons of how “Malay nationality” may be understood (“core and peripheral identities of Malay identity”; p. 4), while also exemplifying what the authors have forwarded as “primordial modernity.” In this vein, the authors argue that “[Malay] national identity takes on both primordial and modernist aspects” (p. 12), where primordialism and modernity should not be “understood as binaries and in dichotomous terms” (p. 13).

The thematic discussion of “primordial modernity” can be found in the chapters on “fragmented cosmopolitanism,” “ethnoreligious identity,” “development & citizenship,” and “the elites.” These chapters give adequate focus on the different issues faced by Malays in both Malaysia and Singapore, as embedded within their respective socio-economic and political contexts, and in molding understandings of themselves. More importantly, these chapters show the different trajectories “Malayness” can be conceived in the two countries, and the strategies which have been adopted from a top-down and bottom-up perspective—leading to the impressions the authors share of the Malay communities and of “Malay identity” in each context. One, which seemingly resist and oppose state constructions of Malaysian Malay identity, while the other, a more conformist, loyal, and co-opted disposition (p. 145). “Primordial modernity” itself is therefore a construct, but one which speaks to the events and circumstances experienced by the Malays thus far, leading to conceptions of “Malayness.”

Firstly, the conceptual significance and nuance offered by the term “primordial modernity” in framing the book’s argument is commendable. The authors have adopted an understanding of “primordialism” which suggest national identity as natural and ascribed, and manifested through language, blood kinship, and customs (p. 11). They also, however, acknowledged that there is a level of social construction at play in understandings of national identity. Here, this is reflected in their adoption of social theorist Dietrich Jung’s concept of “modernity,” where individuals are “hybrid actors” negotiating their identity through “competing knowledge and social practices” within respective socio-political considerations (Jung 2017, as cited on p. 13).

This can be observed in the subsequent chapters, for example, in Singapore where Malay culture and vernacular idioms such as *kampung spirit* or *gotong royong* have been widely adopted and adapted. However, it hides the systemic socioeconomic and political issues affecting Singaporean Malays (p. 96)—perhaps by (over)compensating one aspect or marker of “Malay identity,” to adapt it to be relevant to Singapore’s “modern” society. In essence, this example may highlight the selective cherry-picking by the state of communal traits which can contribute to wider state programs of integration, development and/or nation-building. It not only “reiterates Malay national identity” from the point of view of the state (p. 96), but also cements Malays as part of wider Singaporean society despite its claim that Malay/Muslims are problematic (Kamaludeen 2007). This discussion was poignant, because it showed the irony of state policy decisions while inadvertently affecting the position and perception of the Malays—not just by the Malays themselves, but also wider Singaporean society. Through many examples such as this, the authors show how the term “primordial modernity” highlights such duality, and coexistence.

In engaging with the concept as a whole, I contemplated whether the terms in “primordial modernity” were reversed, would it have been able to showcase the authors’ assessment of Malay national identity similarly or as effectively? Essentially, I questioned why the authors used “primordial modernity,” rather than “modern primordiality.” What effect might it have on adjective and noun, and how does the term then fall back unto, or align with, definitions of “primordialism” and “modernity”? If we agree that “national identity” is to also be viewed as historical and social constructions, then primordiality necessarily lies within ethnic and cultural entities, and the traits which mark them. Would the term “modern primordiality” then suggest these entities (and their associated traits) having to suit or adapt to a modern, social environment? Or, perhaps it may be difficult to imagine considering the supposed innate or inherent nature of primordialism?

I surmised that “modern primordiality” may suggest an adapted or shifted function of primordial markers of identity for modern contexts—where “modern” here may take into account time, space and even policy considerations. It would have been similarly necessary to view Malays as a monolithic group (just as the authors did, as observed on p. 4) to be able to put forth an argument not just for modernity, but for primordiality as well. In the intention and purpose of the book, I do not think “modern primordiality” would have been suitable—or even enough—to capture the

essence of what the authors had intended, that is to show the negotiation and (re)calibration of national identity vis-à-vis the primordial and modern. In this vein, therefore, the authors' use and conception of the term "primordial modernity" is expedient.

