Actually Existing Religious Pluralism in Kuala Lumpur[1]

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Introduction

Malaysia is no stranger to mutating religious diversity and cultural pluralism. For centuries, given its strategic geo-political position along the commercial trade routes between China and India (and beyond), an array of travelers to the peninsular – *interalia* merchants, imperialists and missionaries- have left their imprints, both singular and hybrid, on belief systems, social practices and material cultures that make up the societal fabric of modern-day Malaysia. Together with its diverse and finely balanced Asian populace who are adherents of some of the major world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, and Taoism – the Malaysian Tourism Board was emboldened to make the claim of "Malaysia [being] Truly Asia" not so long ago.

Notwithstanding the allure of magical religious pluralism and multiculturalism, it has been increasingly commonplace for many Malaysians to lament of the deteriorating health of interethnic and interfaith relations in the public sphere over the past three decades in contrast to a nostalgic golden and cosmopolitan past.[2] The specific reasons for this prognosis vary according to the different standpoints and emphases given by their respective interlocutors. Nevertheless, a common recurring trope that stands out can be characterized as an over-zealous and bureaucratic "Islamization of Malaysian society" by a diverse and competing spectrum of local Islamic *dakwah* (missionary) groups and state agencies since the advent of Islamic revivalism in the 1970s.[3]

Moreover, this state-of-affairs is compounded by a durable legacy of the British colonial era crafted in the context of facilitating maximal capitalist resource extraction but given a nationalist inflection in the postcolonial milieu. After securing political independence from Britain, and especially in the aftermath of the landmark Kuala Lumpur "race" riots of May, 1969, a master narrative of the putative constitutional "supremacy" of Malays (*ketuanan Melayu*) vis-à-vis other Malaysian citizens has been entrenched in the national imaginary through the state ideological and repressive apparatus. In sum, a differential and racialized management of the plurality of migrants who flocked to the peninsula in search for a better life coupled with the challenge of nascent Malay ethno-nationalist groups has birthed a bifurcating religious landscape between Muslims and non-Muslims in the public sphere.[4]

How has this trajectory played out in recent years in Kuala Lumpur, the globalizing capital city of Malaysia? Akin to other postcolonial cities in the Southeast Asian region, Kuala Lumpur can be viewed as a complex assemblage in motion; materially and symbolically folding, unfolding and refolding onto itself in multiple ways through its multi-scalar entanglements with competing imaginaries and processes near and far. The heterogenetic urban swirl of cityness, in part characterized by accentuated religious and cultural complexities, is vibrantly immanent in Kuala Lumpur.[5] One of the central features of "cityness", in Abdoumaliq Simone's terms, is the agency of "crossroads" – where people "take the opportunity to change each other around by virtue of being in that

space, getting rid of the familiar ways of and plans for doing things and finding new possibilities by virtue of whatever is gathered there."[6]

This chapter situates some of these "crossroads" in the religiously pluralist city-ness of contemporary Kuala Lumpur. I begin with a recounting of an episode early in 2011 that generated both ire and bemusement among Malaysians. I then proceed to delve into the key historical circumstances that have contributed to this particular intersection of varied emotional intensities construed in generic terms. Finally, I situate how actually existing religious pluralism is materially articulated through a discussion of fieldwork data gathered from two different sites – one residential and the other commercial – in the city.

Love and Sex in the City: The Valentine's Day Affair

In the past few years, Islamic agencies at state and federal levels in Malaysia have been laboring to deter Muslims from celebrating Valentine's Day. The key reason offered is the event's alleged links to "immoral" activities. In 2011, the anti-Valentine's Day campaign took on more fractious accents.

On 9 February, *Parti Se Islam Malaysia*, PAS (the Islamic Party of Malaysia) Youth chief, Nasrudin Hasan Tantawi, was reported to have said that anti-vice campaigns on Valentine's Day in four states (Kedah, Kelantan, Penang and Selangor) controlled by the opposition coalition, *Pakatan Rakyat*, would be conducted to ensure a "sin-free" lifestyle.[7] This move was motivated by disturbing marketing gimmicks in previous years that promoted, among others, "no panties day" as an expression of abiding female love for their partners, free hotel rooms for unmarried couples on Valentine's Day, and late night parties allowing the free mixing of men and women which inevitably leads to "free sex."[8]

His remarks quickly drew criticisms from a number of sources and sparked acrimonious (and amusing) debates among pseudonymous Malaysians in cyberspace. Leaders of his own party and from the opposition political coalition, *Pakatan Rakyat*, comprising secular-based parties like Democratic Action Party

(DAP) and *Keadilan (*Justice Party) said Nasrudin had no *locus standi* to speak for the state governments under *Pakatan Rakyat* control.[9] By contrast, key politicians of *Pakatan Rakyat's* political nemesis, *Barisan Nasional*, took on a characteristic ominous persona, forewarning citizen-voters of the fragility of the former's syncretistic political ideology and the true colors of PAS which is to turn Malaysia into a theocratic Islamic state when it comes into power despite assurances otherwise in recent years. Its "moral policing" tendencies are clear indications of this unchanging aspiration.[10]

Nasrudin subsequently claimed that he was misquoted by the press as he was aware that the PAS Youth wing has no legal powers to conduct "immorality checks" among Muslims. Nevertheless, he repeated his prognosis on the key causes of moral decline among Malay-Muslims in the country, a perspective apparently shared by Islamic state agencies as both the Kuala Lumpur City and Selangor State Islamic Departments (JAWI and JAIS respectively) had similarly called for the ban of Muslims commemorating Valentine's Day a day after the Federal Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) had launched their own anti-Valentine Day campaign, billed as "Beware of Valentine's Day Trap."[11]

In a scripted sermon read out on Friday prayers at various mosques throughout Kuala Lumpur and Selangor state (on 11 February), Valentine's Day was characterized as essentially a Christian-inspired event and thus not religiously appropriate for a Muslim to participate. Moreover, it argued that many of those who celebrate it usually end up engaging in illicit sex. As evidence, the text cited that 257,411 unwanted pregnancies were reported between 2000 and 2008 as a result of the passions ignited on Valentine's Day. The sermon concluded by reminding Muslims that Jews and Christians would continue to deceive them, and would do everything possible to undermine their Islamic faith and Muslim personality. A seemingly innocuous activity like celebrating Valentine's Day is read inter-textually to be a conspiracy to weaken and dissipate Muslims and their faith.

