

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROBLEMS OF THE MALAY COMMUNITY IN SINGAPORE AND IN PENANG: A STUDY OF *KILAT SENJA* AND *ACI PATMABI*

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Abstract

The way of life of the Malay community cannot be separated from its traditional kampong or rural life, which forms the earliest template of life as family, community and nation, from the earliest stages to the developments of today. Changes over time have given rise to corresponding changes in the kampong, transforming them into advanced, modern towns and cities. This phenomenon occurred in Singapore and Penang, two cosmopolitan states of the Straits Settlements with close historical links. What occurred in Singapore may be discovered in Penang as well. The phenomena or dilemma of “cultural aridity” in Singapore may have similarities with the problem of “urban sprawl” in Penang. On this premis, initially the article discusses Hadijah Rahmat’s *Kilat Senja*. Do the socio-cultural issues of the Malay community in Singapore also occur in Penang? The answer to this question may be explicitly and implicitly resolved in Azmi Iskandar Merican’s work, *Aci Patmabi*. Subsequently the article raises and explores a variety of questions on the course of socio-cultural developments of the Malay community in Singapore and Penang.

Keywords: socio-cultural issues, cultural aridity, urban sprawl, Singapore, Penang

INTRODUCTION

This article is initiated by revisiting the bleak picture of life of the Malay community in Singapore painted by Lily Zubaidah Rahim in her book, *Dilema Singapura: Peminggiran Politik dan Pelajaran Masyarakat Melayu* (2004). A major component of this book is an exposition of the Malay identity crisis and calamity arising from, among other factors, the “cultural aridity” of the community itself. Lily Zubaidah Rahim sees this as a direct outcome of the education system of Singapore which marginalizes the Malay community from the primary course of national development in the context of modern development. This process necessitated the sacrifice of socio-cultural values. At the same time, the weakness of the Malays is related to the stigma of a community that is lethargic, backward, dispirited and so on (Lily Zubaidah Rahim, 2004:vii).

Accepting the view of the primary course also means that I, as a Malay who is considered as coming from a lethargic cultural tradition, also have to accept that I possess these bad qualities. Like other Singaporean Malays living with the burden and shadowed by this negative ethnic stereotype, the state of my identity, self-esteem and the feeling that this is the land of my origin and my birth has become unstable. The burden of this negative identity can turn into a widely-accepted impression. The sad thing is, this has more or less proliferated among the Malays of Singapore.

Lily Zubaidah Rahim’s book was published earlier in 1998 at Oxford University Press, with the title, *The Singapore Dilemma—The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community*. In 2004 it was translated into Malay and published by ITNMB (Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia Berhad), Kuala Lumpur. The book is concerned with many historical issues of the socio-cultural development of the Malays in Singapore, particularly in relation to the question of their education and political survival. After the parting of ways between Singapore and Malaysia in 1965, the Malays became the minority community of the island, contending with and living under the rule of another race.

About a year later in 2005, Hadijah Rahmat produced another work entitled *Kilat Senja: Sejarah Sosial dan Budaya Kampung-kampung di Singapura*. The title of her book evidently indicates a bleak portrayal of the Malay community in Singapore, a title with a highly symbolic meaning which requires study at various levels. Although the book provides a sub-heading to the title as “The Social and Cultural History”, the book is, in the main, a

history of the author's own life. This provides a valid basis for *Kilat Senja* to be categorized as Hadijah Rahmat's semi-autobiography. Why indeed, would Hadijah Rahmat select the title *Kilat Senja* for her semi-autobiography?

Kilat Senja, like lightning at dusk, strikes momentarily, lighting up the world with a fleeting brightness followed by a fleeting darkness, after which the sky returns to a rosy glow, perhaps with thunder in the sky, or perhaps rain or a thunderstorm may descend. Very soon the night will fall, blanketing houses, kampongs and seashores. Sailors disperse on the ocean. Such is a possible depiction, based on the beautiful and artistic illustration on the cover of *Kilat Senja*.



Figure 1 The cover of *Kilat Senja*.