Secondly, and operationally, several terms stood out in their use in the book. Initially, I wondered if the terms used throughout the chapters, such as "Malay nationality," "Malay national identity," "Malay identity," and "Malayness" held the same meaning, or were given the same treatment. Were there specific nuances—even subtle ones—meant by the authors in the use of these terms? The authors had defined what they meant by "national identity," that is "the sense of belonging to a certain imagined community that shares characteristics that are distinctive from other nations" (p. 16). This referenced Anderson's seminal *Imagined Communities* (1983), although it may have been an attempt for "primordial modernity" as a concept to be more applicable and acquiescent to national identities and contexts beyond just the Malay world. An indication that there was some level of difference between the terms can be implied from the main question the authors asked in their study: "How do Malays in Singapore and Malaysia conceptualise and negotiate their ethnic identity vis-à-vis the state's construction of Malay national identity?" (Abstract). I suggest that perhaps these terms could be viewed on three levels, as an endeavor to assess their use(s) in the book. The first might refer to the source exercising perceptions of "Malay identity," whether elite or mass. It may imply restraint or agency, in situating and understanding "primordial modernity" of Malay identity or nationality. The second might acknowledge these terms' interchangeability to an extent (I have largely taken this position in this review, for ease of discussion). Here, the authors have shown how, for example, "inter-ethnic" and "transnational marriages" (p. 41), as well as "religious teachers" and "religious scholars" have often been used interchangeably by the masses (p. 134). "Malay nationality," "Malay national identity," "Malay identity," and "Malayness," however, have more fundamental implications in the book. The third may simply be accommodating the use of these terms based on prior established works.

It is also difficult to ignore the position and function of religion in "Malay identity." On one hand, Malays are constitutionally recognized to be Muslims, or have to be Muslims in the Malaysian context. The official definition of "Malay" in Malaysia is more rigid, there are clear boundaries between the "In" and "Out" groups. Politically then, Islam is the factor institutionalizing Malay hegemony in Malaysia. On the other hand, in the book and elsewhere, there is discussion around the conflation between race and religion for Malay/Muslims in Singapore. There is also the politicization of the Muslim identity—through the Singapore Muslim Identity (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 2006), for example. There was also substantial discussion on the "racial and religious entanglement of the term 'Malay/Muslim' as continuing to serve a political function" (p. 68). The authors described how the terms "Malay" and "Muslim" are often "collapsed," because Malays are largely Muslims, and Malays make up most of the Muslim population (p. 68). The use of the "/" in the term Malay/Muslim by the state and in the public sphere also prevents the misnomer of

assuming Muslims as also being Malay (p. 68). “Muslim” here becomes the master signifier, or master identity.

This is a significant point of consideration. In my own research, there is some discussion or debate between “Malay/Muslim” (“slash”), “Malay-Muslim” (“dash”), and “Malay Muslim” without any linking symbol at all. There is also an acknowledgement of the use and presence of these terms in everyday life, and that there is a difference between the use of “/” and “-”. “Malay/Muslim” seem to suggest “Malay” *or* “Muslim”—coinciding with the authors’ point about preventing misnomers—whereas “Malay-Muslim” seem to suggest Malays who are Muslims. There is also some ambivalence about these terms in its differing forms, because it generally refers to the Malays. What is significant to me, however, is that these symbols (or none at all) can connect or separate “Malay” and “Muslim,” and in effect give rise to different meanings. This may then result in different perceptions or conceptions of “Malay identity,” in respect to being Muslim. One may argue that the term “Malay,” whether or not with “Muslim,” already has a political function whether viewed from top-down, or bottom-up.

Thirdly, the book is methodologically refreshing. In using a grounded and inductive approach to analyzing elite and mass texts (even though the authors concentrated on the years 2010 and 2015), the book offered a qualitative insight to an assessment of a variety of data sources—both from the mainstream and non-mainstream. Some of these sources were traditional and conservative, such as textbooks and speeches, while others were less conventional and included magazines, novels, or movies. This is one of the book’s more important contributions to the literature. It moves away from just being a political, historical, or ethnographic account of “Malay identity,” towards one which was also more sociologically analytical. While some of these data sources may be considered outside the norm, they *were* sources of elite or mass/popular voices in Malaysia and Singapore. This undeniably heightened the empirical value and contribution of the book, because it departed from depending only on elite sources of data as per many prior works. It also allowed an insightful view into the masses shaping Malay identities, moving discussions beyond listing socio-economic “problems” patterning Malay communities which was more often found in the literature.

