that the city-state must look out for since other entities such as America and China also have 'imperialism without colony' designs on smaller states in East Asia. Abdul Aziz Bari's article, however, brings back the reader to past issues. In his article, the reader will comprehend that the ejection of Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia was constitutional. Though the late Tunku Abdul Rahman was the sole driver of separation, his actions were, in fact, in line with the law of the Federation. According to Professor Albert Lau, Singaporean and Malaysian ideas of governance had produced varying outcomes due to the differing rhetorics of ethnicity, multiracialism, meritocracy and progress. Singapore, however, is ahead of Malaysia in its economic success. Hence, as much as Singapore and Malaysia have similar economic, social and political concerns such as modernisation, developmentalism and wealth accumulation, the speed at which both countries are going and the distribution of national wealth are certainly unequal.

The final section of the book, the economics section, written by Teofilo C. Daquila, Linda Low, Mahani Zainal Abidin and Lee Poh Onn, discusses the aspect of free trade agreements (FTAs), and here Singapore has a head-start. Though FTAs provide opportunity for trade, they are also one of the main factors contributing toward the destabilisation of economies during an economic crisis. Malaysia and Singapore, however, serve as a model partner to other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries in promoting trilateral and plurilateral FTAs. The advantage of economic co-operation must be covered with the greater picture of multilateral institutional support, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). While a political re-merger based on principles is a distant possibility, a merger of economic activity is more achievable.

The underlying strength of this book is its desire to muster greater co-operation between Singapore and Malaysia, leaving political differences to historical memory. Unbounded by the complexity of history, the path toward greater bilateral proximity is indeed in sight as a younger generation of leaders assumes political power. This book, *Across the causeway*, is one of the first few academic initiatives in that direction and thus a 'must read' for those who are interested in Singapore–Malaysia relations.

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The Malaysian Indian: History, problems and future
By MUZAFAR DESMOND TATE
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The more significant contributions to scholarship on the Indians in Malaysia may be traced to several writers. K.S. Sandhu's seminal *Indians in Malaya* (1969) is

a well-documented study of Indian immigration and settlement in colonial Malaya. Ravindra K. Jain's *South Indians on the plantation frontier in Malaya* (1970) remains the only published ethnography of a Tamil immigrant labour community located in a European-owned rubber estate. This was followed by Sinnappah Arasaratnam's *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (1979), which examined the post-war political and social development of the ethnic group. These writers represented a scholarship of the past – all too infrequent in the region today – in their meticulous attention to fine and rich detail to which researchers have subsequently been able to draw on the wealth of data continually. The 1990s saw several published studies by Malaysian academics (for example, S. Ramachandran, 1994; P. Ramasamy, 1994) from the University of Malaya, who turned their attention specifically to the plight of Tamil estate workers. Their interests were a reflection of their biography and familiarity with a much vaunted and marginalised ethnic community.

This latest work, aptly titled *The Malaysian Indians* highlights and documents the contributions of the Indian minority that has long been perceived within government, the media, and scholars as a neglected and subordinate community struggling to be accepted and integrated in a country that they first migrated en masse to at the turn of the twentieth century — 50 years after independence. For much of this book, Muzafar Desmond Tate (p. 78) addresses perhaps the most important issue that has confronted the Indian community in Malaya, later Malaysia, namely its inability to overcome its inherent and fractious divisions. As he describes it, 'Indians in Malaya continued to be wracked by differences of race, religion, caste, occupation and language as they always had been, to a degree not found amongst either the Malays or Chinese'. Added to this is the religious difference between Hindu and Muslim; and the underlying regional uneasiness within Tamil society, between the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and the Jaffna Tamils. Above all, he continues, the great divide in local Indian society is between a minority of self-contained, influential and socially mobile middle class and the proletarian mass of Tamil labour first alienated and disenfranchised in the estates of Perak and Selangor, now poor and desperate in the squatter settlements of the major cities.

Tate's account of Indian involvement in local politics captures very well the Indian dilemma, to draw on Dr Mahathir's expression of the Malays in 1970. In comparison with the Malay dilemma, in which Dr Mahathir sought to explain why the Malays were unable to compete with other communities, the Indian dilemma is about its political impotence and economic marginalisation. The dilemma is, paradoxically, located in the coexistence of a significant and socially mobile middle class of Indian professionals and business people who have been able to hold their own despite the racially discriminatory New Economic Policy (NEP) implemented in the early 1970s and the majority of Tamil proletariat whose position as a reserve army of labour living in poverty has remained unchanged, relatively speaking, since they first arrived to work in the estates. Yet neither, because of caste and class differences, has been able to forge a political partnership to manage the Indian dilemma.