In turning the pages of the book, the reader gets a succession of impressions of symbolic significance about the lightning at dusk, the glorious and illustrious history of the Malay community of Singapore which is ultimately compelled to face diverse crises in the name of development, modernization, perhaps even marginalization? The socio-cultural history of the Malay community is moving towards extinction along with the collapse of traditional homes and kampongs that are transforming into city-towns where diverse modern ethnic communities live. Would the sailor peevishly withdraw to the centre of the ocean? No, surely, he will return to shore. Hadijah Rahmat portrays this in *Kilat Senja*, a poem which graces the back cover page of her book:

*Kilat senja, perahu kita
Cipta semula layar, bahtera hidup perkasa
meluncur maju ke samudera maya
bagai pelayar terpandang dunia.*

(Lightning at dusk, our boat
Reinvents its sails, the mighty ship of life
advances, sliding into the virtual sea
like a sailor who has seen the world.)

Perhaps the bleak canvas of the Malays in Singapore is similar to the story of the pleasure and pain of Aci Patmabi, the character which Azmi Iskandar Merican creates in his novel *Aci Patmabi* (2012). Aci Patmabi is the young daughter of a Seeni Rawther, a wealthy Jawi Peranakan landlord in Penang of the 1920s, who lives among the “elite crowd of Malays” at Jalan Hatim (Hutton Lane) in the 1920s. Aci Patmabi is the ideal woman of vision, an enthusiast of the progressive thinking of Syed Syeikh al-Hadi widely circulated in *Al-Imam*. She has high hopes for the improvement of the socio-economic power of her community. However, all of this goes to decline and devastation when she marries (or rather, is forced into marriage by her father) to Pakwan, a diamond and gem merchant. Pakwan is a man who loses his direction in life and his *raison d’etre*. Everything—property,

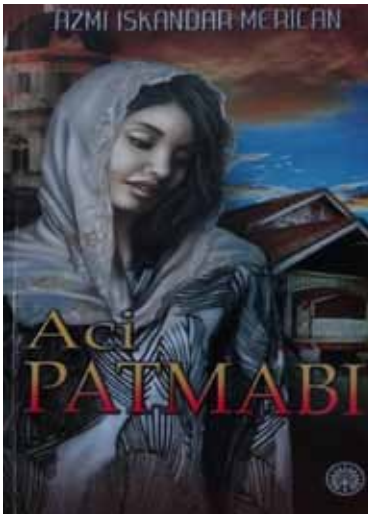


Figure 2 The cover of *Aci Patmabi*.

wealth and family honour—is ultimately lost, pawned off to foreigners. Eventually Aci Patmabi is compelled to leave Penang in anguish and go to Prai, where she lives in poverty and hardship. Many lessons are conveyed explicitly and implicitly in the novel for the reflection of today’s Malay community of Penang.

Much like Singapore, Penang quickly developed, constructing its own concrete city which spread to Malay villages. The process of “urban sprawl”, and its threat to the traditional Malay village was voiced by Norizan Md Nor (2012) on 10 Jun 2012 in a *Berita Harian* interview entitled “Malay Dilemma Intensifies with Penang Urban Sprawl”. The urban sprawl has resulted in city spaces becoming increasingly overcrowded, and this has spread to new areas, including suburbs, rural areas and kampongs. In the name of progress, the development of towns is unavoidable, even at the expense of many traditional villages of historical value. The urban sprawl is a reality in Penang (particularly in George Town) which has a very limited land area. This is the same reality in Singapore. The side-effects of urban sprawl are not small. It can destroy the culture of a community (especially the Malay community) and increase capitalism, commercialism, and the threat of political competition among various ethnicities. Could it be that the problems of “urban sprawl” in Penang are long-standing and continue to destroy the life of Aci Patmabi and her family?

A PROBLEM OF CULTURAL ARIDITY IN SINGAPORE?