Subsequently, on Valentine's Day, "immorality" raids, code-named "Ops Valentine", were carried out

at budget hotels, public parks, recreational lakes, beaches and other well known dating spots by the Islamic authorities. Close to 100 Muslim individuals were detained for *khalwat* (close proximity with the opposite sex) in Kuala Lumpur city and Selangor alone.[12] They were charged under the Syariah Criminal Offence Enactment 1995 which carries a fine of RM3,000, a jail term of not more than 2 years, or both if found guilty. PAS Youth chief, Nasruddin, similarly reported of other kinds of "successes" in their vigilante efforts. His counseling teams distributed around 3,000 leaflets to Muslim couples found in "dark and quiet public spots". Many were said to be "receptive" and even thanked them for their timely interventions.[13]

The idiosyncratic interpretations of Valentine's Day by this assortment of Islamic agencies did not go uncontested. Two component political parties situated on opposite sides of the ideological divide – DAP (from *Pakatan Raykat*) and Gerakan (from *Barisan Nasional*) – marked their disagreement by playfully handing out carnations and chocolates to the public.[14] They contended that Valentine's Day is a non-religious and globally commercialized event that does not necessarily lead to "immoral" activities. Similarly, but evoking a more serious register, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) and Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) took to heart the alleged Christian nature of the celebration.[15] In separate press statements, they made reference to one of the sources for Nasrudin's erroneous understanding of Valentine's Day – the National Fatwa Council ruling of 2005. The Council ruled that Valentine's Day "had elements of Christianity that contradict Islam" and following it "would destroy the faith and morals of the Muslim community". A Muslim celebrating Valentine's Day was also read as opening herself to the charge of treachery, as several centuries earlier it was declared by Queen Isabella to be in commemoration of the victory of Christianity over Islam in Spain. Both the CFM and CCM contended that this inference was a factual error as Valentine's Day is presently a secular celebration taken over by the business world, and is no longer observed as a religious event by churches in Malaysia or any other Christian denomination elsewhere in the world. It urged the National Fatwa Council to retract the ruling as it was "hurtful" to Christians.[16]

They also identified a particular installment of a Muslim program, *Halaqah,* aired two years earlier (February, 2009) on Malaysian public television (TV9) as offensive to Christians. It featured a well-known motivational speaker on the television circuit, Ustazah Siti Nor Bahyah Mahamood, who opined that the immoral activities unleashed on Valentine's Day were firmly within the "traditions of the Christian community." Subsequent to the press statement, the producers of the program had issued a public apology for the slip-up. However, the video clip continues to be available virally in cyberspace.

Before the advent of the internet, expressions of "conflict" by citizens, particularly along "racial" and "religious" lines, would have been downplayed or censored in the mainstream media as they are deemed to have the centrifugal power of unraveling the social cohesion of Malaysian society. Hitherto, this has not been difficult to execute given the regime of strict censorship laws and media ownership patterns favoring the ruling government. Discursively, a typical mainstream news report would underscore the "irresponsibility" of these actors and the necessity of swift punitive actions to pre-empt chaos. However, the rhizomatic capabilities of the internet have complicated attempts at centripetal control by the center. Thus, while not exhaustive nor representative, the comments affordance available in online news not only provides more visibility to the folds of everyday inter-faith relations but also possesses a reflexive and mobilizing function.

Talking points as expressed in a popular free online English daily – *The Malaysian Insider* – bear closer attention given its high readership.[17] One thread essentially rehearsed the contentions noted earlier. Against its detractors, readers pointed out that Valentine's Day has been anachronistically mis-recognized – Valentine's Day is not or no longer a "Christian" religious activity, and hence allegations of conspiracy are mistaken. Another thread attempted to re-direct blame by illuminating and underscoring to the anonymous reading public the doctrinal differences between (Protestant) "Christians" and "Catholics", and that

Valentine's Day is associated with the latter group.

A more robust discussion thread involving altercations, however, centered around the alienating tone of the Islamic proclamations in question. To comments which stated that non-Muslims should not be concerned about the *fatwa* and subsequent religious policing activities since they apply only to Muslims, other readers contended in response that the key issue was rather the distasteful and bigoted views of religious leaders deployed to educate their constituency. This ran contrary not only to respectful etiquette in everyday relations but also against the government slogans of showcasing Malaysia as a model for religious tolerance and racial harmony through aspirational catchphrases like *Bangsa Malaysia* ("Malaysian Race") and more recently, the "1Malaysia" campaign introduced by the current premier of the country, Najib Abdul Razak, when he took office in 2009.

Other comments tried to steer the discussion onto a more "political" plane, of which there were two trajectories. Apart from disregarding the right to privacy, one underscored the pettiness of moral policing activities when bigger issues like corruption and lack of democratic freedoms continue to beset the country. The Islamic authorities were advised to re-direct their energies in addressing societal level problems that cut across religious boundaries. Others lamented that moral policing activities are not only hypocritical but disproportionately target vulnerable young and working class Muslims. Wealthy and upwardly mobile Muslims who can afford to be in ensconced in expensive hotels and high-end entertainment outlets appear to be outside their field of action.

The second thread capitalized on the zealous Islamic initiatives of PAS in showing up the deep ideological discord within *Pakatan Rakyat*, and hence their impotence in replacing the ruling *Barisan Nasional* government which ostensibly adopts a secularist political agenda. Despite the comparative invisibility of their well-known ambition of forming a theocratic Islamic State in recent years, these readers suggested that this stance is a chameleon marketing ploy to lull non-Muslim voters into complacency. The Valentine's Day affair was thus an opportune episode bringing to light the incompatible ideological colors of strange political bedfellows.

Although the policing of Valentine's Day by the Islamic authorities unfolded spectrally across many states throughout the country, Kuala Lumpur was the site where these activities were the most intensive. It produced tangible results in the largest number of Muslims caught in allegedly compromising *khalwat* positions, and by implication an index of the moral state of the globalizing city as a whole.