Doing so allowed further questions of who can define “Malayness,” and where does power and agency lie? Who defines, or can define, the Malay “problem”? In what ways do the masses negotiate “Malay nationality,” “Malay national identity,” “Malay identity,” or “Malayness” vis-à-vis the state? It highlights public versus private practice and negotiation of Islam, alongside state strategies to manage religion. It also interrogates the presence of intellectual discourse within wider society, and provokes issues of culture and morality. As the authors mentioned in the book, there may be “Elite-Mass contention” which points to “nuances in the lived realities of the masses [which] need to be unpacked” (pp. 78, 93). Or perhaps, there may not be much difference between elite and mass voices at all. Overall, analyzing elite and mass texts can point to or imply how distant “elite” and “mass” may be, in the regard of specific issues, ideology, *et cetera*, and thereafter

the construction or formation of “Malay identity.”

Lastly, in terms of context, I appreciate the authors’ historical and sociological treatment to different “periods” of Singapore and Malaysia’s past. This includes pre-British colonialism, legacies of British rule, Singapore and Malaysia’s merger and separation, and most importantly, their respective nation-building efforts. I would argue that these periods, in and of themselves, are both historical and modern. It is historical because it gives an account or representation of what happened, and how “Malayness” could have been understood then. It is simultaneously modern because it also considers the societal changes and complexities of each period. This corresponds back to the Introduction, where the authors used Dietrich Jung’s definition of “modern” or “modernity” to refer to how individuals may “base their identity construction on competing knowledge and social practices” (Jung 2017, as cited on p. 13). And undoubtedly, “Malay nationality” goes through a negotiation of sorts in response. Therefore, even though the authors concentrated on an analysis of textual materials focusing on 2010 and 2015, “primordial modernity” as a concept is one which is arguably malleable, and can be used and applied across time.

Overall, *The Primordial Modernity of Malay Nationality* is an important contribution to wider literature on Malays. The book was effective at “expand[ing] current understandings of Malay identity,” by assessing how elites and masses perceive it “at the intersection of the macro-level of societal construct and the micro-level of individual construction of their national identity” (p. 7). The strengths of the book lie particularly in its conceptual and methodological inputs, and the depth of discussions within its thematic chapters. These contributions can offer insight into studies and analyses of other national identities globally, residing within the duality and dynamism of both the “primordial,” and “modern.”

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### ***The Feast of the Santo Niño: An Introduction to the History of a Cebuano Devotion***

RESIL B. MOJARES

Cebu City: University of San Carlos Press, 2017.

Resil Mojares, the author of *The Feast of the Santo Niño: An Introduction to the History of a Cebuano Devotion*, is unquestionably the most prominent public intellectual in the Philippines today. The National Artist for Literature is widely recognized for the diversity of his scholarly contributions, which range in form from fiction and essay to journalism and historiography. That a scholar of the stature of Mojares should renew his focus on the Santo Niño—arguably the most prominent religious icon in the Philippines—would in itself pique the interest of many Filipino readers. After all, several scholars in the humanities and social sciences, including Mojares himself, have already written extensively on this topic. Why would there be a need for yet another book, and an introductory at that, on this very popular religious icon?

The answer to this question, I think, lies in the timing of its release in the years leading up to a particularly significant juncture in Philippine religious history. In 2021, Filipinos commemorated the fifth centenary of the introduction of Roman Catholicism in the archipelago by a Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan. As indicated in the book’s cover, the explicit intention of the series, of which this book is a part, is to “prepare for the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan and his Spanish crew on the shores of the vibrant port of Sugbo [Cebu].” In writing a renewed, and compact history of the Santo Niño devotion (the book is a mere 131 pages), Mojares’ book is a response to a need for an account of the icon that departs from the “literature on the Santo Nino [that is] memorializing and promotional in nature, whether religious or touristic” (p.2). As such, what Mojares has provided is a work of popular history that emerges from an intention “to trace the introduction to the history of Cebu itself, through the prism of a celebration that began