The expose of the problems of the Singapore Malay community in the hands of an authentic Singaporean is very convincing to the reader. The 16 chapters of 463 pages of *Kilat Senja* consist of diverse material arising from within the author as a descendant of the traditional Malay village that is increasingly threatened by development. Hadijah Rahmat produced this somewhat luxurious volume through the patronage of several large organizations in Singapore such as the Muslim Missionary Society, Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), Language Council of Singapore and Lee Foundation Singapore. The reader is introduced in the early chapters, to the history of the traditional Malay villages in Singapore which are named in the *Malay Annals*. Among others, they are, Telok Belanga, Tanjung Ru, Padang Temasik, Bukit Singapura and Kallang. The residents comprise diverse Malay ethnicities such as the Javanese, Bawean, Bugis, Banjarese, Minangkabau, and Batak, as well as the Chinese, Indian, Arab and European.

In the time of Abdullah Munshi (19th century), the major strains of the Malay kampongs in Singapore were primarily centred around Kampung Temenggung, Kampung Glam, Kampung Boyan and several others in kingdoms ruled by Malay kings of Johor. Traces of Kampung Glam still exist today, but as part of an urbanized, advanced and modern Singapore. Over time, with currents of development, traditional villages in Singapore have been divided into five categories based on the economic activity of its residents, as follows (Hadijah Rahmat, 2005:3):

- (1) Rural village
- (2) Semi-rural village
- (3) Urban village
- (4) Semi-urban village
- (5) Global village

Hadijah Rahmat was born in Kampung Bedok, Singapore, in 1958. Therefore, a part of the contents of *Kilat Senja* is a focus on the life history of the early settlers of the village since 1835, up until it expanded into a Malay village with a rich legacy of history, customs and traditions from a golden era. *Kilat Senja* may be appraised as a semi-autobiographic work by Hadijah Rahmat who narrates about the village where she was born, her childhood, and the present. Kampung Bedok is representative of the traditional village in Singapore that has seen a pioneering era and a golden age. It resonates with the customs and traditions practiced, the harmony and the spirit of leadership, the spirit of neighbourliness. All of this is enhanced by a proud tradition of *pencak silat*, the Malay art of self defence, the beauty of its dance troupes, the uniqueness of form and landscape of homes, the rich traditions of attire, food and so on. The faces of the elderly folk are still cast in smiles of the people of authentic Malay origin. Kampung Bedok is still standing today except it has a new facade, the face of a rapidly developing “urban village”. On the whole, for Hadijah Rahmat (2005: 385), the history of Kampung Bedok represents the history of the Malay village:

The case study on Kampung Bedok may be considered as a microcosm, or representative of the lives of the Malays in Singapore generally. It should not be assumed to be the experience of one small, isolated community. A large part of the findings of the study of this *kampung* may be found in other Malay *kampungs*, in particular, activities and practices relating to culture, religion, education, economy, sports, recreation, the arts, and the effects of



Figure 3 Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hadijah Rahmat with Prof. E.U. Kratz.

redevelopment of the *kampung* on residents. Thus the socio-cultural history of Kampung Bedok may be considered as a general reflection of the social and cultural histories of Malay kampongs in Singapore.

Hadijah Rahmat has emerged as a successful Singaporean writer today, especially of poetry, short stories and drama. Presently she is also a leading literary scholar in Singapore. Her book, *In Search of Modernity* (University of Malaya, 2001) continues to be influential in the study of the history of Malay literature till today. Her years of experience in writing are fully exploited throughout the production of *Kilat Senja* which is brimming with field work activities, interviews with local residents, scholarly and spontaneous views on the situation of the Malay community of Singapore today. Hadijah Rahmat's credibility, talent and creativity have expanded in her writing through the use of diverse documents and pictures of historical value. Drawings and sketches, notes and records and even the insertion of several poems, all require the reader to dive deep into their subtleties and nuances of meaning. She forwards extensive guidance for writing the semi-autobiography—exemplary to other writers—on how the author's life history may be interwoven with the larger history of race, culture and nation.

Is there a direct connection between issues that Hadijah Rahmat puts forward in *Kilat Senja* and those of “cultural aridity” raised by Lily Zubaidah Rahim (2004) in *Dilema Singapura*? Comparing the issue of extinction of the traditional Malay village in *Kilat Senja* with that of Lily Zubaidah Rahim's “cultural aridity”, there certainly is. The socio-cultural concerns

of the Malay community in both are interrelated and mutually intertwined. Whereas Lily Zubaidah Rahim exposes major injustices in the policies of the Singapore government, Hadijah Rahmat's book tends to focus on revisiting the crisis of the Malay community itself. The truth is, the Malays of Singapore are not culturally arid. A large part of the problems that exist in the Malay community of Singapore originate from the weakness of the Malays themselves, wrangling over inherited property and land to the extent that they are inclined to become divided among themselves, eventually selling off their ancestral land to others. When the kampong loses its inward strength, a huge spill-over effect is the loss of customs and traditions of the past. It is not impossible that one day, the term "kampong" or "village" will disappear entirely and permanently from the map of Singapore.