Crossroad Urbanisms and Managing Ethno-religious Pluralism

Throughout the Southeast Asian region, the centrality of the urban environment in re-constituting and cultivating collective subjectivities not only for its local residents but, more broadly, as centripetal imaginaries of state power, civilizational progress, and patriotism is a recurring architectural motif running through the colonial and postcolonial milieu.[18] In this regard, Kuala Lumpur's transformation from a frontier mining settlement in the early 19th century to the postcolonial capital city of Malaysia imbued with high symbolic and economic power requires an abbreviated and contextual re-telling.

From the beginning, its genesis and evolution was deeply entangled with the extractive enterprise begun in the late 18th century. As British administrative control of the peninsula grew and deepened, a new spatial geography of inland urban centers and pluralist ethno-religious landscapes manifesting the "colonial-immigrant complex"[19] appeared on the horizons. Tin mining and cash crop plantations were the primary economic impetus for devising a liberal immigrant policy to attract successive waves of labor from the impoverished regions of China, India, and Indonesia, and subsequently overlaying a spectrum of settlers who arrived decades and centuries earlier and who largely resided in more accessible coastal and riverine settlements. Servicing British and local elite capitalist investments prompted the cultivation of an essentially racialized and segregationist governmentality to manage the plural and mobile demographic and ethno-religious populace. As Joel Kahn succinctly puts it:

Governing Malaya's colonial subjects…involved various mechanisms aimed at immobilizing them, thus tying them to particular places – peasant villages, forest reserves, plantation belts, factory zones, urban bureaucratic centers – each constructed discursively as the preserve of a particular race. This was done, moreover, not just or even mainly to serve the interests of capital but to facilitate the disciplining of colonial subjects and, therefore, to the benefit of an emergent modern state.[20]

Within this broad trajectory, the genealogy of old Kuala Lumpur resonates with many other urban settlements birthed in the colonial era. Originally established by the mid-1800s as a multi-ethnic trading post, it had grown to sufficient prominence that by 1880, the British authorities decided to transfer strategically the administrative capital of Selangor state from the ancient royal coastal settlement of Klang to upstream Kuala Lumpur.[21] Subsequently, it was chosen to be the capital of the Federated Malay States (1896) and of British Malaya (comprising the Straits Settlements, Unfederated Malay States and the Federated Malay States), and finally of independent Malaya (1957) following World War Two.

From contemporary British eyewitness accounts, the ethnoscapes of early Kuala Lumpur were striated by homogeneous ethno-religious enclaves that mushroomed as a consequence of both planned and spontaneous initiatives.[22] For instance, Chinese pioneers (of predominantly the Hakka and Hokkien dialect groups) were reported to have congregated largely to the east of the confluence of the Gombak and Klang rivers, eventually forming the spatial template of modern day "Chinatown." To the north of "Chinatown," Java Street – known today as Jalan Tun Perak (Tun Perak Road) but transiting as Mountbatten Road first – was observed to mark the boundary between the "Chinese" and "Malay" quarter.[23] By comparison, both the localities of Sentul and Brickfields became working class districts largely peopled by South Asian migrants (*interalia* Sinhalese, Tamils, and Punjabis) sourced from other parts of the British Empire to work on the railways and in the city public works department. Similarly, a large piece of land reserved only for Malays, called Kampung Baru (literally, "new village"), was also created near to the town center as a resettlement scheme. In subsequent decades, some of these early "enclaves" or "districts" have pluralized in terms of ethnic mix or were erased to make way for up-market commercial and residential developments given its strategic locations. What has remained intact as incongruent and mute reminders of the ethno-religious pluralism of the early inhabitants in these spaces are their respective places of worship – temples, mosques and churches – some of which stand in close proximity to one another. They also catalogue the doctrinal, linguistic and geographical diversities within each religious tradition through the multiple places of worship of each faith within the same locality.

Despite having ruled for several decades, documented cases of large scale or decisive conversions of "native Malays" into Christianity during British colonial rule are weak in evidence. Partly, this is due to the expediency of colonial rule. In keeping with its economic priorities and with emergent secularist political philosophies back in the metropolitan center, the colonial administration was careful in the manner in which "Malay religion and customs" would be intervened and re-configured. Anti-colonial uprisings animated by millenarian religious imageries elsewhere in the Empire (eg., Sepoy Mutiny in India) were also politically and economically instructive. Through strategies similar to those used in British India, the administration eventually re-calibrated the juridical realms of "religion" and "the secular". By codifying and bureaucratizing Islamic beliefs and practices which were plural and partially or unevenly embodied throughout the "Malay peninsula", the British helped to "promote a very visible Islamization of social and political life, including at least a partial implementation of *hudud* or Islamic criminal law by the state."[25] Moreover, because of the perceived restrictions on working with "Malays", Christian proselytization and humanitarian work by European and American missionaries hailing from an array of theological traditions were targeted mainly at the waves of non-Malay migrants living, working or coursing through key urban centers in the peninsula.[26]

As a consequence of the manner in this particular "crossroad" was historically traversed, and coupled

with the intervention of Malay ethno-nationalist movements, the ethno-religious arithmetic and identity politics of modern-day Malaysia is strongly coded by an oppositional bifurcation of religious identities and emotional intensities – between "Muslim" and "non-Muslim" life-worlds. Arguably, these differentiated governmentalities were further entrenched by Mahathir Mohamad early in his premiership. In 1984, he announced his decision to "Islamize government machinery". This was read by political commentators as a strategy to win over support of Malay-Muslims who were swayed by a plethora of grassroots-based Muslim *dakwah* groups and by the formidable religious credentials of *Parti Se Islam Malaysia*. In response to anxieties voiced by coalition members of *Barisan Nasional*, the legal fraternity, and non-Muslims, he reasoned:

> What we mean by Islamization is the inculcation of Islamic values in government. Such an inculcation is not the same as the implementation of Islamic laws in the country. Islamic laws are for Muslims and meant for their personal laws. But the laws of the nation, although not Islamic-based, can be used as long as they do not come into conflict with Islamic principles.[27]

However, during the long Mahathir administration (1981-2003), a series of federal, state and local council level policies set in motion practices and interpretations that fomented another particular kind of "crossroad" formation, that of the re-drawing and blurring of boundaries and disparate domains. His administration also lent support to the significant expansion of religious bureaucracies at state levels through the provision of large amounts of resources by the Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM).

