

**Nicholas J. Long. *Being Malay in Indonesia: Histories, Hopes, and Citizenship in the Riau Archipelago*. Honolulu: Asian Studies Association of Australia and University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. 295 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, glossary, index.**

**Michael G. Peletz**

Many contributors to this journal have emphasized that in the past couple of decades Indonesians have experienced a series of tumultuous, headline-grabbing developments. Such events include, for example, the financial crisis that swept the region beginning in 1997, the resignation in May 1998 of president Suharto, and the *reformasi* movement associated with Suharto's fall and the successive waves of democratization that followed. Consider also the devastating tsunami of December 2004, which is estimated to have claimed the lives of more than 170,000 people in the region of Aceh alone; the sectarian and communal violence in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and elsewhere in Eastern Indonesia; and the florescence of movements throughout the archipelago, some heavily inflected by Wahhabi-style reformist Islam and the burgeoning of "anti-vice" militias, which have sought greater regional autonomy and at least partial respite from the centralization policies of previous decades.

Processes of decentralization and autonomy serve as the focus of anthropologist Nicholas Long's *Being Malay in Indonesia*. The book is based on thirty months of ethnographic research in the Riau Archipelago, which is widely regarded by Malaysians, Indonesians, Singaporeans, and others as a bastion if not the epicenter or *ur-source* of "traditional" and "authentic" Malay culture, and which has recently aspired to become a center of global manufacturing. Long began his fieldwork in 2005, the year after Riau became an autonomous province (Indonesia's 32nd). His concerns with processes of decentralization and autonomy lie less with the mass resentments and public protests leading up to them and the governmental machinery mobilized to achieve them, than with their symbols, meanings, and affective entailments. For instance, what kinds of sentiments, dispositions, and embodied subjectivities are engendered and conjoined in these processes? More specifically, how do the inhabitants of present-day Riau experience, understand, and represent what it is to be Malay in their everyday lives and social worlds, and how are these experiences, understandings, and representations informed by "broader trends in public and political culture" (17)? The latter questions are important for a variety of reasons, not least because "Malay" (like "Malayness") is "'one of the most challenging and confusing terms in the world of Southeast Asia' ... [a term whose] precise meanings 'have never been established, and [perhaps] never will be'" (17).<sup>1</sup>

In endeavoring to answer these and related questions, Long engages recent literature in anthropology and related fields as well as some classics in existentialism

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Michael G. Peletz is professor of anthropology at Emory University. His books include *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009) and *Islamic Modern: Religious Courts and Cultural Politics in Malaysia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> Here Nicholas Long is quoting Timothy Barnard and Hendrik Maier's preface to Timothy Barnard, ed., *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), x, xiii.

and psychoanalytic theory that have become part of the canon for many scholars involved in the “affective turn.” Especially germane is the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, particularly Sartre’s notion of consciousness and “bad faith,” construed as “an evanescent cognitive condition in which the subject strives to constitute itself in the mode of what it is not” (8); alternatively, as “subjects’ efforts to deny, avoid, or suppress a very particular existential notion of the authentic self” (9). Also relevant is Sigmund Freud’s corpus, most notably Freud’s notion of the “uncanny,” which connects “forms of fear, dread, and unsettledness” (25), just as it links the familiar and the comfortable with “what is concealed and kept hidden” while also emphasizing being “in place and out of place simultaneously” (25).

Following his incisive introductory chapter, Long turns in Chapter 2 to a discussion of the provincial capital, Tanjung Pinang, and the emergence of the various existential, political, and other dilemmas associated with the town’s Malayness. This town, once largely and more or less unproblematically Malay, experienced a massive influx of ethnically diverse migrants from surrounding regions during the years 1983–2008. By the latter part of this period it had also become a haven for Singaporean and other tourists in pursuit of cheap consumer goods, sex, and drugs. These developments led many long-standing residents to worry that their city risked becoming a place of “thieves, prostitutes, and crooks” (41) and that it was in any event losing its culturally familiar character. Hence, while Tanjung Pinang boasted a 2010 population of around 187,000 people, fewer than 31 percent of its residents defined themselves as Malay, the others self-identifying as Javanese (28 percent), Chinese (13.5 percent), Minangkabau (9.5 percent), Batak (6.5 percent), Sundanese (3 percent), Bugis (2 percent), or other (e.g., Boyan, Florinese, and Banjar, around 7 percent) (43).<sup>2</sup> In these circumstances, how, then, has the town been able to continue to promote itself as Malay and thus showcase Malay cultural performances aimed at attracting tourist dollars and inculcating youth with a sense of pride in being Malay?

