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Abstract

This paper examines a genealogy of writings dealing with issues of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore. It then proposes several new vistas in the study of identity and identity formation. The author’s strategy in addressing these two main objectives is to categorize these varied works into three broad approaches: socio-anthropological approach, historical-political approach and exploratory approach. As will be demonstrated in this paper, these approaches are not necessarily exclusive. Rather, such categorizations will serve to enlighten us on how far particular disciplines have dominated the study of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore at the expense of other relevant perspectives. It is pertinent, however, to note that the present paper does not attempt to review all studies conducted so far. Rather, it aims to provide a “sketch map” which can then be analysed and extended for future investigations.

Introduction

Studies on Malay identity and identity formation are, without doubt, well developed and constantly evolving towards preeminence in the Malaysian intellectual arena. One has no need to look further than to examine the plethora of fine scholarship actualized by scholars within Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) to assess the depth of how issues of the Malay identity have been debated, conceptualized and reformulated. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin is perhaps foremost in this pursuit, publishing dozens of articles which culminated into a fine contribution in a recent book, *Contesting Malayness*. Employing theories developed by Bernard Cohn in his study of Indian societies and extending most of the issues raised by other authors in the volume, Shamsul argued that the Malay identity, in itself, has an obscured history that has yet to be seriously examined. He traced how the three pillars of Malayness—bahasa (language), raja (king) and agama (religion)—have been instituted by colonial rule through varied modalities and how the “invasion of epistemological space” has reconfigured modern Malays’ consciousness. Another notable scholar who treads on the same path, yet addresses other pertinent issues, is Abdul Rahman Embong, whose book *Negara Bangsa: Proses dan Pembahasan* (Nation Race: Processes and Debates), has pushed forth the argument that categories such as “Malay Nation/Race” in Malaysia are essentially a product of neo-colonialist visions and therefore should not be regarded as “given”.

Having said that, it is poignant to point out that until recently, there has been no scholarship of equal standing which examines the development of Malay identity in Singapore. The many writings on such issues have yet to be subjected to critical scrutiny though they are lurking within paragraphs of articles in reputable journals, chapters in books as well as unpublished theses. This paper thus hopes to achieve two main
objectives. It will attempt to map out a genealogy of writings on the Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore, bringing to the fore those that have been in the realm of the unknown. My focus will be on written texts that are produced after the Second World War. Such a selection is done with conscious realization that the period from 1945 to 1965 saw a rise in ethno-religious consciousness amongst Malays and subsequently an increasing interest in the study of the Malay-Muslim identity. The period following 1965 marked the separation of Singapore from Malaysia which resulted for the first time in the history of Malay-Muslims in Singapore, the making of a minority community within a larger Chinese populace. Following this are propositions of new vistas in the study of identity and identity formation. My strategy in addressing these two main objectives is to categorize these varied works into three broad approaches, which as we shall observe later, are not necessarily exclusive. Rather, such categorizations will serve to show us how far particular disciplines have dominated the study of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore at the expense of many other useful perspectives, which could be pursued by future researchers. It is pertinent however to note that the present paper does not attempt to review all studies conducted so far. This paper aims to present the first extensive survey of studies on Malay identity in Singapore which will provide information that can then be analysed and extended for future investigations.5

Socio-anthropological Approach

The first approach to be considered is socio-anthropological in nature. Drawing mainly from theories and methods of sociology and anthropology, scholars engaged within this approach focused much upon detailed ethnographical descriptions of varied Malay groupings at a given time. Foremost amongst such approach is a rather dated monograph by Judith Djamour, *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore*. The findings of this pioneering work on Malays in Singapore were based upon the author's field research which was carried out from January 1949 to November 1950. Djamour's interests, however, were not focused on the development of Malay identity as an invented category. Rather, she seeks to examine, in practical terms, how two porous groups of Malays within the colonial setup manifested “ethnicity”. The two types were:

a) Malays who have lived in the Colony for several generations or have moved there from the Peninsula; and

b) immigrants from Indonesia (mainly Java and Bawean) who have settled in the Island for one, two or three generations.