From a different angle, *Kilat Senja* looks at socio-cultural issues of the Malay community in Singapore more in terms of fundamental problems. Whereas Lily Zubaidah Rahim "blames" the cultural aridity of the Malays of Lion Island on policies of the Singapore government, Hadijah Rahmat is more inclined towards the reality that Singapore's development surely cannot be avoided, and consequently many traditional villages have to be sacrificed in the face of the urbanization process. Hadijah Rahmat's perception of the matter is closer to the idea of "urban sprawl" forwarded by Norizan Md Nor (2012) in studying the socio-cultural issues of Malays in Penang. In other words, *Kilat Senja* is a semi-autobiographic work of Hadijah Rahmat on the "urban sprawl" process that has befallen Singapore's traditional kampongs, including her own, Kampung Bedok, where she was born. Eventually she injects a spirit of constant vigilance into the Malays of Singapore in facing currents of development with vision and awareness (Hadijah Rahmat, 2005: 385):

In order to be more progressive and not to be left behind, the Malay community has to gain a visionary awareness in life for their future. We require knowledge to reflect and envisage life in the future and prepare ourselves to face every possibility, so that we are not worn down and consumed by currents of change and miss out on opportunities that exist within the system and the environment of our lives in the present and in the future.

AN ISSUE OF URBAN SPRAWL IN PENANG?

Besides Singapore, Penang is another instance of a state with a long history in terms of diversity of ethnicities, religions and belief systems. The liberal

policies and port practices of Francis Light and English officials after him opened the way for the coming of Europeans, Arabs, Indians and Chinese to the rapidly developing island as traders, propagators of religions, people in search of a new life, and even political refugees. The effects of the history of the multi-racial presence in Penang is, and can still be, seen from the architecture of buildings, places of worship, grave sites, names of places, streets and so on (see Jelani Harun, 2013). Khoo Su Nin in his book, *Streets of George Town, Penang* (2001), presents names of streets that have been immortalized along with the names of the individuals or communities which established them in the past. Among them are, Armenian Street, Arratoon Street, Bishop Street, Bodhi Avenue, Chetty Lane, China Street, Chulia Street, Nagore Road, Peking Street, Scotland Road, and Cintra Street. In fact, a group of Jewish people were among the residents of Penang who lived in Yahudi Road (now known as Jalan Zainal Abidin) in the early 19th century.

Extensive historical studies of the Jawi Peranakan or “Jawi Pekan” of Penang have been made, among others, by Helen Fujimoto (1988) and Alijah Gordon (1999). In her book, Helen Fujimoto lists several successful Jawi Peranakans of Penang who became important figures in various occupations and social activities. One such famous individual of South Indian origin is Kader Mydin Merican (Cauder Mohuddeen), who came to Penang along with Francis Light in 1786 (Helen Fujimoto, 1988:199). He became the first “Kapitan Keling” (an appointed representative of the Indian Muslim community), who in 1801, started the construction of Kapitan Keling Mosque which still stands today. Kader Mydin Merican passed on in 1834 leaving four sons, Othman Sahib, Othman Naina, Othman Nachiar and Othman Kandoo. All of them became successful traders in Penang.

James Low wrote the story of the origins of the Jawi Peranakans in 1836, when they were better known as “Jawi Pekan”. This is the community of people born of marriages between Indian men, most of whom came from South India, and Malay women. Through time, this community came to be referred to by various terms, which gradually changed. Eventually they came to be known only as Jawi Peranakan. This community has lived in Penang for several generations and assimilated the way of life and the local Malay culture. According to Low (1836:251), since times long gone the Jawi Peranakan people were a community of successful merchants, traders and other professions, who in fact outshone the Chinese and the Europeans. “Rumah Teh Bunga” (Chrysanthemum Tea House), an imposing building which still stands at No. 138 Hutton Lane, George Town is a fine example of the magnificent Jawi

Peranakan houses. It was owned by Tuan Abdul Wahab, a merchant, in 1893. In 2010 the house was given over to the National Heritage Department and subsequently turned into the Malay Heritage Gallery of Penang.