As these initiatives grew in scope and intensity, non-Muslims increasingly perceived them as infringing their everyday (non-)religious practices and undermining their secular constitutional rights as Malaysian citizens.[28] For instance, apart from the setting up of a range of public Islamic institutions in banking, financing, judiciary, and higher education, other efforts putatively targeting *haram* (not permissible in Islam) activities have seeped beyond the porous domains of Muslim sensibilities. This included calls to close down licensed pubs, karaoke centers, and

gaming outlets; ban the sale of alcohol; impose Islamic dress-codes for non-Muslim women in public spaces; have separate queues for men and women in shopping complexes and other public spaces; and censor advertisements that depict women (Muslim and non-Muslim) in sexually provocative poses or revealing parts of their bodily *aurat* (modesty) to the anonymous public. By drawing meticulous attention to these *haram* activities, what is also implied is that urbane Muslims were not unfamiliar with them in the past. Nor did they feel that these personal moral choices should be of concern to Islamic authorities. Nevertheless, despite these feelings of ambivalence, many have remained silent in the face of more vocal Islamic *dakwah* groups or chosen more clandestine ways of expression for fear of being accused of "insulting Islam".

Addressing an array of temptations believed lurking in a morally pluralist and ambivalent urban environment has also extended to the young. Nationalized Christian mission schools throughout the country have been instructed to remove signs of Roman Catholic crucifixes and Protestant Christian crosses on buildings, uniforms, books and other paraphernalia in deference to Muslim sensitivities. Unlike secular "civic courses" before, students are segregated respectively for their respective "Islamic Studies" and "Moral Studies" classes, a compulsory unit of study that has been extended up to tertiary level education. There have been reported cases (especially in the alternative media) of Muslim school principals punishing students for bringing non-*halal* food to school, promoting the separation of eating utensils in the school canteen, and of Malay-Muslim school teachers making derogatory remarks about other religions or questioning the patriotism of non-Malays.[29]

In tandem with the expansion of the Islamic religious bureaucracy, several amendments to Syariah criminal law at state levels strengthened considerably the legal powers of Islamic authorities for the moral surveillance, enforcement and punishment of adult Muslims who transgress against these disciplinary rulings.[30] Other subsequent enactments further allowed the automatic enforcement of *fatwas* (learned opinion) issued by state *muftis* (religious officials) and the Fatwa Council without due legislative process in the state

assembly. Of this train of legislative crossroads, arguably the most controversial was an amendment to Article 121 (1A) of the Federal Constitution in 1988. This removed the jurisdiction of the civil courts over Islamic matters, and effectively created two spheres of competing jurisdictions between the Civil and the Syariah courts. In recent years, this jurisdictional conundrum involving Malaysians who have made personal faith choices straddling both domains have resulted in court decisions that concede or defer to the authority of the Syariah courts.[31] In 2001, shortly after the tragedy of "9/11" (September 11) in USA, when Premier Mahathir Mohamad made the claim that Malaysia was already a progressive Islamic state worthy of emulation by other Muslim countries, the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS)[32] issued a press statement that contended:

> Over the past twenty years, in the process of Islamization of our laws and regulations government bureaucracy has imposed rules and regulations which have infringed on the religious freedom of both Muslims and non-Muslims and the trend seems to be getting worse over the last few years…[because of] greater polarization among our different communities along the lines of race and religion, [we] call on the government to set up Inter-Religious Councils at National and State levels to promote inter-religious understanding.[33]

In the intervening years since the above press statement was issued, several other agonistic debates on the management of religious pluralism in the country have further widened and deepened the fault-lines. For instance, in 2005, the Malaysian Bar Council organized a conference to discuss a draft bill proposing the formation of a national inter-faith commission in light of issues involving several high profile legal cases. The conference was boycotted by a loose coalition of Muslim NGOs called the *Allied Coordination Committee of Islamic NGOs* (ACCIN) who felt that the Bar Council had an ulterior agenda. It also characterized a memorandum submitted by the MCCBCHS to the *National Human Rights Commission* (Suhakam) suggesting that Muslim converts be allowed to revert back to their previous faiths if the original reason for their conversion no longer exists (eg., failed mixed

marriages) as "anti-Islam" in tone. Similarly, the youth wing of PAS denounced the formation of an interfaith commission as they contended that it would usurp the power of Islamic authorities. Moreover, they deemed any public discussion of various Islamic issues like *murtad* (apostasy) by non-Muslims as offensive and as an "insult to Islam".

In 2007, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Malaysian Independence (*Merdeka*), the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) issued a press statement which aptly characterizes how Christian leaders perceived the state of religious and cultural pluralism in the country:

> Today, after fifty years of nationhood, we realize that we cannot take unity-in-diversity for granted. What divides us has become more accentuated than what unites us. Signs of polarization along ethnic and religious lines, along with other forms of chauvinism, racism and superiority are eroding our national unity. In order to face these challenges, the CFM feels the necessity to reinforce the importance of the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law, which are restated in the basic tenets of the Rukun Negara (National Principles). Only by doing so can we safeguard our democratic life, enhance good governance, and sustain unity not adverse to religious and ethnic pluralism.[34]

In light of the preceding, the Roman Catholic Church embarked on a bold and unprecedented course of action in March 2008. The Home Minister had earlier prohibited the publisher from using the word "Allah" to refer to the Christian God in their weekly Catholic newspaper, *The Herald*. Although indigenous Christians in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak had been using the term for decades – and for centuries in the case of Christians in the Middle East – without causing any furor, the reason given was that this linguistic practice would potentially confuse Malay-Muslims and undermine national security in the long run. *The Herald* filed a judicial review challenging the ban arguing that it was unconstitutional. Subsequently, when the High Court ruled in favor of *The Herald* in December 2009, the Home Minister appealed the decision and applied for a stay of execution. Despite its stringent track record on public gatherings, the Home Ministry allowed a

permit for a public protest by Muslim groups. A number of state-supported mosques in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor further lobbied for "Allah" to be reserved for Muslims and to protect its sanctity against illegitimate use. In the subsequent weeks, several churches, including a Sikh temple and the office of the lawyer representing *The Herald*, were vandalized. In retaliation, three mosques and two Muslim prayer rooms were desecrated.[35] Against the trend, there were also assuring signs of inter-religious solidarity as small groups of concerned Muslims and non-Muslims voluntarily organized themselves to stand guard in various places of worship in Kuala Lumpur. Several months later, this particular episode saw a symbolic closure of sorts when perpetrators of the first arson attack on the Metro Tabernacle Church (situated in Kuala Lumpur) were convicted, and the church compensated. However, to date, the more salient issue of the Home Ministry not withdrawing its legal appeal has remained outstanding and unresolved.