As of the second group, Djamour noted from a census report that “Very few Indonesian immigrants, for instance, would claim to be Malays unless they were accepted as such by the village community”.6 From these persuasive lines, we get the impression that the Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore then was very much a fluid one, albeit in selected contexts. There existed rules of inclusion and exclusion but these have yet to be concretized via state policies. Djamour elaborated that such differences between Malays from the Peninsula and from Indonesia were often blurred due to intermarriages between them. Despite their regional differences, she observed that strong in-group solidarity had developed between them. Within other contexts, the process of *Masok Melayu* (Becoming Malay) by ethnic Chinese was further made fluid through the practice of adoption. Djamour discussed how female Chinese children then were “Malayized” through the system of anak beli (bought child). By adopting Islam, Malay names, language and culture, these Chinese children were soon to be identified as Malays without having to overcome the stigma of alienation.7
Djamour’s book was later coupled by two theses, which examined Malay sub-ethnic groupings, Bawean and Javanese societies, respectively, yet retaining a similar descriptive style. These theses were part of a systematic attempt by the newly established University of Malaya to document developments within various communities in Singapore and Malaya. Hence, in the narratives of Abdullah Malim Baginda and Abdul Aziz Johari, there were notable efforts to merely illustrate rather than analyse the Malay identity with the aid of theoretical tools. It was only upon the advent of a Dutch scholar, Jacob Vredenbergt, that the task of engaging ethnicity with theory became a reality.

Vredenbergt’s book, entitled De Baweanners in hun Moederland en in Singapore; een bijdrage tot de kulturele antropologie van zuidoost-Azie (The Baweans in their Motherland and in Singapore, Contributions to the Cultural Anthropology of Southeast Asia, published in 1968 and translated into Indonesian in 1990 as Bawean dan Islam) was a masterly and critical extension of the above mentioned theses. Yet, different from the earlier accounts, Vredenbergt drew upon studies of non-Malay societies and further employed the theories of major thinkers such as Gordon Allport to hone his analysis.

By way of participant-observation coupled with surveys done on secondary school students at Sang Nila Utama in 1963, Vredenbergt argued for the need to situate Singapore as a vital site in the process of maintaining the Bawean identity vis-à-vis the wider “Bawean Diaspora”. As he has clearly demonstrated, the Baweans in Singapore maintained their sense of belonging to a unique ethnic category through varied means. First was via the pondok (village huts). This was a centre in which values and practices related to Bawean culture and Islam were disseminated and emphasized. Aside from that, ceremonies such as childbirth, circumcision and marriage played an important role in reinforcing a common identity. Last but not least of the factors that compelled Baweans to not integrate into the larger Malay community was the stigma of being “Bawean”. Vredenbergt noted that Baweans were often denigrated with stinging insults based on historic stereotypical images. In eyes of Malays from other sub-groupings, Baweans were fated to be resurrected after death as jerangkung (skeleton-like ghosts). They were deemed as masters of sorcerers whose love for pomp, wealth and envious traits had so often induced them to have evil designs on others. Baweans were also charged by Malays to have originated from pigs as the word Bawean was, in reality, derived from Babian (Pigs).

It is worth noting that marriage, as an institution, had at the same time served as a diluting element of Bawean identity. Vredenbergt highlighted that while other Malay sub-groupings looked upon Baweans with prejudiced eyes; there occurred a slow and growing prevalence of intermarriages between them. The effect of this was a progressive shift away from the emphasis of the Bawean to a wider “Malay-Muslim” identity. Besides that, the language policy in Singapore, which emphasizes on Riau Malay, had a corroding effect on Baweanness. Vredenbergt’s book ends with a critical postscript outlining the state of Baweans in Singapore in the 1980s. The tone, unlike that of his analysis of a close-knit community observed in the 1960s, was that of estrangement and decline. The youth were no longer preoccupied with activities of the pondok nor of Bawean culture and language. Most Baweans would readily identify themselves as “Malays” both in censuses and everyday interaction.