Despite attempts by the English-speaking Malayan-born middle-class Indians to involve themselves in local politics through the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) prior to and after the Second World War, their commitment to a multicultural Malayan identity and values and their

rejection of communal politics proved their downfall in the years leading to independence. The British-sponsored Alliance coalition of Malay, Chinese and Indian representatives in a consociational government, which laid the basis of communal politics and a racial state after independence, led to the rise of the MIC through the Tamilisation process engineered by Tun V.T. Sambanthan (pp. 92, 110) and maintained by Samy Vellu. Despite never enjoying more than 50 per cent of Indian support throughout its tenure, the MIC by default was institutionalised and subordinated within a system of unequal power-sharing and patronage politics; the legitimacy of such a government was only held together by the perpetuation of racial ideology and politics. The consequence was that capable Indian political leaders from a middle-class background were marginalised. They left to join or form political parties committed to multiculturalism and social justice (pp. 112–13) but made little impact on the political and economic lives of the majority of Indians in Malaysia. Those who eschewed participation in party politics turned their energies to involvement in non-governmental organisations (Chapter 17).

Any work that deals with the Indians in Malaysia is a challenge, not least of all to unpack the category of Indians and avoid the essentialisation of a group that Tate recognises as incredibly heterogeneous. Much of the book is, despite the title, about the Tamils who constitute 80 per cent of the Indian population in Malaysia for much of its history. A useful contribution is the attempt to discuss the political and economic fortunes of the Tamil community in the three premierships of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Abdul Razak, and Mahathir bin Mohamad. It is hardly surprising to note that there were no significant improvements for the Tamil working class during the tenures of the three prime ministers. A golden opportunity was lost under Tunku when a promising initiative by Sambanthan in consolidating estates threatened by fragmentation in the 1960s, in a co-operative scheme that provided ownership to estate workers, floundered when the Tamil-led National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) opposed it (pp. 120–1). The NUPW leadership feared that such a move would undermine its influence with the estate labourers and the government.

Tate's book is a worthy contribution published by the Strategic Information and Research Development Centre. The book is very readable despite the wealth of detail. It covers most of the important secondary sources on the Indians in Malaysia. It is also written by a person who knows the country well, having lived here since the 1950s, first as a serviceman and later as an educationist and writer. If the intention was to write a book that would inform Malaysians of a neglected but important community and provide some clues of why the Tamils have not been able to realise their full potential, it has taken a significant step. They should read it.

Tate was unfortunately not around to witness the general elections in March 2008. While it is premature to argue that these elections signal a move away from the politics of racism to one that recognises the promise of multicultural recognition, it has at least rekindled some hope that all is not lost for many Malaysians in and outside the country. What I take away from this book is the potential of the middle class to influence change and deliver economic and social justice. In the political history of Malaysia, those who have chosen the middle path, namely the 'multicultural' middle class, have had little success. A window of opportunity has opened after the

March elections. This time the Malay middle class has taken the lead. Will they succeed?

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Writing Singapore: An historical anthology of Singapore literature
Edited by ANGELINA POON, PHILIP HOLDEN and SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM
Singapore: NUS Press Singapore & National Arts Council Singapore, 2009. Pp. 677. Bibliography.
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More than a collection of works, *Writing Singapore* positions itself as a platform for critically evaluating the continuously shifting dialectic between literature and other discourses of identity formation, its aim being to 'contribute to important constructions and revisions of individual and national identities' (p. xxi). As its focus, the concept of identity is dissected and rigorously examined, understood here as flexible, and at best provisional. Eschewing a narrowly defined Singaporean identity, the editors have chosen instead to commit to a geographical focus. Drawing attention to the fact that Singapore only existed as an independent nation with its own citizenship in 1965, a Singaporean identity as a criterion in the selection process is necessarily limiting. The decision to adopt a more flexible paradigm of inclusion has worked to the merit of the editors and contributed to one of the anthology's strongest points, resulting in greater breadth and coverage of writing in English coming out of a Singapore history. This flexibility has made it possible to include works by authors who were born in Singapore, but have since migrated, or renounced their citizenship, but nonetheless continue a relationship with the island state. One will also find works by authors such as Margaret Leong, who identifies as a Malayan poet, Goh Poh Seng, born in Malaya and now living in Canada, and Sri Lankan native Lloyd Fernando, represented here. While demonstrating the impossibility of fixing identity, the anthology simultaneously reinforces Judith Butler's assertion that the concept of identity is repeatedly constructed through institutional exercises within a set of differentials that seek to maintain and regulate it (Butler, '"There is a person here': An interview with Judith Butler', in *Butler matters: Judith Butler's impact on feminist and queer studies*, ed. Margaret Sonser Breen and Warren J. Blumenfeld, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005, p. 11), a view particularly applicable to Singapore. As such, identity formation takes the form of contestation, is often a result of dissonance, and produces what Butler refers to as 'a paradox and a tension for the norm' (Butler, p. 20). This is exemplified in pieces such as Simon Tay's short story 'Exiles', Ovidia Yu's play *Three fat virgins unassembled*, and the selected poetry of Cyril Wong and Alfian Sa'at.

The anthology is divided into three sections, based on significant markers in the development of Singapore as a nation. The first concentrates on literature in Singapore prior to 1965, being the year when Singapore unexpectedly found itself an independent