
Review by: Clive S. Kessler


Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the American Historical Association


Accessed: 30/10/2011 09:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at [http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp](http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp)

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
ization of Punjabi culture and language by Urdu, designated as the national language of Pakistan. *Punjabiyyat* has also created an image of Punjab as resisting invaders from the Aryans and Alexander the Great to the Mughals and the British. Nor is the movement an elite one alone. Punjabi films represent a popular cultural expression of *Punjabiyyat*. Like their elite literary counterparts, these films reveal an incomplete attachment to a nationally authorized culture rooted in a narrow definition of Islam with Urdu as its emblem.

As Ayres makes clear, Punjab’s relative importance in Pakistan makes *Punjabiyyat* a poor case study for available theoretical categories of explanation; here we cannot rely on instrumental motivations or other functionalist explanations that interpret language politics as a means to achieve other kinds of power. Rather, the movement’s aim is to increase symbolic capital as an end in itself (p. 100). This is also one of Ayres’s general conclusions: namely, that language politics can be motivated by the pursuit of symbolic capital accumulation for its own sake (p. 190).

The second intervention Ayres makes is in chapters six and seven. She examines textbooks and education policy documents that are crucial to understanding the development of state-sponsored historiography in Pakistan. Here she makes two points. First, colonial scholarship tended to divide Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods, and state-sponsored histories in Pakistan adopt this division. Secondly, scholarship on Pakistan sees General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq’s 1979 National Education Policy as a moment of rupture, but in fact this was the culmination of a particular vision of the nation apparent from the start. It was the democratically elected government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, not the Zia regime, that first instilled the *Islamiyat* and Pakistan studies programs. Ayres also examines books from the mid-1980s onward that defined new regional perspectives on Pakistan’s past (particularly interesting here is how some of these histories draw on the *tazkirah* form; p. 147). Discussing cases of restoring a regional and non-Islamic past to Pakistan’s history, she argues that a focus on language rationalization alone without taking into account deeper cultural memories and cultural reproduction through literary canons downplays the concerns significant groups in society have about the relative value of their regional cultures and their symbolic capital.

The third intervention Ayres makes is to compare state language policy in India and Indonesia with that of Pakistan. Indonesia is particularly instructive as a contrast. Ayres shows how, despite the many structural parallels between Indonesia and Pakistan in the 1940s (including the place of Bahasa Indonesian and Urdu as spoken by a small minority of its populations), the definition of the former as a national language has not led to the kind of conflict that has occurred in Pakistan around Urdu. She presents convincing reasons as to why this is so. However, she argues that in all three cases the imagined communities at stake came about through translated negotiations that were not necessarily unified through print capitalism, because literacy levels were low. The mass public was also comprised of different language speakers and was really a collection of “partial publics.”

Ayres might have considered some aspects of language politics in the subcontinent more carefully. A discussion of how English has been hybridized in India and Pakistan, giving rise to “Hinglish” and Pakistani English, would have yielded a more nuanced picture of it as a prestige language linked to the colonial past. Given the archetypal peasant hero of its films and the profile of its audience, the class dynamics within the *Punjabiyyat* movement cannot be ignored. Language conflict in Pakistan also needs to be contextualized more broadly in relation to the state’s failure to institutionalize conflict. Finally, there is no discussion of how Urdu, with its rich literary history, had to be simplified and reimagined in order to become an emblem of Islam. Nonetheless Ayres’s engaging and thought provoking study is required reading for historians of South Asia interested in language politics. Moreover, as she stresses, India, Pakistan and Indonesia are not anomalous cases but are the outcomes of significant postcolonial movements (p. 185). As such, their language politics cannot be ignored by scholars of language and the nation-state in general.

**JAVED MAJEED**  
*Queen Mary College, University of London*


For two days in December 1950, Singapore was torn by widespread rioting. Eighteen people were killed and 173 injured. The resulting property damage and disruption of everyday economic life threatened civil peace and the credibility of newly restored postwar British rule.

The cause of this eruption was a thirteen-year-old girl, one Maria Hertogh, known in Malay as Natra binte Ma’arof. Born to a Dutch army man and his Eurasian wife in Java in 1937, the girl was either placed in the care of or given in adoption to a Malay woman; the exact characterization of this transaction depends on whether one believes Hertogh’s parents or their opponents.

At the end of World War II and amid the chaos of the Indonesian revolution, Che Aminah, a Malay woman from Trengganu who was caring for Maria/Natra, returned to Singapore with the young girl. Her parents, who had survived the war, reclaimed their daughter. In the eyes of many individuals in the local and international Muslim communities, “Natra” had irrevocably become a Muslim. Neither her parents nor the Dutch government accepted this view as a final determination of custody, and judicial authorities became involved. As court proceedings began, the girl was placed...
in the temporary care of a convent, a move that made her adoptive family distraught and enraged Muslim sensibilities. Then Natra was given in marriage to one Mansoor Adabi, the son of a prominent Malay nationalist from Kelantan, a strongly Islamic east coast Malay state, with whose royal family Che Aminah had a close connection.