It took almost two decades following Vredenbergt’s work for a new theoretically informed research on Malay identity in Singapore to be undertaken. This task has been carried out with much rigour by Mariam Mohd Ali who examined differing ways of “being Malay” in the North Coast of Singapore. Ali began her narrative by criticizing
the corpus of sociological works that have treated “Malay” as a given and monolithic bloc. She situated her work as part of an emerging genre which tries to push forth the idea that “the forms of cultural and social organization of the people who identify themselves as Malays as quite diverse; each form having developed out of certain historical, social, political and ecological conditions”. Mariam’s analysis, however, does not stop at demonstrating the multiple conceptions of Malayness. Rather, she revisited the subject of indigeneity which has been shrouded by dominant narratives of scholars and interest groups in Singapore for some time. Via observation and extensive interviews, Mariam argued that Orang Kallang (People of Kallang), Orang Selat (People of Selat) and Orang Seletar (People of Seletar) then still saw themselves as the original inhabitants of Singapore linked to the southern part of Johore; a self-identification that was prevalent in the era before the coming of the British to Singapore in 1819. Amidst the ongoing state pressures and migration of other ethnic groupings into the villages, Mariam observed that tensions began to develop between these indigenous peoples and other incoming Malays. This brought about a newly constructed binary categories, “Orang Baru” (New People) and “Orang Lama” (Old People) within the North Coast Malay community.

It is perhaps not an exaggeration to commend Mariam’s dissertation as radical in methodology and analysis as well as rich in content. Unlike earlier dissertations on Malay-Muslims in Singapore, which were stifled by disciplinary boundaries, Mariam experimented on a multidisciplinary approach cutting across history, sociology, politics and psychology. She goes further to question the state’s ideology of “multi-racialism” which had dissolved subtleties within different ethnic categories—“Malay”, “Chinese” and “Indian”. This was indeed a bold and creative attempt that has not been attempted by most aspiring Singaporean scholars around her milieu. Most importantly, Mariam has steered the way for subsequent researches to look deeper into the dynamics of Malayness and its relationship with Islam. This was embodied in research done by Nurliza Yusof.

Entitled “Being Malay in Singapore”, Nurliza Yusof employed phenomenological analysis to uncover underlying meanings embedded in her Malay informants’ articulations of their identity. Nurliza observed that the Malay identity then was very much a product of discriminatory practices and responses to the experience of being a marginal community in Singapore. In response to the day-to-day experiences of political and socio-economic marginalization, Malays in Singapore employed varied strategies to assert their indigenous rights. First was via welfare activities which ensured constant communication and in-group solidarity between them. Second was through preserving Malay customs and traditions (adat). Last but not least, Nurliza observed that Malays enhanced their Islamic-based activities such as congregational prayers and kenduri (feasts) so as to bring about a potent spiritual brotherhood amongst them. Going further than Mariam Ali, Nurliza illustrated how language had become a key marker of the Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore. Usage of the correct language codes and expressions in specific occasions, according to her, determined one’s place within the Malay community.

Yet another useful genre of studies within the socio-anthropological approach includes those that focused upon the process of “Malayization” of Indian and Arab communities in Singapore. Research on the Arabs has been carried out by Lim Lu Sia, Harasha Khalid Bafana and Nargis Mohamad Talib, all of whom argued that Arabs have, in many ways, adopted much of the Malay culture and identity whilst concurrently asserting their uniqueness in varied situations and contexts. Nargis’s dissertation is instructive for its critique of dominant perceptions which argued that maintenance of ethnic boundaries is in essence a male domain. Conversely, she asserted that Arab women were the crucial agents in perpetuating the Arab identity in Singapore.
The integration of the Indian community, in terms of behaviour and self-identifications into the overarching Malay-Muslim identity, has been briefly examined by two useful studies. In her article on Indian Muslims, Bibijan Ibrahim focused upon how the process of “Malayization” had seeped into the behavioural codes of the minority community. Furthermore, she examined how they were culturally inducted into the larger Malay society in terms of appearance, dietary habits, language, dressing, marriage customs, housing and religious orientation. Bibijan posited that there were two broad groups of what she termed as “Malayized Indian Muslims”. At one end of the spectrum were the acculturated Indian Muslims who adopted Malay culture but maintained a small degree of “Indianness”. At another extreme were the assimilated Indian Muslims who became “Malays” in totality.24

There has been only one recent attempt at examining the interplay between Chinese-Muslim identities to that of Malay in post-independent Singapore. Tan Hui Sen’s short essay argued that unlike the Indians and Arabs, Chinese-Muslims were often wedged between two worlds, assimilating slowly into the Malayo-Islamic culture whilst retaining to a great extent, Chinese language and customs. His essay is perhaps the second sustained effort following Judith Djamour’s book, which sought to draw connections between the Chinese and Malay identities.25

