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*Identity, Nationhood and State-Building in Malaysia*. By K.J. Ratnam. Petaling Jaya, Selangor: SIRD, 2019. viii+129 pp.

Since the historic defeat of Malaysia’s Barisan National (BN) government in the fourteenth general elections (GE14) on 9 May 2018, thus ending its sixty-one-year rule, there has been a flood of domestic and international analyses and commentaries on this ‘shocking’ event. Of the eleven general elections around the world in 2018 (namely, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Pakistan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Venezuela and Zimbabwe), only in Malaysia was it a peaceful one (absence of violence) followed by a peaceful transition of power. It is an important and significant point to make; put simply it is between lives lost and lives saved.

To date there have been at least a thousand pages written, in printed and/or digital form, on this historic event, even though the Pakatan Harapan (PH) has now been toppled and humbled after a twenty-month rule and replaced by Perikatan Nasional (PN). What has been written and published on the PH victory and the BN defeat may be divided into at least five categories: first, op-eds or popular writing published online and offline; second, psephological analyses of election results; third, discussions of politics and personalities; fourth, emotional pro-PH euphoria as well as offensively impolite anti-BN critique; and fifth, longitudinal and conceptual perspectives on the outcome of the historic event, its impact and future.

K.J. Ratnam's book *Identity, Nationhood and State-Building in Malaysia* is one of the few in the fifth category that addresses not only the inability of the past government to resolve many issues but also the future of the new government (p. 49). Although brief, the book offers a sophisticated and theoretically informed analysis that is to be expected from a renowned and highly respected political scientist in Malaysia.

The book is presented in two parts. The first is the heart of the book, which contains an essay on "Identity, Nationhood and State-Building" (pp. 3–43). The second is longer, consisting of an interview between K.J. Ratnam and Dr Patrick Pillai, a former journalist who was trained in geography.

A close reading of the essay reveals that it is not written as a post-analysis of GE14, but Ratnam's interview with Pillai touches on many aspects of the former's post-GE14 hopes. The essay is a thoughtful reflective piece from someone who has studied theoretically and empirically, since the early 1960s, and understood the political process in Malaysia. More than that, as an academically informed public intellectual, Ratnam has his own views on the past and future trajectory of Malaysian politics and society.

Two major sociological concepts are at the heart of his essay—namely, 'identity' and 'loyalty'—both of which he probed with great sophistication and depth against the background of Malaysian history and social reality. Analytically, he focuses simultaneously on 'authority-defined' social reality (a top-down state perspective) as well as 'everyday-defined' social reality (an experiential 'nation-of-intent' or 'imagined communities' perspective) of the two concepts.

In the former, Ratnam emphasizes the role of the state in defining identity; both constitution-based as well as policy-based. Such authority-defined identity has been constructed and framed in the form of colonial knowledge found in the First Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore conducted in 1871 and, subsequently, in the decadal census in British Malaya. The ethnic identities or categories are based on homogenized social categories, of Malay, Chinese, Indian and Others, ignoring internal sub-categories in policy

formulation, and this being the case up until recently. Perhaps time constraints made Ratnam leave out from his excellent discussion how the official identity construction process has been conducted in the country.

Similarly, Ratnam's discussion on identity and loyalty in the experiential 'everyday-defined' social reality addresses the issue of multiple or multilayered personal identity and loyalty as 'self-defined' entity. He highlights the heterogenous nature of identity and loyalty that emerged from the sub-categories within each ethnic category.

Such a microcosm of identities and loyalties is historically related to the bigger issue of nation formation, or idea of a nation, or 'nation-of-intent', for instance, among Malays. This has been addressed in detail in William Roff's *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (1967), where he charts the emergence of three new Malay elite groups, their relationship with traditional secular and religious leadership, and their contribution to the growth of pan-Malayan nationalism. Until today, the Malays continue to attach their identities to these three elite groups (the aristocrat-led group, the Islamist and the *rakyat*-based; *rakyat* refers to ordinary people). Arguably, this has been the origin of their multiple and multilayered identities and loyalties, articulating centrifugal and centripetal dynamics, that, lately, have split Malay realpolitik into six strategic groups.

Ratnam's conversation with Pillai is titled "Regaining the Middle Ground in Malaysian Politics" (pp. 45–129). The moot question is: was there ever a middle ground in Malaysian politics? If coalition or consociational politics has been at the core of Malaysian modern electoral politics, there was never a middle ground. It has always been, for want of a better term, 'a moving ground'. Nonetheless, this book will certainly excite many interested in Malaysian politics in general and post-2018 in particular.

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*Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture: Questions of Translation, Epistemology and Power*. Edited by Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen. Singapore: NUS Press, 2019. 321 pp.

Edited by Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen, *Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture* emerges from anxieties about “the validity and utility of Southeast Asia as a geographic entity and taxonomic device for framing and understanding the built environment” (p. 1). By offering a selection of texts that engage with social, cultural and political dimensions of the built environment, the book hopes to explore the histories and historiography of Southeast Asia's architecture in the twentieth century and, consequently, question “the self-certainties of both regional and global architectural histories” (p. 1). In so doing, the book intends to be an antidote to the “existing regional architectural histories of Southeast Asia” that, according to the editors, are “either compilations of discrete architectural histories of individual nations or component parts in larger global architectural histories” (p. 1).

To achieve their objective, Chang and Imran Tajudeen have compiled the work of nine scholars whose academic activities centre around the Pacific Ocean: Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia and America. The authors' contributions are selected and organized around three themes: translation, epistemology and power. The first section on “Translation” offers chapters on Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Saigon in 1929 (H. Hazel Hahn), the connection between colonial methods and the creation of a nation state by the Thai monarchy in the twentieth century (Lawrence Chua), and the emergence of the so-called Bali Style in Indonesia from the 1960s onwards (Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava). The second