Historical writing has hitherto largely focused upon the background and causes, as well as the bitterly contested and ultimately irreconcilable “rights and wrongs,” of these sad events. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied focuses not on the origins and immediate context of this fateful episode but on its imperial political aftermath. His book is a timely contribution and represents a new approach to the Maria/Natra issue. Not only does the author’s style convey the occasionally confusing and contingent nature of the case’s ramifications, but the topics that most interest him reflect an engagement with contemporary scholarly theories.

Aljunied is mainly concerned to trace how the British colonial administration contained and managed the threat that the riots posed to its credibility, prestige, and effectiveness. To analyze these various challenges, Aljunied draws upon an armory of post-Foucauldian concepts. Whether one finds recourse to these ideas exciting or overwrought, his analysis is important and convincing. The British authorities at the time were, for their own practical reasons, fearful that communists and radical anticolonial nationalists would exploit popular unrest, to their own imperial disadvantage. What the British failed to see coming in these events was the future: an assertive, postcolonial, and internationally attuned political Islamism that repudiated not only British rule but the entire era of European ascendancy of which it was so prominent a part.

In the Maria/Natra events, although barely understood or recognized, the first signs of a new era were discernible to those who were not immediately preoccupied with fashioning official political responses. That is what hindsight, through lenses provided by Aljunied, now enables us to see. A new kind of political sensibility asserted itself; a new form of popular historical consciousness that did not simply reject, but was situated outside of, the imperial “narrative” announced its arrival. In issues and key personalities and also in decisive political memories, the groundings of a globally aware future: an assertive, postcolonial, and internationally engaged political Islamism that repudiated not only British rule but the entire era of European ascendancy of which it was so prominent a part.

In the Maria/Natra events, although barely understood or recognized, the first signs of a new era were discernible to those who were not immediately preoccupied with fashioning official political responses. That is what hindsight, through lenses provided by Aljunied, now enables us to see. A new kind of political sensibility asserted itself; a new form of popular historical consciousness that did not simply reject, but was situated outside of, the imperial “narrative” announced its arrival. In issues and key personalities and also in decisive political memories, the groundings of a globally aware modern Islamist politics in Malaysia, and its region, were laid down.

Che Aminah’s young lawyer, Ahmad Ibrahim, later Dean of Law at Kuala Lumpur’s International Islamic University, pioneered the Islamization of Malaysia’s legal system. Taken under the wing of one of his prominent legal champions, Mansoor Adabi became managing editor of the Malay Legal Journal. And in trials that followed the disturbances, young defense lawyer Lee Kwan Yew drew a lesson from his success in securing the acquittal of a group of rioters whom he knew to be guilty. As prime minister of Singapore, Lee put an end to trial by jury there.

An obscure, long-forgotten story? Hardly. After an unhappy life, Maria/Natra died in 2009. But the idea of “Natra” lives on, more powerful than ever. The musical “Natra” was playing in Kuala Lumpur as this review was being written, and the Malay popular press trumpeted stories about a new “Natra” television miniseries. Enmeshed by the historical circumstances in which they lived, the colonial officials who investigated the Maria/Natra controversy and its aftermath could not have imagined that they were participating in the creation of a powerful postcolonial narrative.

Clive S. Kessler
University of New South Wales

CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES


Alan Gordon sets out to explain how and why the reputation of Jacques Cartier, one of the early European explorers of North America, has risen and fallen over the centuries. Gordon’s explanatory framework can be reduced, at the risk of oversimplifying, to three levels of exposition. The first and most general is nationalism and memory theory, the second an intermediate level on which he traces cultural and intellectual trends that span decades, and the third a more detailed chronicle of Cartier-related events—monuments unveiled, festivities staged, books published—set within their immediate political and cultural contexts.

Rather than following any one theorist dogmatically, Gordon adapts the insights of many to forge his conceptual framework. He sees heroes as symbols of collective values and beliefs. They have cultural utility because personification facilitates popularization, and they are deployed to cohere modern mass societies, representing the “common sense” that keeps everyone on the same page.

Cartier was first made heroic by nineteenth-century French Canadian ultramontanists who believed French Canada had a providential mission as an exemplary Catholic society in the New World. Since Cartier claimed Canada for France, he was deified as the founder of French North America. The ultramontanes’ Cartier was less interested in finding a western route to China than he was in establishing a new Christian kingdom. Character flaws such as disobeying orders, kidnapping aboriginals, and losing dozens of his crew to scurvy were glossed over as incidental costs of doing business.

This “common sense” consolidated in the mid-nineteenth century. As the book’s subtitle suggests, Gordon takes a special interest in how historians were implicated in the process, gaining professional status and security through their contribution to the national project. A historian, for example, played a key role in securing from overseas a portrait of the pious and intrepid mariner that was subsequently reproduced and