**Historical-Political Approach**

The second approach to be considered is historical-political in nature. Unlike the earlier approaches discussed above, work of this sort draws much upon issues, methods of analysis and sources within disciplines of history and political science. Foremost amongst such genre of writings is an oft-cited classic entitled *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. In this seminal work, William Roff (1967, second edition published in 1994) traces the slow growth of communal, ethnic and national feelings amongst peninsular Malays during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Having analysed a variety of Malay-language publications and interviews with prominent Malay personalities, Roff narrated the emergence of three Malay elite groups and their ideological struggles with traditional elites as well as the general peasant population. He posited the early twentieth century as a critical period in which the ideals of nationalism had entered into the Malay consciousness and subsequently shaped their self-identity.

Most importantly, Roff dedicated an entire chapter in his book to what he termed as the cosmopolitan “Malayo-Muslim World of Singapore”. In his observation, Singapore of the late nineteenth early to twentieth century was an arena in which politics and identities were contested and debated upon. He described how Arabs, Jawi Peranakans (hybrid of marriages between Indians and Malay women) and Babas (hybrid of marriages between Chinese and Malay women) were active within the Malay community as participants as well as critics of its progress. The Arabs, for that matter, were renowned for enhancing the Muslim element within Malayness through intermarriages and management of the *haji* (pilgrimage) traffic. The Jawi Peranakans, on the other hand, dominated the presses and publications, which helped to spread ideas of patriotism and loyalty to the land. Last but not least were the Babas, whose criticism of Malays as Melayu Layu (Declining Malays) brought about the reinforcement of Malay ethnic solidarity in the realm of media discourse.26

Although subsequent chapters were dominated by developments in mainland Malaya, Roff’s monograph is irrefutably informative as it gives detailed anecdotes on how the Malay identity politics became a major issue in the 1920–1930s Singapore. Roff
highlighted the growing antagonism between Malays as opposed to the Arabs and Indians as a result of the formation of Malay-centric organizations and clubs. From here, we can derive that Malayness, at least in Singapore then, was marked by an increased differentiation with the “Other”, defined as the DKA (Darah Keturunan Arab, i.e. those of Arab descent), DKK (Darah Keturunan Keling, i.e. those of Indian descent) and the Chinese. Such condition remained as a prevalent feature amongst Malays up until the post World War II period.\(^{27}\)

Roff’s book remained influential for many decades and has steered the course of much of the research on Malays-Muslims in Singapore. Tania Li, in particular, utilizes much of Roff’s findings without providing any original contribution except in her examination of shifting ethnic identifications within colonial censuses. This is not entirely surprising bearing in mind that culture, economy and ideology were her main preoccupations rather than issues pertaining to identity per say. Li was however first amongst scholars in the 1980s to highlight the importance of adopting class-analytical tools to diagnose new developments within the Malay community.\(^{28}\) It is also necessary here to point out that Roff’s emphasis on Singapore as a separate and autonomous arena for the study of the Malay-Muslim identity became a neglected feature in the writings of subsequent scholars. An example of such “negligence” was reflected in Ariffin Omar’s monograph on the ideology of Bangsa (race) and politics in colonial Malaya.\(^{29}\) Ariffin has sadly placed Singapore as a mere periphery to the “greater” happenings in the Malayan Peninsula although some references were made to the contributions of several personalities within Singapore. This deplorable state of historic-political studies on Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore following Roff’s book was however reigned by a controversial monograph published in 1998.