Thus it may be said that there is much correspondence between the situation in Singapore and what has been, and still is, happening in Penang, at least in the way it is portrayed by Azmi Iskandar Merican in *Aci Patmabi*. The clear skies of Penang are not constant, for without even waiting for dusk, it may suddenly become dark and disturbing for residents. Flash floods can happen fast. *Aci Patmabi*'s marriage to Pakwan changes everything. Pakwan is negligent in his religious beliefs and practices, preferring horse-racing, alcohol and women. Being involved in all sorts of corrupt activities he becomes slipshod as a businessman. Darul Falah Club, originally a charitable Islamic club, transforms into a gambling den. The gem business is neglected and eventually goes to wrack and ruin. One by one, property, land and house are sold to settle mounting debts. Pakwan is reduced from owner of a horse carriage, to riding on a bullock cart. In the end he dies accidentally as a consequence of thrashing from residents of a dilapidated mosque built by his own grandfather.

Pakwan's death results in increasing pressure for *Aci Patmabi*, and even more for her two sons who have inherited Pakwan's foolhardiness. *Aci Patmabi*'s suffering climaxes when they both cheat her and sell off the land and bungalow at Jalan Hatin which they inherited. *Aci Patmabi*, who is ailing, becomes increasingly directionless and finally decides to move to Prai. She



Figure 4 Azmi Iskandar Merican.

leaves Penang, which is increasingly is being pawned off to foreigners, on a bullock cart. Azmi Iskandar Merican ends the novel (2012:315) with *Aci Patmabi*'s poignant lamentation, as follows:

Patmabi, struggling to suppress her sobs, tried to answer Naina's question. At last, sobbing and moaning, she said, "We, the Malays of Penang have lost all that we ever had. We've become Jews. We no longer have a land."

In keeping with the nature of a work of fiction, *Aci Patmabi* may be variously interpreted. The strength of the novel is concentrated on its historical setting which is linked to the socio-cultural ills of the Malay community of Penang of the early 20th century. However, Azmi Iskandar Merican presents this setting quite loosely and with a lack of empirical data. The essence of the narration in the novel does not speak of Norizan Md Nor's idea of "urban sprawl" (2012). *Aci Patmabi*'s origins are from an elite Malay family from the centre of town in Penang, yet she is eventually compelled to move to a suburban area (on the "mainland" in Prai) as a result of the weakness of several individuals who forget themselves, their *raison d'être*, the honour of their race, their self-esteem, and all else.

Certainly the human quality of forgetfulness has an origin. As Azmi Iskandar Merican observes, Pakwan's forgetfulness is a reflection of the "reality" of socio-cultural problems of the Malay community of Penang at a point in the past, particularly of the wealthy who went astray on the path of life. Pakwan possesses all the characteristics of the "cultural aridity" of the rich in the sense indicated by Lily Zubaidah Rahim (2004). Pakwan is truly arid in terms of the business culture of the Jawi Pekan community of Penang that was so eminent in the past. On the contrary he is negligent and forgetful, feeding his lust and desires to the point of pawning all his goods and property to foreigners. Pakwan falls from riches to rags, to paralysis, and to poverty. In the end, he lives in despicable conditions. This is Azmi Iskandar Merican's take on a contemptible man who does not know the value of his prosperity, comfort, peace, youth and good health.

