

becoming more predisposed to identifying themselves with events and groups in global Islam. Like *bangsa*, *umma* (or *ummah*) as a form of Muslim self-identity can be at once divisive and unifying. In Southern Philippines, for example, the movement led by Muslim separatist groups to identify their struggles as part of the overall battle for the *umma* meant that non-Muslims are regarded as the 'other' in a society whose existence serves as a liability for the cause of Muslim unity.

Both books ought to be included in course syllabuses on Southeast Asia. The authors of these essays show us that the study of Muslims as well as the other groups that populate the region is far from peripheral and detached from the study of Islam as a whole. Rather, studying Muslims in Southeast Asia could provide us with windows to understanding how Islam as one of the fastest growing religions is lived and debated about. The contestations of identities and of interpretations explored in these books will undoubtedly serve as a basis of comparison to explore and unravel what it means to be Muslim in the world.

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*Contestations of memory in Southeast Asia*

Edited by ROXANA WATERSON and KIAN-WOON KWOK

Singapore: NUS Press, 2012. Pp. 300. Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463414000149

*Contestations of memory in Southeast Asia* is a collection of ten chapters dealing with the eclectic post-war and post-colonial development of selected Southeast Asian countries. The authors include sociologists and anthropologists examining three case studies from Singapore, two from Indonesia, and one each from Burma, Laos, Vietnam and the Philippines.

The introductory chapter addresses 'the stakes involved in memory', with an emphasis on the interplay and machinations involved in the creation of memory, history, and identity among the various ethnic groups from the Second World War through to the present. Indigenous power relations within each nation impacted and continue to have an impact on the deconstruction and reconstruction of historical memory and 'truth'. The creation of memory, whether personal or as a product of 'hegemonic narratives', is indivisibly linked to enduring 'contestations' and with that the quest and very meaning of 'truth'. The editors 'propose that the problem of memory cannot be uncoupled from the problem of truth. Truth, however, is an elusive concept ...'.

'Part II: Nationalism and the construction of destinies' examines the official constructions of history as nationalist exercises of identity-making replete with conscious and unconscious acts of selection and with considerable impact on the emerging nations. The chapters by Sharon Seah Li-Lian's 'Truth and memory: Narrating Viet Nam' and Dayang Istiaisyah bte Hussin's 'Textual construction of a nation: The use of merger and separation' deconstruct historical narratives long accepted as 'dominant truth' rather than 'dominant narrative'. Seah analyses the reconstruction of the

American War on Vietnam through a museum narrative and reiterates the claim of 'the narrative process as simply a "knowing" process, not a truth search'. Dayang Istiaisyah's detailed, comparative textual analysis describes the dominant representation of Singapore's separation from Malaysia as 'ideologically motivated'. Her final line underlines the book's theme of contestation: '... it should be noted that, while the party may have been successful in "naturalising" its ideology of multiracialism among Singaporeans, its hegemony is never complete, because judging by past electoral results, there has always been a portion of the population who view the nation differently'.

'Part III: Traumatic memories: Interpenetrations of collective and personal experience' is a natural expansion of the theme of memory in its attention to the ordinary individual's experiences: a 'history from below', one that produces traumatic memories of the past that continue into the present. Personal narratives recount experiences of war in the Philippines, race riots in Singapore, growing marginalisation in Singapore, and surviving political consequences in Indonesia. Collectively Part III makes for compelling and refreshing reading: Kwok Kian-Woon and Kelvin Chia's 'Memories at the margins: Chinese-educated intellectuals in Singapore' (chapter 9) and Budiawan's 'Living with the spectre of the past: Traumatic experiences among wives of the former political prisoners of the "1965 Event" in Indonesia' (chapter 10) examine experiences and narratives of groups not always considered as marginal, such as Chinese-educated Singaporeans or not always considered consequential because of their gender. Some readers might consider the narrative quality in Part III as not replicating the analytical rigour and tenor of Part II, in particular, Adeline Low Hwee Cheng's 'The past in the present: Memories of the 1964 "racial riots in Singapore"'. Though Low qualifies her contribution by stating a desire to avoid the 'academisation' of informants' memories, gleaned conclusions from only 33 informants, no matter how rigorous or representative the sample might be, should elicit some reservations.

As a book on Southeast Asia, it is unfortunate that Thai and Malaysian perspectives are not included. A chapter on Malaysia could have provided a possible counterweight and connection to the chapters on Singapore. Absent too are relevant illustrations to enhance the analysis or introduce the chapters to those unfamiliar with the region. Only chapter 4 is accompanied with images to illustrate the assertions made in the text.

This book is a worthy addition to a range of disciplines beyond the obvious links to history and sociology. As the editors note themselves, there is a 'burgeoning cross-disciplinary concern with social memory' with significant social and political dimensions. Contestations of memory will undoubtedly intensify with the increasing transnational movements of people and ideas, the increasing sophistication in commodifying history and culture and with the enduring tensions between competing voices and interests. Memories, fleeting or otherwise, will translate these contestations in both tangible and intangible forms and this book should prompt continuing conversations on the role of memory at personal, national, and regional levels.

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