In *The Singapore Dilemma*, Lily Zubaidah Rahim was particularly interested in examining and exposing the factors which have brought about the socio-economic marginality of Malays in Singapore. Although framed within the perspective of political science, Lily drew upon historical sources to illustrate how colonial definitions and policies towards Malays were preserved and brought to a new level by the post-colonial Singapore government. Like Roff, she devoted a chapter to discuss comprehensively issues pertaining to the Malay identity. Taking on a transnational approach, Lily revived the memories of the pre-modern period, asserting that Malays in Singapore were essentially part of a larger Pan-Malay “Nusantara” (Southeast Asia) community. Such worldview, according to her, has always been a feature of the Malay psyche. She cited examples of anti-colonial struggles as well as Pan-Malayan activities as historical samples of how Malays in Singapore *hanya tukar bilik dan bukan tukar rumah* (were merely changing rooms and not changing houses). Through such justifications, Lily asserted that Malays in Singapore were the indigenous peoples of the island.\(^{30}\)

Aside from the subject of indigeneity, Lily went on to discuss religion as a definitive marker of the Malay identity in Southeast Asia. Malays, according to her, were once Hindus and this remained a feature of their identity much longer than Islam. The conflation of Malay identity and Islam, in Lily’s appreciation, was essentially a political construct which was, in many ways, problematic as it has an effect of excluding non-Muslim indigenous peoples such as the Christian Bataks in Indonesia. In the Singapore context, however, Islam as a marker in determining the Malay identity has a reverse consequence of perpetuating Malays’ status as a minority. Coupled further by the stress on language and culture, Lily argued that the Malay identity as defined by the both Muslim and non-Muslim elites in Singapore has departed from its transnational historical precedents. That was not all. With the combined formula of Islam, language
and culture as markers of the Malay identity, the stage was set for Singaporean Malay-Muslims to be categorized as one of the most backward minority races, soon to be marginalized by the polity.31

Departing from Lily’s viewpoint, Hussin Mutalib—a Singaporean scholar and social activist—maintained that Islam has been a defining marker of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore and also a source of constant tension in their dealings with the post-colonial secular state. Hussin demonstrated this assertion by bringing to the fore several imperatives which underpins Malay-Muslim community’s responses to governmental policies.

These include: a country’s history and ethnic demography, the minority’s socio-economic status vis-à-vis the majority, geo-politics, the extent of socio-economic development and modernization, and the ideology and strategic choices of the state’s political elite, as well as the type of political system.32

Such imperatives, Hussin further argued, have squarely placed Malay-Muslims in Singapore in a disadvantaged position since its independence. Coupled by various developments in the Muslim World such as the United States invasion of Iraq as well as the inflow of Islamic revivalist tendencies via the internet and other forms of global-based media, Malay-Muslims in Singapore had become more vigilant in reacting and pushing forth demands relating to their rights as Muslims to a point that it overrode the issue of indigeneity. Hussin focused upon debates on the Muslim Law Act, the Madrasah issue, the open defiance towards the banning of headscarves in public schools and suggestions for a new form of Malay-Muslim leadership as compelling manifestations of Muslim identity assertiveness. Modernization, Hussin highlighted, had not diluted Malay-Muslims’ attachment to their religious identity. Conversely, it had an effect of strengthening their Islamicity which poses a direct challenge upon the state to creatively manage such irreversible phenomenon. A failure to do so would result in a fractional integration, if not alienation, of one of the largest minority groupings on the island-state.33

Exploratory Approach

Aside from disciplinary approaches in the study of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore, the third genre of works to be examined is to be termed as “exploratory” in nature. What is meant here by “exploratory” is a type of work that does not engage into the employment of qualitative or quantitative methodologies nor the garnering of theories. Rather, such works provide broad overviews of debates and, most importantly, personal reflections on the issue of Malay identity in Singapore. Foremost amongst these is a seminar paper by Tham Seong Chee, Defining Malay. By narrating political, academic and cultural perspectives of Malay identity in Singapore, Tham argued that the Malay identity has often been subsumed within racial categories established by the Singapore State.34 Academicians, on the other hand, have argued that the Malay identity was, in the main, an ultra-relative concept, which should be interpreted differently within different contexts. Following that, the cultural approach, according to Tham, asserts that the Malay identity should be understood as against its co-existence with “non-Malays”, here meaning Arabs, Chinese and so forth. An interesting implication of Tham’s analysis is the marshalling of Malay identity in Singapore as a rapidly evolving concept when compared to those found in neighbouring nations.35
Another interesting work that is worthy of note is a publication based on a lecture by Syed Hussein Alatas. In this short yet insightful elucidation, Alatas explored distinguishing aspects of “The New Malay”, as against other negative-based concepts such as “Old Malay” and “Drift Malay”. Alatas forcefully argued that to be Malay is to manifest the values of Islam and the Malay culture. The process, however, does not end there. Critical reasoning and moral uprightness are, according to Alatas, distinguishing elements that separate the “New Malay” from the “Old Malay”. He observed that whilst Malays have always claimed Islam and their unique adat (culture) as features of their identity, such features were often tainted by magical and superstitious beliefs which served as impediments to their progress. It is worthwhile here to quote him at length:

