Notes

1. Christoph Marcinkowski, *Shi'ite Identities: Community and Culture in Changing Social Contexts*, Freiburg Studies in Social Anthropology 27 (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2010), 82–3.
2. *Ibid.*, 81–2, 95.

P. Lim Pui Huen, *Johor: Local Histories, Local Landscapes, 1855–1957*

(Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2009), 240 pp. ISBN: 9789814266260.

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On 15 July 2010, IAIS Malaysia hosted a public seminar on “The Impact of Globalisation on Contemporary Muslim Societies”, which was attended by more than 300 guests, among them foreign diplomats and academics. The highlight of this event, however, was the Royal Address by HRH Raja Zarith Sofiah binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah II, the consort of the Sultan of Johor. In her speech, entitled “Globalisation: Building Bridges Between Islam and the West”, HRH Raja Zarith Sofiah pointed out that mutual understanding is also important if Muslims are to rid themselves of their stereotypical image as terrorists and extremists, whereas Muslims must know that they share a common history with people of other faiths. Elsewhere, this reviewer, too, has been trying to emphasise the important role played by Malaysia’s monarchy within the context of the contemporary discourse on extremism.¹ As a matter of fact, Malaysia’s system of constitutional monarchy has always understood itself – and indeed functioned – as a mediator and a bridge.

Johor Darul Ta’zim – the ‘Abode of Dignity’ – and its Sultans had always been such a bridge between civilisations. Johor is also one of those Malaysian states that are still marked by mutual respect between the races and mutual love between the royal family and their subjects.² One of the heroes of Johor’s more recent history, HRH Sultan Abu Bakr, the great moderniser, is also fondly known as the ‘Father of Modern Johor’, as many historians accredited Johor’s development in the nineteenth century to his enlightened leadership. He initiated policies and provided aids to ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs to stimulate the development of the state’s agricultural economy which was founded by Chinese migrants from Southern China in the 1840s. He also took charge of the development of Johor’s infrastructure, administrative system, and military and civil service, all of which were modelled closely along Western lines. Sultan Abu Bakar was also noted for his diplomatic skills, and both the British and Malay rulers had approached him for advice in making important decisions. He was also an avid traveller and became

the first Malay ruler to travel to Europe during his first visit to England in 1866. Abu Bakar's friendship with Queen Victoria played an important role in shaping Johor's relationships with Britain: Johor was to be the only state in Malaya to maintain autonomy in its internal affairs as the British Colonial Government pushed for greater control over the other Malay States.

The author of this splendidly illustrated volume, Datin P. Lim Pui Huen, comes from a family with deep roots in Johor, one of the most developed and fastest-growing states in contemporary Malaysia. Her grandfather, Wong Ah Fook, was one of its early pioneers and his son, Dato' S.Q. Wong, was a member of the Council of State for more than twenty years. Her husband, Dato' Lim Kee Jin, served as State Physician for an even longer period. Previously, she has written about secret societies, clan associations, Chinese genealogies, and the Second World War in Malaya. Her writings – including this volume – and her biography of her grandfather reveal her connections to Johor and her fascination with its history. They also reveal an absorbing interest in the theme of continuity and connectedness between past and present, tradition and modernity, and people of different communities, with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. As a matter of fact, this book grew out of the support of many such people who obligingly scoured their memories, searched their photo albums, peeled pictures from their walls and willingly subjected themselves to long interviews with the author.

How Johor was transformed from virgin jungle into a vigorous economy and a harmonious society, and how Johor Bahru – the state capital – grew from a village on the shoreline into a bustling metropolis, separated from neighbouring Singapore only by the Causeway – that is the story told in this book. Visionary leadership by the Sultans of Johor and the various state governments along with the energy and entrepreneurial spirit of its people kept Johor always a step ahead – whether as the world's largest producer of pepper and gambier or as Malaysia's largest rubber producer – not to mention its leading role in the struggle for Malaya's independence from British colonial rule in the later 1940s and 1950s. Moreover, in both World Wars, the Royal Johor Military Force (*Timbalan Setia Negeri* of Johor – until today the only state in Malaysia that has its own military force – fought bravely on the world's theatres of war.

Johor was always modern in its policies and multicultural in its outlook. Although also deeply committed to Malay tradition and Islamic religion, the Sultanate of Johor was at the same time welcoming to technological development and progress. In Johor, we encounter an open multicultural society that sets this state so refreshingly apart from certain regions that seem to be marked by bigotry, ethnic inbreeding and racial prejudice. This reviewer, who over the last 15 years or so has had the privilege of enjoying the friendship of Johorians from all sectors of life, would also argue that Johor is still multicultural Malaysia at its best. Moreover, in spite of

huge losses for the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) coalition government in other – mostly northern – parts of West Malaysia in the 12th Malaysian national elections of March 2008, the world seems to be still in order in Johor. There, Malays, Chinese, and Indians seem to understand (and appreciate) perhaps a bit better than elsewhere what it means to live in a multicultural setting – and what would be the rather grim alternatives.