This reading of *Aci Patmabi* is consistent with the idea of "cultural aridity" forwarded by Lily Zubaidah Rahim (2004). It is quite possible that what is happening in Penang did, and still is, happening in Singapore too. Pakwan's recklessness is an instruction to his sons on a worldly life of ruthlessness and greed, to the point that they trick their own mother with cunning and deceit. The tragic story of *Aci Patmabi* is not too different from the crisis of the land and property rush that Hadijah Rahmat portrays in *Kilat*

Senja. In both situations the most abused victims are the Malays as a whole, with their entire property and land pawned off to the foreigner. Like Hadijah Rahmat, the credibility of Azmi Iskandar Merican is sound and authoritative, particularly since he is a descendent of the Merican family from the Jawi Peranakan community that has all this time been firmly grounded in Penang. Born in Penang in 1937, the author has a wide experience of the history of the socio-cultural modes and measures of the Malay and Jawi Peranakan communities of Penang (see Azmi Iskandar Merican, 2010).

Azmi Iskandar Merican attempts to interest and persuade the reader with repeated reminders of Syed Syeikh al-Hadi's idea of progressive Islam advocated in *Al-Imam* magazine. The name, *Al-Imam* occurs no less than 12 times in the novel, right from the initial part of the book (Azmi Iskandar Merican, 2012: 9, 14, 32, 34, 74, 89, 104, 114, 160, 163, 164 & 192). It appears as if *Al-Imam* and Syed Syeikh al-Hadi, the source of the idea of progressive Islam, are unwavering remedies for the disquiet in Aci Patmabi's soul. Incidentally, *Al-Imam* and Syed Syeikh al-Hadi also emerged in Singapore (Roff, 1972).

Unfortunately, the impact of the call for progressive Islam does not endure in *Aci Patmabi*. On the contrary, calamity not only befalls the Malays in Penang, but also Syed Syeikh al-Hadi, the man who thought so highly of the idea of progressive Islam, and *Al-Imam* itself. On this note Aci Patmabi, admirer of *Al-Imam*, eventually falls apart on the journey of life, compelled to ride in a bullock-cart to who knows where. Why would Azmi Iskandar Merican give Aci Patmabi such a severe "beating"? Why is it not the "culturally arid" Pakwan, but Aci Patmabi, admirer of *Al-Imam*, who is tormented and disgraced? Could it be that with the sad and bleak ending in misery and wretchedness that batters Aci Patmabi body and soul, Azmi Iskandar Merican fact wishes to say that the progressive Islam supported by the Youth Group in the past failed to nurture or bring about a development of the mind (or intellect) to the Malay community of Penang? The thinking in *Al-Imam* appears to lack vision in *Aci Patmabi* in comparison with Ahmad Rashid Talu's *Iakah Salmah?*, which was written much earlier in 1928.

What is the ensuing course and direction of the Malay communities in Singapore and Penang? Without touching on political issues, Hadijah Rahmat ends her semi-autobiography with the sub-heading, "Anjung Kemusnahan" (Doorway to Destruction) (Hadijah Rahmat, 2005:353). This certainly indicates a sense of destruction, extinction or devastation. When the doorway to a house is destroyed, over time, decline and decay will set in

at the central space. This may cause the entire house to collapse eventually. Perhaps this is the message that Hadijah Rahmat wishes to convey to the Malays in Singapore. Family quarrels undermine the durability of a culture, what more with descendents whose endurance is so weak that they sell off ancestral lands in the name of development and for personal gain. For the Malays in Singapore who do know the implications of the figurative and metaphoric language, Hadijah Rahmat (2005: 348-50) encapsulates the course and direction of their lives in two poems entitled “Potret Pembangunan” (Portrait of Development) and “Uncang dan Belalang” (The Bag and The Grasshopper). The following extract is from “Uncang dan Belalang”:

*Sekarang,
berdiri di padang lapang
aku hanya tersenyum panjang
dengan hentak kakiku
kau sudah melompat melulu.
Belalang,
terbanglah puas-puas
meneroka alam yang luas
sebelum terkandas
dalam uncang hidup bebas.*

(Now,
Standing in an open field,
I smile a long while
When I stamp my feet
You hop in haste.

Grasshopper,
Fly till you're satisfied
Explore this universe vast
Before you crash
Into the bag of freedom.)