Actually Existing Religious Pluralism and Halalizing a World Class City

In 2004, the Second Kuala Lumpur Draft Structure Plan was unveiled by City Hall with great fanfare. Its authors contended that a new plan superseding the 1984 version was needed because the socio-spatial mutation of the city in terms of population growth, infrastructural and property development in the last two decades had rendered its earlier plans and preconceptions of spatial governance obsolete. Among others, this included the construction of the extensive Multi-media Super Corridor (MSC), the hypermodern Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), and a federal government administrative complex called Putrajaya inscribed with mimetic Middle-Eastern architectural motifs. Greater in-migration to the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur from around the country and a net out-migration from Kuala Lumpur to areas outside of the city had also confounded population distribution patterns envisaged in the KLSP 1984. While the old administrative city limits of Kuala Lumpur was kept intact, the fluid mobility of people, ideas and artifacts facilitated by transportation and technology

to the surrounding localities also necessitated a more dynamic concept of an expansive and interconnected metropolitan region – the Kuala Lumpur and its conurbation ("KLC").

The plan also highlighted the grand vision of morphing Kuala Lumpur into a second-tier "World Class" city in the first instance, and positioning it further to become a premier "Global City" in the indeterminate future. More than a decade earlier, in 1991, then-premier Mahathir Mohamad had unveiled a similar utopic and teleological project when he promulgated Wawasan 2020 ("Vision 2020"), a road map to transform the nation-state of Malaysia into a "fully developed" country in three decades. Apart from KLIA and Putrajaya, the iconic 88-story Petronas Twin Towers, built with Islamic architectural motifs and which briefly held the position of the tallest building in the world in the late 1990s when it was completed, was the most important signature of this developmental thrust forward. They aptly showcased Mahathir's vision of elevating Malaysia onto the global stage based on a neo-liberal economic platform coupled with a modernist Sunni Islamic religious ethos.[36]

Salient in the technocratic and lofty "from above" discourse of the KLSP 2004 are the distinguishing traits of what Michel de Certeau has characterized to be the erotics of knowledge production as embodied in omni-visual power. Typically, the city's complexity and opaque mobility is frozen and made readable as a crystal-clear text.[37] Disciplinary and instrumentalist knowledge are strategically deployed to grid and enframe space for the purpose of predictability and stability, and hence help lubricate flows of capitalist and utopian agendas. I suggest a similar kind of imaginative horizon is being beckoned into existence by Islamic state agencies in the first instance but given immediacy and personal relevance by an array of Muslim adherents negotiating with intertwined histories and overlapping everyday spaces found in Kuala Lumpur. To a large extent, this has been necessitated and facilitated by significant demographic changes in Kuala Lumpur. From 1971 onwards, the rapid urbanization of Malay-Muslims was set in motion by the watershed New Economic Policy (NEP) which, upon its expiry in 1990, became re-designated as the New

Development Policy (NDP). Among others, these policies envisioned the modernization of Malay-Muslims through affirmative action quotas in tertiary education, business and employment opportunities largely found in urban centers, with Kuala Lumpur and its sprawling suburbs being the chief gravitational destination.[38] The key motif was to dissolve the colonial legacy of a spatial duality between non-Malay urban dwellers and Malay rural *kampung* (village) residents.

The arrival of the first generation of rural Malay-Muslim migrants to Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s saw many of them contributing to the already significant spread of urban "squatter colonies" by erecting their own houses without prior official approval in established Malay squatter *kampungs* or on unoccupied land because of inadequate affordable housing.[39] Periodic city censuses carried out among "squatter colonies" from the 1970s up to the 1990s indicated that ethnic Malays were significantly overtaking the Chinese in terms of demographic make-up. Surveys also noted that many of these settlements were ethnically homogeneous as residents reproduced the familiar in terms of vernacular cultural practices and religious sensibilities – including varieties of "folk Islam" – of their home villages onto the alien spaces of the city. In more mixed squatter settlements, everyday negotiations included boundary-crossing aspects but they were also strategically framed by the overarching ethno-political discursive and administrative grid of the state. As coping strategies, they range from respectful recognition of each other's presence to mutual avoidance of each other. However, political alliances at the local level have largely tended to be within rather than across ethno-religious groupings even though they might be living in close physical proximity with each other.[40] Similarly, in the management of the "squatter problem", local politicians have opportunistically alternated between pathological and patronage perspectives as they labored to square national unity and city development discourses with the pragmatics of having to secure their votes during the periodic State and Federal elections. Over time, a range of infrastructural facilities (including mosques and less so for places of worship of other religious

traditions) have been incrementally provided for these settlements in return for these favors.

However, under a robust "squatter free" agenda outlined in the KLSP 1984 and in keeping with the utopian vision of transforming Kuala Lumpur into a "World Class City" before the turn of the new century, the spatiality and sociality of these ethno-religious spaces were unraveled and reconstituted in a different register. During this period, civil society groups have observed that compared to the past, the forced eviction of urban squatters was far more intense and unrelenting as commercially valuable land was re-appropriated for a range of infrastructural, commercial and residential projects. Most squatters, resigned to the changing realities of the times, had opted to be relocated to high-rise housing flats, usually following an ethnic-based redistributive formula.