The answer to that question turns in part on some of the elisions, silences, and ambiguities in the two conflicting models of Malayness that Long encountered in his fieldwork. The first, which Long terms the “integrationist model of Malayness,” posits that “Malay identity ... [is] encapsulated in a set of customs and dispositions that can be acquired by anyone setting foot on ‘Malay soil’” (55–56). The reference to Malay soil is important; it indexes territory claimed historically or at present by a Malay ruler (e.g., one or another local aristocrat, the Sultan of Johore), and, by extension, a relationship entailing the *rakyat*’s (people’s, commoners’) loyalty to a ruler in exchange for the latter’s political, spiritual, and other protection. This inclusive, incorporative model allows local Javanese, Minangkabau, and various (Muslim) others to be defined and to self-identify as Malay in some contexts, even though in domestic and other settings they may preferentially valorize their “sub- (or intra-) Malay” identities, much as sometimes occurs in neighboring Singapore and Malaysia. The limits of this model are readily apparent when it is applied to non-Muslims, be they (as they typically are) Chinese Buddhists or Batak (or other) Christians. For even if such individuals have lived in Tanjung Pinang for decades and self-identify as Malay, as some clearly do, the Malay/Muslim majority does not regard them as such. As one man put it with

<sup>2</sup> These percentages are roughly comparable to those for the province as a whole, except for the larger percentage of Chinese in the town compared to the province (43).

reference to a Christian acquaintance of Long's who regarded himself as Malay, "If your friend is Christian, he is not Malay, and he is not allowed to say that he is" (58). The bottom line here is that being a Muslim is a precondition for being Malay and that "the integrationist model stop[s] well short of endorsing the claims of regional belonging that are made by migrants subscribing to other religions" (58).

The second model is that of "multicultural Malayness." It posits that Malayness is but one of many cultural identities present in Tanjung Pinang and Riau more generally; that the boundaries between such cultural identities should be maintained rather than collapsed or elided; that Malays should be privileged over all other groups owing to their historical primacy; and that, conversely, all others are *ipso facto* (and should certainly feel) beholden to them for the "gift of citizenship." This model, which derives from neighboring Malaysia, helps explain why many residents of Tanjung Pinang, including many with longstanding ties to the community, simultaneously "feel in place and out of place" (62), and why Long gravitates toward Freud's notion of the uncanny to help him make sense of some of his data.

The models of Malayness Long examines are further complicated by the dynamics of local history, as we see in Chapter 3, "Poisoned Histories." This chapter explores how residents use the past to understand and market the present; how and why they position themselves to attract state and other resources to assist youth in their efforts to fully develop their human potential and achieve future prosperity; and why many of the residents that Long befriended were altogether unwilling to discuss the region's history with him. Long's inquiries about the region's past ultimately revealed that, in order to safeguard some of their powers and privileges, more than a few local aristocrats had collaborated with Japanese occupying forces during World War II. Moreover, Long learned, many of the descendants of these aristocrats are believed to deploy *ilmu* (esoteric knowledge, the "black arts") and other "sinful, frightening, and possibly violent means" (87) to suppress knowledge of this past and subjugate those who might disseminate information about it or pose other challenges to their legacies and the prerogatives and powers associated with them. Key genealogical pillars and contemporary icons of Malayness are thus seriously tainted by treason, betrayal, and treachery. As such, they pose existential and other problems for those inclined or encouraged to self-identify as Malay. Some mythic accounts offer a partial solution to these conundrums by recasting unsavory ancestral figures as Bugis, thereby maintaining the relative purity of Malay ancestors and upholding various incentives for positive engagement with Malayness.

Chapter 4, "Marketplaces," challenges the contemporary stereotype that Malays are inept at petty trade and other forms of commerce (a bias that has been a staple of political discourse in neighboring Malaysia for well over a century). Long does this partly by showing that, in Tanjung Pinang, much of the stereotype derives from the lack of visibility of Malay merchants in the central marketplace relative to the outlying parts of town, where those who ply their trades outside their homes tend to be concentrated. Another factor contributing to the stereotype is that some successful Malay traders who fear that their true identity (as Malays) might scare off potential customers actively present themselves as Minangkabau, Indonesian (or Singaporean), or of some other non-Malay background. Such Malays are not only complicit in reproducing the unflattering stereotype that Malays are unwilling or unable to avail

themselves of modern market opportunities; they also illustrate some of the disincentives and ambivalences associated with self-identifying as Malay, hence part of the attraction of bad faith.