The “New Malay” has certain characteristics or traits. One of them is rationality. The “New Malay” views the world in a more rational manner. He reasons, calculates and plans. He does not subscribe to mere rationality, but it is rationality combined with certain universality. In the case of the Malay community, there is already a built-in system of universality. The Malays are Muslims and being Muslims, they participate in certain universality by belonging to a world of religion having a universal system of values.36

The last article to be considered is by Lian Kwen Fee who discussed the construction of Malayness across nations: Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Drawing almost entirely from the various works cited above, Lian provided no original insights on the making of the Malay identity in Singapore. Nevertheless, his article is somewhat fresh in its frame of analysis as it tries to show the interconnectedness between the histories of Malay identity in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Another interesting observation by Lian was the deliberate delay by the Singapore State to define the Malay identity upon its separation from Malaysia. Lian argued that this was due to the Singapore government’s concern in establishing the foundation for economic survival, which could have been stunted by issues of identity and belonging. Malays in Singapore had had to wait for the next two decades before their identity was formalized following the introduction of the Group Representative Constituency (GRC) system. A bill was passed after debates were held in Parliament amongst Malay-Muslim leaders and from then on Malays are defined in rather ambiguous way, removing Islam as a distinctive marker. A Malay is a:

... person belonging to the Malay community means any person, whether a Malay by race or otherwise, who considers himself to be a member of the Malay community and who is generally accepted as a member of the Malay community by that community.37

Conclusion

Thus far, the above review has revealed to us certain trends within the study of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore. As we have seen, most of the works discussed employed ethnographical and sociological approaches. A large number of works cited were unpublished dissertations and this may explain why they were generally obscured from a wider scholarly scrutiny. The historical-political approaches as well as exploratory approach, although perceptive, are however confined to a few notable works. Cutting across all of these approaches are some recurrent issues that have been disputed as essential elements of Malay identity, namely, Islam, language, place and culture. Whilst the role of Islam in determining the Malay identity has been put to question by scholars such
as Lily Zubaidah Rahim and the definitions propounded by the Singapore government, it is important to note such opposing trends have not gained much ground within academic circles; as seen from the works surveyed above. To be Malay is still equated as being Muslim.38

Furthermore, through this review, it has also become apparent that studies on Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore are essentially underdeveloped. Farid Alatas viewed such phenomenon as rather astonishing due to the fact that “Malayness” has always been a passionate topic of debate in the public sphere amongst Singaporeans.39 It is worthwhile to postulate that the current fervour of academic disinterestedness towards the study of the Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore is perhaps a product of an established perception that engaging in such issues may inevitably expose discriminatory practices and the politics of State marginality. Such unwarranted fear by many academicians in and outside Singapore is indeed a stumbling block towards the development of critical scholarship pertaining to identity and identity formation. Then again, I wish to suggest the following directions in which issues of Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore could be researched upon in the near future with the hope of prying open the lag in academic rigour. To supplement the existing scholarship, the Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore should be studied from a number of different perspectives which are outlined below:

a) **Gender.** Extending from Nargis’s findings on the role of Arab women in the maintenance of identity, it is interesting to explore how Malay women were crucial in the dissemination of Muslim values and culture. This may perhaps reinforce and/or recover the agency of women as against the dominant perception that the creation and sustenance of Malay-Muslim culture is essentially a male province.

b) **Minority sub-ethnic groupings.** This has been a limited feature in earlier studies. The Bugis, Banjar and Patani Malays are notable subjects to be researched upon, especially on how they coped with having to fit into the larger “Malay-Muslim” category. The extent of interactions and unions between members of these sub-ethnic groupings is also a worthwhile area of research in order to comprehend the fluidity and/or rigidity of such sub-ethnic identities.

