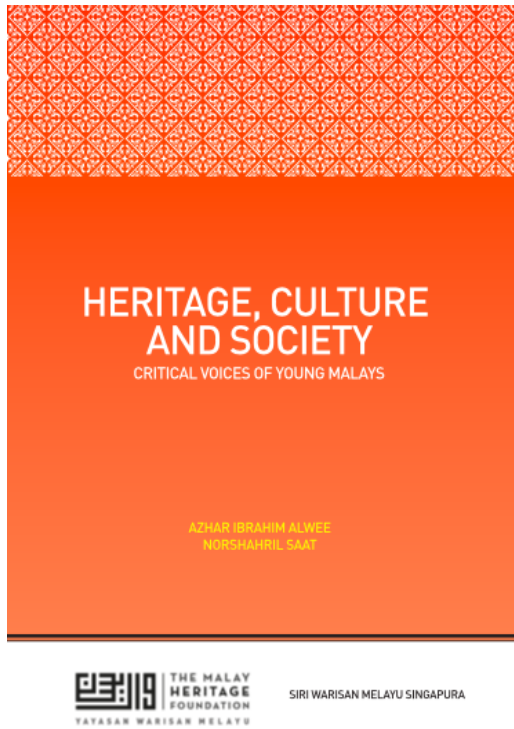


HERITAGE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY: CRITICAL VOICES OF YOUNG MALAYS



Synopsis

We often hear the call for youth to be active in community projects, engagement and voluntary work. This call is commendable and necessary. But as a community, we need to be conscious that engagement and community involvement cannot be divorced from commitment and affiliation to discursive activities. The latter demands a good grasp of issues, challenges and potentialities.

To those who believe in the significance of reforms, social transformation and emancipation in contributing to society's wellbeing, discursive activities are intellectual endeavours that warrant attention. Frantz Fanon argued that: "the level of consciousness of young people must be raised; they need enlightenment" (see *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963). Intellectual affiliation among youth is central if

we envision the emergence of thought-leadership from this generation.

Writing and articulating in the public sphere demands rigour in the realm of content. It also requires the researchers and writers to articulate issues and perspectives relevant and urgent, especially aspects that have not been given much premium in the dominant narratives. Through writing and articulating in the public space, we can nurture civic courage. The latter means to responsibly question and rethink dominant paradigms that contribute to the best practices and ideas to progress.

Both writing and discoursing are also an affirmation of presence in a particular socio-political arena. In the context where domestication, relegation, and exclusion of ideas are taking place, we need to nurture a generation or cohort of youths conscious and perceptive of their current realities and future destinies.

Any discursive engagements demand sound formulation of issues and problems, rigorous analysis, a good sampling of data and resources, fair recognition of nuances of differences and perceptions, and discipline

to commit time and mental focus in accomplishing a research paper. As part of the process, the craft of writing, and the intensity of formulating, scrutinizing issues and problems will be enhanced.

Indeed, writing and discoursing are not, and should not be privileged only to research circles or academia. The challenges of today's complex and competing discursive warrant reading and reflecting public. It is no exception for the youths.

In this compilation, most writers are students, researchers and have just started their professional careers. The call for active youth engagement in society needs concrete planning and the creation of opportunities for them to do research, as well as to articulate their thoughts. The Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF) hopes that a series of publications can be initiated from forums and sharing sessions organised. The Sembang Ilmu Series forum is one of the platforms for youths to articulate their ideas and share their research on the community's cultural, heritage and social matters.

These opportunities should empower them since they inspire their cohorts to come forward to contribute and be part of discursive circles in our community. Such endeavours of sharing knowledge and perspectives can also be seen as life-long learning, especially for those already in their professional careers.

Most importantly, we hope that through such discursive sessions, the process of researching can nurture awareness to writing with clear commitment. These three attributes characterize the latter: First, it is essentially educative in its purpose, content and style. Second, it is empowering to both the writer and their prospective readers. Third, it has both the annunciative and denunciative components.

Public discourse allows youths to be exposed to historical and contemporary issues. Before accomplishing their papers, each of them (except for three regional contributors) was made to present their proposals, and the editors advised them accordingly. The skills of researching, writing, and articulating ideas effectively are part of the process of discursive initiatives which we aim to achieve.

The work of documenting, profiling and analysing is central in any heritage and cultural endeavours. We hope this research series on culture, heritage and society provides space for our youth to imagine, articulate, and sharpen their writing craft for a general readership. Young researchers and writers need more encouragement, and support for them contributes to the discourse heritage-making and cultural appreciation.