This book then is a history of and a tribute to this interaction of people and of a landscape that has come together to make Johor what it is today. Archival documents, maps and photographs as well as many family albums and personal memories contribute to this treasure chest, a multifaceted account of the history of Johor, which became a separate entity and state in 1855. The nineteenth century's 'opening up' is shown by referring to the export of gambier, pepper and rubber, the building of modern palaces, mosques, schools and government offices in the state capital Johor Bahru and in other towns, such as Muar, the merits of its own Armed Forces and Civil Service, a measure of external independence as an Unfederated Malay State under British protectorate rule, a range of sports and pastimes which even included a Grand Prix, the local writers and an active press in English and other languages, a railway that already in 1909 linked Johor Bahru to Penang, and the Causeway to Singapore, built in 1924.

Moreover, Johor's confusing experiences in the period just before, during and after the brutal Japanese Occupation (1942–45) are seen by the author as contributing to its role in the 1957 achievement of Malaya's political independence. As a matter of fact, many of the heroes of the Malayan independence struggle hailed from Johor. Dato' Sir Onn bin Jaafar (1895–1962), for instance, was the Chief Minister of Johor and the founder of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which came into being at *Istana Besar* – the Royal Palace – in Johor Bahru on 11–12 May 1946. His son was Tun Hussein Onn, the third Prime Minister of Malaysia, and his grandson is Hishammuddin Hussein, currently the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs.

Those who love Johor – like the writer of these lines who has manifold wonderful memories of its people – a state where Malaysia's three component races live peacefully together, will also love this beautiful book which is a fitting tribute to Johor's strong commitment toward building a strong, truly independent and multicultural Malaysia.

Notes

1. See Christoph Marcinkowski, "Countering Extremism Through Re-establishing Authority in Islam: A Role for Constitutional Monarchy", lecture presented at the International Conference of Youth on Terrorism, organised by the Malaysian Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, 25–28 February 2009, Kuala Lumpur; abstract available online at <http://www.ssig.gov.my/>

ssig/kcent/material/Youth%20&%20Terr%5B1%5D.%20Conf.%20ABSTRACT%20-%20Dr.%20Christoph.pdf (accessed on 14 September 2010). The event also featured a Royal Address by HRH Raja Nazrin Shah Ibni Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah, the Crown Prince of Perak.

2. At the time of writing, this reviewer was working (for the IAIS Occasional Paper Series) together with friends from Muar, Johor, on a pictorial biography of the late Abdulqadir bin Said, a soldier and member of the police force, who was highly decorated by several Sultans of Johor, a member of UMNO who also served as liaison with MCA, the ethnic-Chinese *Barisan Nasional* component party. He was fluent in Cantonese (from which he used to translate simultaneously during joint UMNO–MCA meetings) and at various incidences travelled to Taiwan with his friends from MCA, representing UMNO.

Arun Bala, *The Dialogue of Civilizations in the Birth of Modern Science*

(Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), xii+230 pp.

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Arun Bala has produced a significant and timely book addressing the roots of contemporary civilisational misunderstanding between European-American exceptionalism and the emergent global cosmopolitan worldview. Bala is a reputable physicist who taught history and philosophy of science at the National University of Singapore, and presently heads a project at Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies studying the Chinese, Indian and Islamic scientific traditions with their role in the rise of modern science in Europe. His book brims with concise condensations of controversies in the history of science that convey the gist of complex issues in a fluid digestible style. It unveils vast historical perspectives linking continents and weaving through centuries, replete with comparative analyses of major intellectual, scientific and cosmological topics. It also sparkles with genuine insights proffered as hypotheses awaiting criticism and testing.

Arun Bala presents in 183 pages an incisive corrective to the prevailing Eurocentric bias of 'modernity' coupled with his call to broaden and deepen the basis for a vital truly universal science. This is a richly nutritious read opening new vistas upon our current civilisational dilemma and its implications for late-modernity. His work is also humbling and ego-deflating for proponents of one's own particular civilisational uniqueness when claiming a unique copyright for scientific originality – whether European, Islamic, or Asian. This review can only touch on several of his more important themes and arguments with an eye to the challenge posed for renewal of civilisations.

Bala asks "Why did modern science develop in Europe and not elsewhere?" – or more crudely, "Why didn't the Chinese or the Muslims beat Europeans to