The rapid material and symbolic transformation of Kuala Lumpur also demanded that a host of "unsightly" and "illegal" roadside shrines, temples and *suraus* found in these squatter settlements – mostly of popular Hindu and Chinese religious provenances – be evicted and demolished. Not all, however, were provided with satisfactory alternative sites (in terms of adherence to religious geomancy) in comparison to Muslim *suraus* which were easier to reconstitute. On a broader scale, accompanying the significant increase in Malay-Muslim urban population has been a corresponding mushrooming of new mosques as well as the renovation of older ones across metropolitan Kuala Lumpur, especially in new commercial and residential areas. In comparison to an earlier milieu, most of these new mosques have adopted Middle-Eastern architectural motifs and are strikingly larger in size. By comparison, a longstanding lament of non-Muslim religious groups has been that land for places of worship in new suburbs has not been readily made available. Various church denominations have thus resorted to renting conference halls in hotels, buying over shop houses and factory lots in order to conduct their worship services. When alternative sites were offered, compromises were sometimes imposed by the authorities and private developers. For instance, small Hindu temples in squatter settlements were required to merge with each other even though they have

different patron gods/goddesses and founding genealogies. Equally significant, over the years, human rights groups have documented the brusque and arbitrary manner in which these demolitions and relocations were executed. These narratives of victimhood by ethno-religious minorities are especially salient in the metropolitan Kuala Lumpur area.[41]

Similarly, I suggest that the lived domestic spaces of Kuala Lumpur residents also figure significantly in shaping the contours of everyday religious pluralism. In my fieldwork with former Indian squatters now living in a high rise flat, what is apparent is that while the authorities have resolved the bane of affordable housing at a formal level, the architecture of these structures has nevertheless fomented undercurrents of resentment even as they also arguably offer new opportunities for cross-ethno-religious solidarities. In comparison to landed squatter houses which allows for organic modifications, living in these structures is considered traumatic and oppressive. First, for inter-generational households extending to grandparents, the compactness of these 2-bedroom flats is viewed as hardly conducive. Second, the design of the common areas does not allow the effective dispersal of an array of sounds and smells emanating from the units. Instead, they reverberate and circulate in the corridors of the building. Finally, the high density of residents coupled with the poor maintenance of these buildings effectively disfigure these strictures into vertical "slums" and places of unhealthy ferment.

Where formerly there was the comparative safety of ethno-religious homogeneity because of the distance afforded by segregated dwelling in the cluster of squatter settlements, these structures have blurred these sacred boundaries in quotidian ways. For instance, my Hindu-Indian informants usually use a hand bell during their daily domestic *pujas* (prayers). Although they are clearly audible to neighboring units, the "religious noises" that are produced are momentary and localized. By comparison, my informants feel that the amplified and reverberated sound of the *azan subuh* (call to prayer at dawn) issuing out of a *surau* located within the building is of a different scale. These wake-up calls are not relevant to them, and are seen as culturally insensitive. But because they fear

causing ill-feelings to their Muslim neighbors and inviting possible retaliatory action from both local Muslim residents and entrepreneurial politicians who want to be seen as defending Islam against its detractors, they have not publicly sought any redress. Unaccustomed to a Muslim soundscape, the issue of "religious noise" extends as well to middle-class and ethno-religiously mixed residential areas where new mosques with powerful loudspeakers allow for greater aural reach than before.

Even in commercial precincts which have been ethno-religiously pluralist for decades, the interplay between government policies, demographic changes, local-level entrepreneurial politics has sometimes led to reduced opportunities be interpreted in a racialized manner. This was evident in one of the oldest and lucrative commercial enclaves in Kuala Lumpur – "Little India/Masjid India" – where I conducted fieldwork between 2004 and 2006.[42] In the past, "Little India/Masjid India" has had a far more varied and unregulated ethnoscape – Chinese, Punjabis, Malays, and Tamils – eking out a living. But in part prompted by the overarching policies discussed earlier and by more recent urban planning innovations, "Little India/Masjid India" has been re-branded as a destination for a host of *halal* cuisine and goods, and for tourists to visit and gaze at the old "Malay" quarter of Kuala Lumpur. Subsequently, long established non-Muslim businesses have also found it financially necessary to voluntarily re-locate or change their usual wares and services to cater to the Muslim clientele.

At the time of my fieldwork, the religious festivals of Hindu Deepavali and Muslim Hari Raya Puasa were in close temporal proximity, a calendrical cycle that recurs once every three decades. Street vendors who had been setting up temporary stalls along the spine of the enclave during their respective festivities for several years without any problems suddenly found themselves caught in a novel crossroad. The Kuala Lumpur City Hall had decided to allot Malay-Muslim traders with 78% of the 556 bazaar lots. Disgruntled Indian-Hindu traders contended that they were more accustomed to at least 350 lots instead. To suggestions by City Hall that they shift to the Indian-Hindu enclave of Brickfields during this special period, the

traders reiterated their desire of doing business in fa-miliar places. When City Hall officials did not relent on their decision, the affected traders read this episode as yet another instance of their continued neglect and marginalization as working class Hindu-Indians.

To be sure, the large and growing population of both working and middle class Malay-Muslims has significantly altered the entrepreneurial networks of production and marketing, and consumption patterns in Kuala Lumpur. While Johan Fischer has character-ized this shift as the "halalization of consumption", trajectories of the constriction and broadening of re-ligious pluralism are evident.[43] For instance, in order to tap into this substantial niche market, many non-Muslim local and foreign businesses have modified their products and services to meet an array of *halal* specifications monitored by the relevant Islamic agency. In the process, they have learnt to be more fa-miliar with Islamic sensibilities and sensitivities. Many others have also entered into innovative business ven-tures with Muslim entrepreneurs, adding yet another complexion to a longer genealogy of Sino-Malay busi-ness partnerships in the country.[44] Similarly, Malay-Muslim foodways have broadened with the rise of urbane and cosmopolitan Muslims in Kuala Lumpur. Many traditional Muslim food businesses (including street vendors) have taken to learning the cuisine of non-Muslims but substituting non-*halal* ingredients with alternatives.

Nevertheless, the push to overtly comply with *halal* requirements does not automatically translate to a bona-fide appreciation of everyday religious plural-ism. In a number of reported cases, it is evident that the much-valued *halal* logo has taken on the auras of both a commodity fetish and an ambivalent signifier. In business establishments, the display of the *halal* logo does not necessarily guarantee the "purity" of the item consumed. On the one hand, imitation logos can be purchased. On the other, the convoluted chains of production and distribution also allow for the possibility of multiple points of contamination en route. For some Muslims, this has necessitated the ad-ditional practice of "purifying" these goods through efficacious rituals and prayers in order to disperse doubt.