While documenting demands a meticulous survey with familiarity to cultural and social history and memory, engaging the problematic assumptions, parochial and exclusivist interpretations and clichés in

dominant and peripheral discourses are aspects of critical thinking that they need to be given ample exposure. Apart from a good reading corpus, active participation in the public sphere is one crucial avenue to get exposed to critical perspectives.

Heritage and cultural empowerment can be enhanced further if civic consciousness and social commitment are recognized as the *élan vital* for community development. The efforts towards heritage recognition cannot simply stop at the level of appreciation. We need heritage making as a living creative process, and the power of youth's creativity lies here. There is no quick fix to achieving this, but one that demands planning, action, and vision. Let's hope, at least, that heritage discourse is initiated first.

We would like to thank the contributors of this volume for their hard work and commitment to this project. This book is an offshoot of the *Sembang Ilmu* series, part of MHF's efforts to provide an engaging space to present their thoughts on heritage and culture. This publication and talk series would not have been possible without the MHF team – Julina Khusaini, Muhammad Fadli Idris, and Rozana Sidek. Thank you all.

About the Writers

Azhar Ibrahim Alwee (PhD) is a Lecturer at the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS). He teaches Malay-Indonesian literature and ideologies of development at the Department. His research interests include sociology of religion, sociology of literature, critical literacy and the Malay-Indonesian intellectual development. Amongst his published books are *Emancipated Education* (2020), *Historical Imagination and Cultural Responses to Colonialism and Nationalism: A Critical Malay(sian) Perspective* (2017), *Menyanggah Belunggu Keracunan Fikiran Masakini* (2016), *Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay Indonesia World: Critical Perspectives* (2014) and *Narrating Presence: Awakening from Cultural Amnesia* (2014). He is a recipient of the National Day Award (The Commendation Medal, 2021).

Norshahril Saat (PhD) is a Senior Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), a research institute based in Singapore. He received his PhD in International, Political and Strategic Studies from the Australian National University (ANU) in 2015. He completed his Master of Arts in Malay Studies and Bachelor's Degree (with Hons) in Political Science from the National University of Singapore. His research interests are mainly Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore politics, and he has published extensively on Islam, Malays and politics of these three countries. Amongst his published books are *Beyond Bicentennial: Perspectives on Malays* (2020), *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia* (2020), *Alternative Voices in Muslim Southeast Asia* (2019), *Tradition and Islamic Learning: Singapore Students in the Al-Azhar University* (2018), *Islam in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Modernity* (2018), *Majulah! 50 years of Malay/Muslim Community in Singapore* (2016), *Yusof Ishak: Singapore's First President* (2015) and *Faith, Authority and the Malays: The Ulama in Contemporary Singapore* (2015).

About the Contributors

Ahmad Ubaidillah Mohamed Khair is an undergraduate from Yarmouk University, Jordan. He is majoring in Islamic Jurisprudence and its Sources. His area of interest includes local and regional literature, sociological aspects of Islam, Islam Reform, and Nusantara Islam. He is a Sahabat Sastera (Friends of Malay Literature) under the Malay Language Council, Singapore (MBMS), and has presented works of Nusantara poetry for Poetry Festival Singapore. He has also published writings on platforms such as Muslim.sg, Wasat Online, Karyawan and ELEVEN.

Faris Ridzuan graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) with a First-Class Honours in Sociology and a minor in European Studies. His research interests include the sociology of religion, inequality, gender and sexuality, and the sociology of mental and physical health. He has written for

platforms such as Today and BERITAMediacorp. After serving in the public service in the social sector, he is currently a Product Policy Issue Manager at a tech company, where he works to keep users on the platform safe. He hopes to also deepen his knowledge on and contribute to the sociology of science and technology, especially in the areas of the impact of science and technology on inequality and vice versa.

Liyana Nasyita Shukarman is a Malay Studies graduate from the National University Singapore (NUS). Her research interest includes developmental studies and the relationship between literature and society. She is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in NUS, in the Department of Malay Studies, with research on indigenous production of knowledge by Malay writers in the 19th century. For her honours thesis, she had explored the issue of displacement of the Malay community through the works of Singapore Malay writers. Apart from that, she is also an advocate of Malay heritage, language and culture and is involved in the Malay cultural scene as a dancer in traditional and contemporary Malay dance.

M Ahalla Tsauro is a first-year master's candidate in the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Before this, he studied at Universitas Airlangga and worked as a research assistant at Stratagem Indonesia. His interest in studying Islam, politics, and society began during his time in the Islamic traditional institution or Pesantren where he studied for almost eight years. During his undergraduate years, he wrote chapters in *Ekologi Al-Quran: Kajian Islam Tentang Lingkungan* (2016), *Indonesia in Changing Southeast Asia* (2016), *Journal of Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies* (2018), *Journal Tashwirul Afkar* (2021) and *Jurnal Masyarakat Kebudayaan dan Politik* (2021).

