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Losing Hearts and Minds: Race, War, and Empire in Singapore and Malaya, 1915–1960. By Kate Imy. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024. xii+326 pp.

With her latest book, Kate Imy has made an important contribution to a new generation of scholarship on the social and cultural history of Malay(si)a and Singapore. While this is not, strictly speaking, a study of the Malayan Emergency, it will be of interest to those seeking to learn more about that conflict. Published as part of the Stanford British Histories series, the book also offers much to scholars of British imperialism.

The book is cleverly titled to undermine what is now something of a cliché in writing about Malaya, though Imy shows that the provenance of the “hearts and minds” phrase can be traced to late nineteenth-century South Asia. The longer history of this phrase is paralleled in the book’s narrative arc, for Imy’s analysis of “soldier and civilian experiences of war and anti-colonialism in Malaya and Singapore” (p. 1) starts in the First World War and ends in 1960. This allows Imy to evidence the longevity of practices and attitudes that have, in the past, been associated with the Emergency alone.

The book includes chapters on the racial and gendered hierarchies sustained under colonialism, and the ways in which these were disrupted, challenged or recreated at different historical moments. As the subtitle suggests, Imy observes Malaya through the lenses of race and gender, with these two themes overlapping in a focus on imperial ideas about “martial races”, for example. This emphasis on race and gender also leads to a framing of the Emergency as a “targeted race war against Chinese people” (p. 176) and an attempt to rebuild “lost confidence in British leadership and white masculinity” (p. 177)—characterizations that are sure to generate debate. Chapter 6 (“Forging the Commonwealth”) makes for interesting reading, though here the focus is not so much on Malaya as on the construction of new, post-war “Commonwealth” identities that encountered one another in Malaya. This reviewer was particularly impressed by chapter 7

(“Pregnant in the Jungle”)—an account of the “reconfiguring [of] race and gender ideals” (p. 205) in propaganda produced during the 1950s. Visual sources drawn from under-used collections in Australia and elsewhere are analysed deftly in this final chapter.

Losing Hearts and Minds is very much a work of its time, especially in terms of the passionate tone of its prose. Imy describes the book as a “story about the people who lived and died in defiance of the institutions that sought to destroy them” (p. 12), for example, and ends her study with an observation that speaks to contemporary geopolitics well beyond late-colonial Southeast Asia: “When states commit to ‘winning’ at all costs, the world is lost” (p. 249).

The book is also clearly influenced by the “history of violence” approach that is now dominant in the field of colonial history. Indeed, Imy emphasizes the injustices inherent in the views expressed in many of the colonial sources cited—from offensive “jokes” published in colonial police magazines to the faux indignity of European women who undertook “coolie work” under wartime occupation. While the racism, misogyny and sheer vileness of some of the texts cited are certainly not disputed by this reviewer, one does wonder if, taken as a whole, they are necessarily revelatory. Many readers with knowledge of the history of colonial Southeast Asia will already be well aware of the “pervasive racism at the heart of British rule” (p. 78) and may find repeated statements reminding them of this unnecessary.

Imy’s study “prioritizes the people whose hearts and minds British leaders claimed to win” (p. 7). She is honest, however, about the methodological challenges inherent in adopting such an approach “where my own language skills are inadequate” and where reliance on material translated into English (or produced by colonial-era officials writing in English) is necessary (pp. 8–9). Some of Imy’s data is thus drawn from oral histories produced by scholars who *do* have the requisite language skills (Agnes Khoo’s *Life as the River Flows* is cited extensively, for example). The writings of Elizabeth Choy and Han Suyin are also frequently referenced. All of this results in a limited number of individual voices being called upon with perhaps too much regularity in some chapters.

To be sure, none of this detracts from the book's eloquence. Imy is a skilled raconteur. She has a talent for finding stories in the archive and using these to illustrate wider points (a technique used to strong effect in chapter 4, "Labored Intimacies"), without straying into the realm of narrative history. This makes *Losing Hearts and Minds* accessible (as well as analytically sophisticated).

This is a highly original work of scholarship that should be read by anyone with an interest in the modern history of Malay(si)a and Singapore. It will also help to make Southeast Asia more visible in the fields of gender and colonial history.

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Sikh Pioneers of Perlis, Malaysia 1906–1957: A Community History.
By D.S. Ranjit Singh Darar. Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Press, 2023. xxv+291 pp.

This book stands as a monumental contribution to Malaysian historiography, shedding light on an often-overlooked segment of the Sikh diaspora. It explores the arrival of Sikh immigrants in Perlis—Malaysia's smallest and northernmost state—and highlights how this community carved out a meaningful existence by preserving their cultural and religious heritage while adapting to the changing socio-economic landscape. Spanning two parts and thirteen chapters, the book vividly captures the pioneers' journey as they built a cohesive community. Through interviews, archival sources and detailed family histories, the author brings to life the tenacity, resilience and significant contributions of the Sikh settlers in establishing a sustainable and thriving environment in Perlis.

Ranjit Singh's work focuses on documenting the experiences of numerous Sikh settlers in Perlis, but this review will highlight the contributions of only three individuals. Recognized as "The Perlis