Aci Patmabi does not give a definite answer as to where the Malays in Penang should find a new direction in life. *Aci Patmabi*'s journey on a bullock-cart has no clear connection with directions, except for Azmi Iskandar Merican terse concluding words, “We, the Malays of Penang have lost all that we ever had.” Do these words mean that the Malays in Penang should surrender to destiny to determine it all? *Aci Patmabi*'s relocation to Prai, or

in other words, the relocation of the Jawi Peranakans from George Town to Prai, indicates no ray of hope for a bright future in Aci Patmabi. On the contrary, it may be seen as only a temporary “escape” from life’s problems, an escape that the Malays of Penang should not make. The Malays or the Jawi Peranakan ought to stay firmly put, to build family and career, and pursue land, property and possession in the city of George Town.

Be that as it may, today one can see the reality and truth of *Aci Patmabi*’s words quoted above, with one’s own eyes. Once again, without touching on political issues, in Penang, *Aci Patmabi* is now a truth originating from a troubled and labyrinthine past which has endured since the early twentieth century. The “urban sprawl” should not be blamed, although at this point certainly difficult to restrain. One should look within to see how the Malays (or specifically, the Jawi Pekans) are increasingly forgetting the history and stature of their own culture. Pakwan exemplifies the undesirability of the consequence of recklessness. This recklessness in continuing the legacy of the Jawi Peranakans and their pre-eminent business culture has led to a cultural aridity that is rife in Penang today.

CONCLUSION

Hadijah Rahmat and Azmi Iskandar Merican both typify authors born in Singapore and Penang before 1965 who are still actively writing today. They see the socio-cultural history of the Malay community as a very significant problem which ought to be revisited and addressed again in the 21st century because a large part of the basis and direction of the subsequent journey of the Malay community takes off from past events. The problems which arose in the past ought to be dismantled and analysed to produce guidelines or directions for future generations. The Malays in *Kilat Senja* experience a process of urbanization, whereas in *Aci Patmabi* they are forced to leave the ruthless city life that is erosive and kills human values. It could be that at some point in the future the Malay community in Singapore will leave the city, yet to which kampong or village would they go?

The intimate link between the socio-cultural histories of Singapore and Penang becomes apparent through a sharing of the problems that are almost the same in both regions, particularly those connected to the crisis in the lives of the Malay community. Scholars who study the socio-cultural problems of these regions cannot avoid discussing issues that are almost the same, though they manifest in individual forms. The issue of “cultural

aridity” in Singapore discussed by Lily Zubaidah Rahim corresponds to the issue of “urban sprawl” raised by Norizan Md Nor in Penang, and vice versa. Similarly, the issue of extinction of the Malay kampong raised by Hadijah Rahmat in *Kilat Senja* is parallel to the issue of cultural aridity in the business of the Jawi Peranakan forwarded by Azmi Iskandar Merican in *Aci Patmabi*, and vice versa. Both works mutually intersect with the issues of “cultural aridity” and “urban sprawl” occurring in Singapore and Penang. It is hoped that more and more bold and visionary Malay writers of Singapore and Penang will engage in existing problems, and beyond that, channel their suggestions for more dynamic and direct ways to resolve the problems. With a persistent resonance of writers’ voices the muteness of a forgetful community may be broken.

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(Translated by Lalita Sinha)

Appendix

Bicara Kisah Di Sebalik Kilat Senja

Bicara Kisah Di Sebalik Kilat Senja akan diadakan di Bilik Seminar, Masjid Sultan, Singapura, pada 6 April, jam 2 petang.

Program itu menampilkan pengarang buku *Kilat Senja*, karya Prof Dr Hadijah Rahmat yang bakal menyorot proses pengumpulan maklumat dalam proses kreatifnya. Prof Hadijah juga akan berkongsi penemuannya ekoran penulisan mengenai kampung di Singapura, sekali gus memberikan pelbagai maklumat yang boleh membantu penulisan mengenai kampung di negara itu.

Sempena acara itu, perancangan untuk doa memintasi tanah perkuburan bersejarah di Jal Kubor, akan turut dibincangkan.

Acara anjuran Singapura Stories dengan kerjasama Lembaga Pemegang Amanah Masjid Sultan dengan sokongan Malay Heritage Centre. Makl

Berita Harian, 1 April 2013, p. 6



6. Penang and Province Wellesley in 1867.

Penang in 1867.

(Source: Hoyt, 2001:23)