Mohd Zarif Asyraf Radzlee holds a Bachelor's Degree in Education (History and Literature) from the University of Science, Malaysia. He is also an educator as well as an independent writer and researcher. His writings are published on the Lestari Hikmah and IBTimes.ID websites and contribute one of his articles in *Inteligensia Penyuluh Nusantara*. His main research interests are in the history, sociology, and literature of the Malay World and Southeast Asia. His research and reading interests include intellectual history, thought history, Malay-Muslim culture and politics, sociology of knowledge, and traditional and modern Malay literature. His goal is for Malaysian and regional historical discourse to become more critical, progressive, autonomous, and function as an intellectual-moral inquiry.

Muhammad Suhail Mohamed Yazid is a PhD candidate in History at the University of Cambridge and a Prince of Wales Student at Trinity College, Cambridge. His research interests include the modern political history of Singapore and Malaysia, monarchies, and Afro-Asian internationalism. His writings have been published by World Scientific, BERITAMediacorp and the *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*.

Nur Hikmah Md Ali is a Year 4 undergraduate majoring in Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She served as the President of the NUS Malay Studies Society in 2020 and was appointed as Sahabat Sastera (Friends of Malay Literature) in 2021, an initiative by the Malay Language Council, Singapore (MBMS) to engage and contribute to the discourse and activities concerning Malay literature in Singapore.

Nur Syafiqah Mohd Taufek is currently a master's candidate in the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her research interests include Islam in Southeast Asia, religious discourses, religious ideologies, and gender issues. She has co-authored several publications for the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute) including *The Serious Social Impact of Non-Violent Extremism in Indonesia*; *Indonesian Islam beyond Habib Rizieq Shihab: Deconstructing Islamism and Populism*, and *Rethinking Extremism Beyond Physical Violence: Anti-Shia Hostility in Malaysia*.

Nurshirah Tabrani is a graduate of the National University of Singapore (NUS) with a BA in Malay Studies. She spends almost every other day translating all kinds of materials and searching for different ways to enhance the ecosystem in the local translation industry. She hopes that the Malay language continues to flourish and remain relevant for generations to come.

Said Mahadi Said Iziddin is a journalist from the Malay News & Current Affairs desk (BERITAMediacorp) at Mediacorp. He produces a wide range of content for TV broadcast and digital platforms about the Malay/Muslim community including topics on culture and heritage. His recent video series, *BERITAJelajah*, which explores unique places and profiles of interesting individuals in Singapore entered the finals of the 2021 New York Festivals Television & Film Awards. He has always been interested in the social life and history of Malays in Singapore. As part of Singapore's Bicentennial commemoration in 2019, he co-wrote *Titik Tolak: Dwiabad Melayu Singapura (2020)*, a publication on the history of Malays in Singapore based on field interviews collated from fellow journalists.

Shaik Azad is pursuing his BA (Hons) in Malay Studies with a minor in Sociology at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He believes in the importance of discussions and conversations in the public sphere; whether it is to empower the masses or to engage in meaningful discourse. He is driven by the idea of making knowledge accessible to every member of society. When not working, you can find him drinking teh tarik at neighbourhood coffee shops, talking about anything and everything under the sun.

Wan Noor Khuzairey Wan Mohtar is a history teacher, an editor in GERAK Malaysia, co-editor of a novel by Jamal Ismail titled *Ombak Selatan* (2021) and co-writer for the article “Kemanusiaan

Marhaenisme Usman Awang: Memintal Penyanggahan Menyulam Keindahan” published by Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka. He has contributed an article in “Intelegensia Penyuluh Nusantara” and published a book entitled “Kitab Perdana Menteri”. Besides writing materials for publication, he also contributes his writing on several platforms including Lestari Hikmah, Solidaritas, and Gerak Malaysia, His main writing interests comprise development studies, religion, literature, and philosophy. His favourite writers include Syed Hussein Alatas, Chandra Muzaffar, Shahrudin Maaruf, Azhar Ibrahim, Usman Awang, and Keris Mas. He is currently doing research on humanism and poverty.

Zinnurain Nasir is an Assistant Curator with the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). His current research interest revolves around the biographical construction and historical analysis of Jawi-script magazines, as a medium to comprehend the politics of magazine publishing in post-World War II Malay society in Singapore. His broader interests include local Singapore history, microhistories of urban communities, and identity politics, especially within the Malay community.