Chapter 5 focuses on the norms and forms of Malay belonging and integration both in villages (*kampung*) and their neighborhoods, and in ethnic and other associations (*ikatan*). One of the more compelling discussions in this chapter concerns “Chandra, the bad neighbor” (137–43), a *waria* (*wanita-pria*; woman-man, male-bodied individual “with a female soul”) of Chinese ancestry who is driven from the community in the course of Long’s fieldwork. Chandra was expelled from the community not so much because of the allegations that she occasionally engaged in deeply sinful sexual relations with other phenotypic males—something she apparently did relatively discretely, in her own home, with the curtains drawn, etc.—but because, as Long was told, she performed such acts “in our neighborhood” rather than in some distant locale or “at least across town.” According to this account, the withdrawal of citizenship had less to do with transgressing heteronormative strictures than with failing to recognize the moral geographies that rendered the transgressions acceptable or at least tolerable in some locales but effectively beyond the pale in others (“closer to home”). The ascendance of “*syariah* values” (139) is also implicated in these dynamics, amplifying longstanding impulses entailing cultural cleansing and purification through purging, and heightening anxieties associated with the seemingly inexplicable and the “potential monstrosity of the unknown” (141–42).

Fear of the unknown and of what is defiantly resistant to being understood and subjectively experienced in any simple, straightforward way is a unifying theme of Chapter 6, “Hauntings.” Here we learn that the “certitude that Tanjung Pinang is a Malay town is disturbed by unsymbolised histories resurfacing in the form of troubling spectres” (162) and other mysterious creatures (*makhluk gaib*). For many residents, Tanjung Pinang is a “home with hidden dangers, a town in which invisible elements that are widely acknowledged, but frequently overlooked in the bustle of everyday life, stand primed to irrupt, uncannily, at any time” (171). While there are “multiple species of uncanniness [and danger] at play in the Riau Islands” (171), residents feel that they have less to fear from potentially murderous spectres and spirits acting more or less on their own than from poisoning, sorcery, and other malice at the hands of fellow humans, especially Malays.

The view of Malays as commonly inclined toward malevolence provides part of the backdrop to Chapter 7, “The Human Resource Crisis.” Here Long explores the dialectic between government discourses since the 1990s bearing on “the crafting of *high-quality* human resources who would be able to contribute to national development” (174) and the regionally widespread belief that the local, especially Malay, labor force is too tradition-bound, of low quality, and by no means nationally or globally competitive (176). Tellingly, many of the government’s discourses and the beliefs and practices they have engendered are heavily informed by David McClelland’s *The Achieving Society*,<sup>3</sup> an ethnocentric and otherwise deeply flawed work whose arguments are widely disseminated in Riau (177–84), serving as a kind of sacred text for social engineers and responsabilized citizen-subjects alike. The circulation and valorization of these kinds of

<sup>3</sup> David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1961).

arguments, along with their more recent incarnations that are cast in the global-management speak of present-day neoliberalism, help explain why “scores of tournaments are held every week, testing everything from colouring and public speaking to robot building and minibus-driving” (180), and that “what is being socialized is *not* primarily a particular body of content, but rather the motivated and disciplined disposition that will turn a Riau Islander into a ‘high quality human resource’” (184).

Some of the latter themes are further developed in Chapter 8, “Achieving Malayness,” which explores the recent emergence of a cultural obsession with competitions and achievement (*prestasi*), particularly those associated with the performance of Malayness. One of the ironies here is that the attainment of regional autonomy saw the passage and/or stepped up enforcement of myriad laws geared toward eliminating gambling and prostitution, which had been important sources of tourist revenue prior to decentralization. Since Riau Islanders boast neither prominent archeological sites nor any noteworthy architectural monuments or particularly scenic natural attractions, the crackdown on gambling and prostitution has left them with little to promote in touristic enterprises aside from their increasingly diluted, contested, and folkloric Malayness. Unfortunately, however, that Malayness, according to local stereotypes, is largely incompatible with official pronouncements that equate Malayness with “progress, business acumen, educational performance, and good human resource quality” (221). As the civic and ethical duty to make oneself “more Malay” is increasingly and ever more heavy-handedly foisted on migrants, there is a “growing suspicion [among all residents] that perhaps ‘Malayness’ is not really a thing at all, but just a set of malleable claims” (241). One upshot is that, for many residents, contests focusing on the proper performance of Malayness are necessarily insincere, disingenuous, and artificial.

Long’s concluding chapter makes a strong summary case for his argument that, perhaps more than anything else, decentralization in Riau “forced [residents] to think hard about whether they were Malay, whether those around them were Malay, what that meant, and what rights being Malay—or non-Malay—could or should entitle them to within the new province” (244). More importantly, he makes a compelling case that “affective experience is one of the prime motors of the social and political life in the Riau Islands” (249), and that lived existential realities, “fraught [as they are] with doubts, anxieties, bad faith, ethical dilemmas, resentments, and frustrations” (205), thus provide a richly rewarding point of departure for scholars and students (graduate and undergraduate alike) seeking to understand the intertwining of the affective and the political. For these and other reasons, this engagingly written book is a most welcome addition to the literature on post-colonial development, subjectivity, Indonesia, and the Malay world, and clearly merits a broad readership.