Conclusion

By providing these selective anecdotes of religious dis-enfranchisement (real and perceived), I do not wish to paint an alarmist nor determinist picture of the health of inter-religious relations in modern day cos-mopolitan Kuala Lumpur. Indeed, it says something about the good sense and goodwill of ordinary Malaysians that religious conviviality continues to be vibrant in spite of the many acts of un-conviviality by groups which claim to speak for their collective inter-ests.[45] In everyday conversations and in my ongoing fieldwork, it appears that many working class Malay-Muslims are not aware of what has been done in their name. And if they are, they do not approve of how these authorities and vigilante groups offend the sen-sitivities of non-Muslims. Similarly, for the younger generation of well educated (especially in foreign uni-versities) and urbane middle-class Malay-Muslims well acquainted with the libertarian powers of new media, the propagandist slant of traditional main-stream media has had a weakening hold in buttressing a jaundiced view of Malaysian citizenry based on "race" and "religion".

Their aspirations are echoed in an array of cosmo-politan Malay-Muslim public intellectuals and Mus-lim civil society groups well known for their stance in upholding democracy, social justice and human dig-nity across ethno-religious lines.[46] They counsel against over-zealousness in adopting a Wahhabi-style reformist version of Islamic governance to "purify" supposedly syncretistic local Muslim popular prac-tices. They find the recent spate of *fatwas* and the pre-occupation of the Islamic authorities with moral policing rather disconcerting, idiosyncratically my-opic and unflattering to the wider ecumenical con-cerns of their faith. However, they are not in the position of formal power. Neither are they given much media space by the government authorities to challenge the dominant mindset of the religious in-telligentsia and open up the public sphere for healthy debates. Instead, what often prevail in the media – mainstream and alternative – are views that close down or ostracize the exploration of difference, whether along the intellectual or experiential planes.

In my brief account of actually existing religious pluralism in Kuala Lumpur, I have appropriated Abdoumaliq Simone's imagery of "crossroads" to contemplate how the contingent present might be grasped. In this regard, a significant "crossroad" that was traversed not long ago is the electoral voting patterns of the General Elections of 2008. An analysis of this particular line of flight suggests a discernible dilution, if not confounding, of ethnic identity markers in shaping political decisions among the younger generation of urban voters. This trend is expected to broaden and deepen as the traits of city-ness spread rhizomatically. For decades, the ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional*, and their oppositional political nemeses, have opportunistically relied on this colonialist-derived formula to territorialize, manage and guide democracy in the country. The signs are that as this particular necessary fiction weakens, other kinds of ideological interpellation come to the fore. For now, the rallying and differentiating powers of "religion" are still salient given its transcendental referents, long historical arc, and its powerful economy of affect. As my discussion of the Valentine's Day episode suggests – and it is one of many others over the last few years – zealous attempts to accentuate the putative danger of hybrid cultural forms in urbane Malaysia, while effective in the short term, may have the unintended doubling force of unraveling its own bifurcated logic and potentially fragment hegemonic positions. Whether this itself will automatically lead to a "crossroad" that will substantively be more religiously convivial for the residents of Kuala Lumpur – by "getting rid of the familiar ways of and plans for doing things and finding new possibilities by virtue of whatever is gathered there" – is as yet vaguely discernible and largely unthinkable at this point in time.

[1] A preliminary paper was first presented at the International Workshop on "Placing Religious Pluralism in Asian Global Cities" convened by Drs Chiara Formichi and Juliana Finucane. Supported by the Asian Research Institute, National University of Singapore, the workshop was held from 5-6 May, 2011. An edited book publication is forthcoming.
[2] *Interalia* see Raymond Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia," *Asian Survey* 28.4 (1988): 400-418; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Political Dimensions of Religious Conflict in Malaysia: State Responses to an Is-

lamic Movement," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 28.80 (2000): 3-65; Peter G. Riddell, "Islamization, Civil Society and Religious Minorities in Malaysia," in K.S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (eds.), *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 162-190; and Nathaniel Tan and John Lee (eds.), *Religion under Siege? Lina Joy, the Islamic State and Freedom of Faith* (Kuala Lumpur: Kinibooks, 2008).
[3] A recent variant of this thesis is explained in terms of the "over-sanctification" of Islam in Malaysian society – a concern by religious authorities on the details of the everyday lives of Muslims. See Julian Lee, "Oversanctification, Autonomy and Islam in Malaysia," *Totalitarian movements and Political Religions*, 11.1 (2010): 25-43.
[4] Susan Ackerman and Raymond Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Forum, 1990 [1988]).
[5] Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
[6] Abdoumaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 192.
[7] In the 12th Federal and State Elections held on March 2008, the ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional* (National Front), lost not only its two-thirds majority in Parliament but also five of the thirteen states to the *Pakatan Rakyat* opposition coalition. In the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, 10 of the 12 seats were captured by *Pakatan Rakyat*. One of the states (Perak) later reverted back to *Barisan Nasional* because of defections. This "political tsunami" was unprecedented since Malaysia gained its independence (*Merdeka*) in 1957.
[8] Other celebratory events identified as lending themselves easily to "illicit sex" are the New Year's Eve and the *Merdeka* (Independence) public gatherings.
[9] See "Politicians say nay to V-Day 'immorality checks'," *Malaysiakini*, 10 February, 2011 at http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/155699 and "Those who demonise V-Day the real enemies," *The Star*, 15 February, 2011.
[10] See "Chua: V-Day 'policing' proof of Islamic state agenda," *Malaysiakini*, 10 February, 2011 at http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/155715. See also "It's all right to observe Valentine Day, says Khairy," *The Star*, 12 February, 2011 and "Azmin: Celebrate Valentine's Day but know your limits," *The Star*, 13 February, 2011.
[11] See "Pakatan states plan Valentine's Day crackdown," *Malaysiakini*, 9 February, 2011 at http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/155576. See "Embattled PAS Youth said statement misunderstood", *Malaysiakini*, 10 February, 2011 at http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/155711
[12] See "96 Muslims nabbed in Valentine clampdown," *Malaysiakini*, 15 February, 2011; "88 Muslims nabbed for khalwat," *The Star*, 15 February, 2011.
[13] "V-Day romps elude PAS' morality rounds," *Malaysiakini*, 15 February, 2011 at

http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/156090.

