

sociality looks like in Pliya and how kin ties are embedded in a particular social setting where humans and spirits interact.

The last chapter returns to the main ambitions of the book. One of them is to propose an analysis of kinship that is not restricted to the description of a disembodied system, but which, on the contrary, accounts for kinship ties as they are crafted through practice. Even though this promise is not new in the field of anthropology, the book fulfils it brilliantly. One regret, however, is that the author deals very little, if at all, with some recent local changes that might have a direct or indirect impact on relations between kin groups or on how people practically engage in these relations and exchanges—such as the impact of local Chinese investments on labour migration patterns, or the impact of cash crops on local hierarchy and land tenure. Beyond these minor remarks, the author's first monograph not only constitutes a significant contribution to Khmu and kinship studies in general, but it is also a vivid lesson of what ethnography should look like.

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*Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, Volume 1, His Voyages, Legacies and Modernity, Volume 2, His Voyages, Legacies and Colonial History.* By Hadijah Rahmat. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020. 556pp+720pp.

Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munshi—the name of a significant figure in Singapore's early British imperial historiography—quite appropriately functions as the main title of Hadijah Rahmat's two-volume work on his life, writings and legacies. Hadijah first encountered Abdullah in undergraduate classes offered at the Department of Malay Studies at the University of Singapore in the late 1970s. Her use of Abdullah's

name for the title of a mammoth 1216-page tome some forty years later captures the centrality of Abdullah and his writings to her work and life as a Malay-Muslim academic in postcolonial Singapore.

Hadijah commences volume 1 with details on Abdullah's life, his writings and the multiple and overlapping personal and cultural contexts of language (Tamil, Arabic and Malay), literacy, religion, and manuscript and print cultures in which he was formally and informally enculturated. She then quite abruptly pivots to the notion of modernity, specifying how it is manifest in Abdullah's writings. This detailed treatment of modernity, building on her doctoral work, is used to briefly compare Abdullah's efforts with those of two other important Indo-Malay World literary figures: the semi-mythical Tun Sri Lanang and the historical Kartini. As part of a publication supported by Singapore's National Heritage Board and SG Bicentennial, this volume finds the author linking Abdullah to contemporary issues in politically independent Singapore such as his perceived influences on National Education (a programme initiated by the Ministry of Education in Singapore) and identity. It also contains Hadijah's contributions to how Abdullah is represented at the National Museum of Singapore and bicentennial "celebrations" (p. 495) of his birth at Malaysian and Singaporean conferences.

In volume 2, Hadijah belatedly provides the reader with important contextual information that would have helped readers make sense of Abdullah's life had it been integrated into volume 1. Here, the reader is finally informed as to how intersecting local and imperial realms strongly shaped the lives and imaginaries of Abdullah and his literate forebears. Hadijah describes how she spent decades trawling through libraries and archives in Europe, America and island Southeast Asia to personally sight documentary repositories with crucial information on Abdullah's relationships with English East India Company officials and British and American missionaries. She also details how colonial officials interacted and negotiated with members of the local ruling class, especially Sultan Hussein, on a treaty that eventually made 'Singapura' into 'Singapore'. She dedicates a significant portion of this volume to subsequent

contestations between some of the prominent descendants of the ruling class and the postcolonial state, connecting it to the emergence of state-curated spaces like the Malay Heritage Centre and heritage areas like Kampung Gelam. A smaller part of this volume traces the cultural legacies of Abdullah across yet another imperial bequest: nationally sundered Malaysia and Indonesia.

Inquirers into all things Abdullah and their connections to early imperial Singapore with implications for coloniality and postcoloniality will invariably encounter Hadijah's numerous and diverse academic and cultural contributions—the latter encompassing song lyrics, a play, museological consultancy, media commentary and interviews, teacher-training and more. This clearly written and appropriately illustrated publication provides readers with convenient access to virtually all of Hadijah's contributions.

The laudatory attempt at historical treatment of Abdullah across both volumes could be further enhanced by leveraging dialectical materialism. As Hadijah notes, Abdullah's forebears made a good living as cultural intermediaries of colonialists and their exploits (p. 7). Likewise, Abdullah's capacity to be very generous in entertaining others on his annual furlough to Melaka (p. 34) and the bequests listed in his final will and testament (p. 32) indicate that he too handsomely profited from a veritable family business. While Hadijah refreshingly offers contextual details, connecting Abdullah's personal wealth to the literary, religious, imperial and epistemological dimensions of his life would thicken and complexify the unfolding narrative. Historical perceptions of Abdullah could then be reimaged—as hinted at in the late Amin Sweeney's (2005) even more voluminous and still-unsurpassed three-parter in Malay: *Karya Lengkap Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir* (The complete works of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir). Only a sliver of Sweeney's initial steps towards a freshened depiction is available in the English language, in "Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi: A Man of Bananas and Thorns" (2007, pp. 223–45). Hadijah's two-volume contribution in the much more accessible English could have aspired to document a more complex Abdullah. Abdullah was decidedly more than

someone “passionate for languages and literature and Western ideas” (p. 35); he adroitly benefitted from his engagements of hierarchies of power, influence and wealth. A fuller integration of the latter in making sense of Abdullah’s life and writings would have the knock-on effect of engendering a much sharper hermeneutic of suspicion towards his writings. The tendency of scholars of Abdullah to use his full name in titling their efforts should be accompanied by a more complex understanding of the man, his writings and his times—that, in 2021, should encompass the material, and perhaps more ambitiously, the affective.

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