c) **Malay-Muslim organizations.** Definitions of Malay-Muslim identity via race/ethnic-based organizations such as Majlis Pusat, 4PM (Persatuan Persuratan Pemuda-Pemudi Melayu) and Mendaki should be scrutinized in comparison with those that stress upon Islam as an essential and dominant marker (e.g. Darul Arqam; PERDAUS—Pelajar-Pelajar Agama Dewasa Singapura; FMSA—Fellowship of Muslim Students Association and Jamiyah). It would also be interesting to trace the evolution of each of these organizations and its visions of Malayness.

d) **Critical biographies of prominent personalities.** Examples of this are personalities active in the public realm such as Dato’ Syed Ibrahim Alsagoff, Ya’akob Mohamed and Masuri Salikun. Research on this should look into how their identities as part of Malaya, Singapore, Nusantara (The Malay World) and the Greater Islamic Ummah (Community) shifted in different contexts and under different conditions.

e) **Diasporas.** Examining Malay-Muslims who are born in Singapore but are residing outside the state boundaries, this sort of research should draw
upon quantitative and qualitative methods to find out how Malays outside Singapore perceive their identities vis-à-vis the community at "home".

f) Authority-defined and everyday-defined domains. This is a reiteration of Prof. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin’s suggestion of researching the extent in which the Singapore government’s definitions of Malays are in line with the Malays’ conceptions of themselves. Interviews, surveys and even polls can be utilized to gather information on this.

g) Literature and creative arts. Films, poems, short stories, novels, plays and other creative expressions should be interrogated to show how the Malay-Muslim identity is expressed in the creative and arts circles.

h) The post World War II era. This was one of the most tumultuous periods in Singapore’s history in which notions of allegiance, belongingness and nationality were constantly in motion. The Malay identity, like that of Chinese, was influenced by varied ideologies as well as religious currents widely circulated then. It is interesting to bring forth how some of these trends of thought steered notions of Malayness and the ways in which these notions were enhanced, displaced and/or subjugated by state-defined categories upon Singapore’s declaration of independence. Such research should draw upon the abundant historical sources that are readily available in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and in British National Archives.

The list of topics stated above is by no means exhaustive. It is pertinent, however, for future scholars to adopt a multidisciplinary approach and a fusion of multiple theories to analyse the Malay-Muslim identity in Singapore. Only then can such studies enhance our understanding of the Malay-Muslim identity. In conclusion, it is hoped that this article would induce scholars towards rendering their expertise in analysing the dynamics of Malay-Muslim identity and identity formation in Singapore. Having laid down a “sketch map” of the works that have been conducted so far, it is undeniable that the prospects ahead of us to study Malay identity are, indeed, alluring.

NOTES


4. For details of this, see Husain Haikal and Atiku Garba Yahaya, “Islamic in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy and the Making of a Minority”, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1997, pp. 83–88. Malays in Singapore constitute 14% of its total population, hence, are the largest minority grouping on the island. 99% of the Malays in Singapore are Muslims and it has remained as such since the 1950s up until today.

5. For the purposes of this paper, I have relied much on two recent and most comprehensive bibliographies on Singapore, sifting out works that dealt with issues of identity and identity formation amongst Malay-Muslims. See Hussin Mutalib et al., Singapore Malay/Muslim Community 1819–1994: A Bibliography, Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies, 1995 and available online at: <http://www.lib.nus.edu.sg/bib/sh>.

8. Bawean, like Javanese, Bugis and Banjar are ethnic sub-groups within the wider Malay categories.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 207–212. Categories such as Javanese and Boyanese, employed by Abdul Aziz, Abdullah and Vredenbergt, were later adopted by Julina Khusaini and Jeanette Chia Hwee Hwee for the purposes of their theses. Although earlier findings were updated with fresh figures and facts, similar lines of arguments and methods were maintained. See Julina Khusaini, “The Baweanese and the Javanese in Singapore: A Comparative Analysis of Integration in a Plural Society”, unpublished research paper, National University of Singapore, 1989 and Chia Hwee Hwee, Jeanette, “A History of the Javanese and Boyanese in Singapore”, unpublished research paper, National University of Singapore, 1993.
34. See Nirmala Srirekam PuruShotam, *Negotiating Multiculturalism: Disciplining Difference in Singapore*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000, on how different ethnic groups in Singapore have been reduced to “racial” categories via colonial and post-colonial state policies.