[14] "V-Day flowers from DAP, chocolates from Gerakan," *Malaysiakini*, 14 February, 2011 at http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/156044.

[15] Formed in 1986, the Christian Federation of Malaysia is a coalition of three major groupings of different Christian traditions and persuasions – namely, the Roman Catholic Church, the Council of Churches of Malaysia, and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship.

[16] "See "V-Day: CCM 'hurt' by assumptions made in fatwa," *Malaysiakini*, 11 February, 2011 at http://www.malaysiakini.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/news/155775.

[17] Namely, http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/no-love-in-kl-and-selangor/

[18] For example, see Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[19] Lim Heng-Kow, *The Evolution of the Urban System in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1978).

[20] Joel Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2006), 140.

[21] Indicative of the invested nature of contemporary historical research in Malaysia, the foundational myth of Kuala Lumpur has been re-visited and contested in recent years. Contenders include entrepreneurial Bugis, Sumatran Mandailing royalty, and Chinese-Hakka tin miners.

[22] John M. Gullick, *A History of Kuala Lumpur, 1856-1939* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2000).

[23] In many cases, British and other foreigner accounts did not distinguish between the varieties of geographically specific sub-ethnic or even different ethnic groups residing in the towns and villages they encountered. Later, in the census categories, they became conveniently lumped together as "Chinese", "Malay", and "Indian" for administrative purposes.

[24] See Bernhard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Form of Knowledge. The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[25] Kahn, *Other Malays*, 86f.

[26] This was later formalized in the Federal Constitution as Articles 11 (1) and 11 (4) which, while guaranteeing the freedom of religion, also prohibit the propagation of any religion to Muslims. Under various state enactments, it is an offence to propagate religious doctrines other than Islam to Muslims. There are, however, no corresponding laws prohibiting the propagation of Islam to non-Muslims.

[27] Interview with Mahathir Mohamad, *Utusan Melayu*, 26-27 October, 1984. Cited in Hussin Mutalib, *Islam in Malaysia: From Revivalism to Islamic State* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1993), 30.

[28] For example, see Yeoh Seng-Guan, "Managing Sensitivities: Religious Pluralism, Civil Society and Inter-faith Relations in Malaysia," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 94.382 (2005): 629-640.

[29] See the annual human rights reports published by local civil society group, Suaram (http://suaram-blog.blogspot.com/).

[30] See Michael Peletz, *Islamic Modern: Religious Courts and Cultural Politics in Malaysia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Kikue Hamayotsu, "Politics of Syariah Reform: The Making of the State Religio-legal Apparatus," in Virginia Hooker and Noraini Othman (eds.) *Malaysia: Islam, Society and Politics* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 55-79.

[31] For example, see Yeoh Seng-Guan, "In Defence of the Secular?: Islamization, Christians and (New) Politics in Urbane Malaysia," *Asian Studies Review* 35.1 (2011): 83-103.

[32] The idea of an interfaith council was first mooted in 1983 in response to official statements that Malaysia would be transformed into an Islamic theocratic state. The Council of Churches of Malaysia played in a key role in its formation.

[33] Press Statement, "Declaration of the Freedom of Religion in Malaysia" by Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia dated 1 August, 2002.

[34] Press Statement, Christian Federation of Malaysia National Day Message: 50th anniversary of Merdeka, dated 29 August, 2007.

[35] For more details, see the chapter on "Freedom of Religion and Matters Pertaining Religion," in Malaysia Human Rights Report 2010 (Petaling Jaya: Suaram Komunikasi, 2011).

[36] Barry Wain, *Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[37] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 94.

[38] The 2000 census figures indicate that ethnic "Chinese" is still the majority at 43 percent of the Kuala Lumpur City population of about 1.4 million. However, the "Bumiputera" (Malays and indigenous peoples) component of the city has substantially increased by 77 percent over the past two decades to make up 38 percent (Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020: A World Class City, p. 4-4).

[39] For a discussion of "the squatter problem" in Kuala Lumpur, see Yeoh Seng-Guan, "Creolised Utopias: Squatter Colonies and the Postcolonial City in Malaysia," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 16.1 (2001): 102-124.

[40] For example, see Yeoh Seng-Guan, "House, Kampung and Taman: Spatial Hegemony and the Politics (and Poetics) of Space in Urban Malaysia," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17.2 (2005): 128-158.

[41] Through the viral powers of new media and amoebic re-tellings in temples, these narratives arguably fueled the political agitation of Hindus and Indians, which culmi-

nated in the unprecedented Hindraf (Hindu Action Front) mass civil protest rally of November 2007. The heavy-handed treatment of these protestors by the police authorities and the inaccurate reading of the mood of the times by the Indian political elite subsequently significantly influenced the results of the 13th General Elections the following year. For details, see Yeoh Seng-Guan, "The Streets of Kuala Lumpur: City-space, 'Race' and Civil Disobedience," in Melissa Butcher and Selvaraj Velayutham (eds.), *Dissent and Cultural Resistance in Asia's Cities* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 128-147. For a broader discussion of identity politics, see also Andrew Willford, *Cage of Freedom: Tamil Identity and the Ethnic Fetish in Malaysia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

[42] See Yeoh, Seng-Guan, "Limiting cosmopolitanism: Street-life Little India, Kuala Lumpur," in Shail Mayaram (ed.), *The Other Global City* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 131-160.

[43] Johan Fischer, *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2008).

[44] For example, see Chin Yee Whah, "Sino-Bumiputera Partnerships: Promoting Inter-ethnic Relations at Mid-level," in Francis Loh Kok Wah (ed.), *Building Bridges, Crossing Boundaries: Everyday Forms of Inter-ethnic Peace Building in Malaysia* (Kajang & Jakarta: Malaysian Social Science Association and Ford Foundation, 2010), 199-222.

[45] See Francis Loh Kok-Wah (ed.), *Building Bridges, Crossing Boundaries. Everyday Forms of Inter-ethnic Peace-building in Malaysia* (Kajang & Jakarta: Malaysian Social Science Association & Ford Foundation, 2010).

[46] See Virginia Hooker and Noraini Othman (eds.) *Malaysia. Islam, Society and Politics*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).

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