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POLITICS OF HERITAGE IN SINGAPORE

The Malay-Muslim legacy of Kampong Glam

The representation of Malay-Muslim heritage in Singapore has changed repeatedly in relatively short periods of time. Until the 1990s, an exclusively rural legacy was showcased as the ethnic heritage of Singapore's Malay community. The alleged Malay 'failure' to function in urban society is rooted in administrative shortcomings of the colonial era when other Muslim migrants interacted with the British leaders on behalf of the Malay community. When attempts to redress the situation did not show immediate success in the 1950s, the Malay ineptness for participation in urban economic and cultural life was believed to be proven. In terms of socio-demographic indicators, this negative attitude quickly became a self-fulfilling prophecy contributing to the marginalisation of Malays. Urban Malay heritage would be rare and, where existing, in squalid conditions and better complemented by the built legacy of Arab trading history. This orientalisation of Malays continues to hinder a representation of their heritage as part of Singapore's cosmopolitan legacy. The current representation of Kampong Glam as 'less Malay than Arab' is a consequence of a particular conceptualisation of Malayness. New initiatives to boost the Malay character of Kampong Glam are best understood in the context of the longstanding neglect of existing Malay contributions to cosmopolitan connections.

Introduction

Malay-Muslim heritage is an important part of Singapore's multicultural legacy. The city state in Southeast Asia categorises its citizens in three main ethnic groups, Chinese, Malays and Indians (the CMI races, making up 75%, 14% and 9% of the population respectively, leaving the rest to the 'Other' as a residual category). According to its multiracial ideology, each group is free and even encouraged to keep up a distinct identity as long as the cohesion of the nation-state is not compromised. A similar idea applies to religion. Religious practice is encouraged as a moral basis for good citizenry but must be kept separate from national politics (Kamaludeen and Pereira 2008). In the case of Singaporean Malays, the link between ethnicity and religion is a peculiar one. As the indigenous Malay community is almost entirely Muslim, the terms 'Malay' and 'Muslim' are sometimes used synonymously. The problem with using 'Malays' as an umbrella term for all Muslims in Singapore is that there are also Arab, Indian and even Chinese Muslims who would be excluded by such a terminology according to its contemporary definition.

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Conceptually, the Singapore government's clear-cut categorisation of its citizens has its roots in the idea of pluralism inherited from the colonial era. Pluralism originally served as a tool to administer the multi-ethnic population of Southeast Asia's colonial territories (Anderson 2006). Its main trait is the existence of various distinct cultures and population groups within one territorial unit. Instead of working towards a socially and culturally coherent society within each colony, pluralism highlighted and at times reinforced the differences between the officially recognised population groups. In colonial-era pluralism, the various population groups had different sets of rights; often as in in the Dutch East Indies the *inlanders* or indigenous population had the most disadvantaged position compared to European colonisers or other non-European migrants to the colony (Furnivall 1948).

After the 1950s, the differentiating trait in pluralism continued in the multiracial ideologies of Singapore and Malaysia, albeit with different emphases. The rigid categorisation in Singapore is paired with a strong belief in meritocracy (Chua 1998), in that none of the four racial categories deserves special privileges. Singapore's subscription to meritocracy clearly precludes affirmative action for minorities and has been blamed for contributing to the poor or inaccurate representation of minority cultures, for instance in the Malay-Muslim neighbourhood of Kampong Glam (Ismahil 2006). Malaysia, on the other hand, grants a comprehensive package of special support for the indigenous Malays to compensate for the perceived or real injustice of the colonial era. The contrasting post-colonial pathways of implementing multiracialism have resulted in different interpretations of Malay heritage in Singapore and Malaysia. In particular, Singapore's Malay community had to re-define local Malay culture and heritage in Kampong Glam and other historically Malay-Muslim neighbourhoods from the somewhat unfortunate position of being denied the privileges of neighbouring Malaysia's Malays (Iskander 2006).

For this research undertaken between 2006 and 2010, Kampong Glam on the eastern fringes of Singapore's downtown area is discussed as the heritage district for Singapore's Malay *and* Muslim community as it is a central venue for many Islamic religious and cultural institutions (Fig. 1). Other heritage districts, Little India and to a lesser degree Chinatown, are also a draw for local Muslim visitors, but Kampong Glam is the only central area where commercial life and cultural venues cater to Muslims predominantly (Tantow 2010). Kampong Glam is, however, also heavily influenced by non-Islamic culture as it is home to traditional Chinese clan associations and a hub for many Indian textile outlets (only a few are owned by Indian Muslims, many belong to local Hindu or Sikh families). Despite these influences, the study area for Kampong Glam has largely remained Malay and Muslim in character and is as such a unique urban quarter in Singapore's central city area (Perkins 1984).

Today, Kampong Glam's ethno-cultural space has become a popular heritage attraction for tourists and local sightseers. Singapore's government authorities and statutory boards, such as the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), have commissioned revamps of major parts of the district to showcase a coherent heritage theme to tourists (Fig. 2).

The influx of tourists, however, is not the only factor shaping place identity and local culture. In the case of Singapore and other states of Southeast Asia, the changing self-perception of Malay Muslims has for decades been linked to particular representations of its heritage for *purposes of nation building*. In the post-colonial context of Singapore,

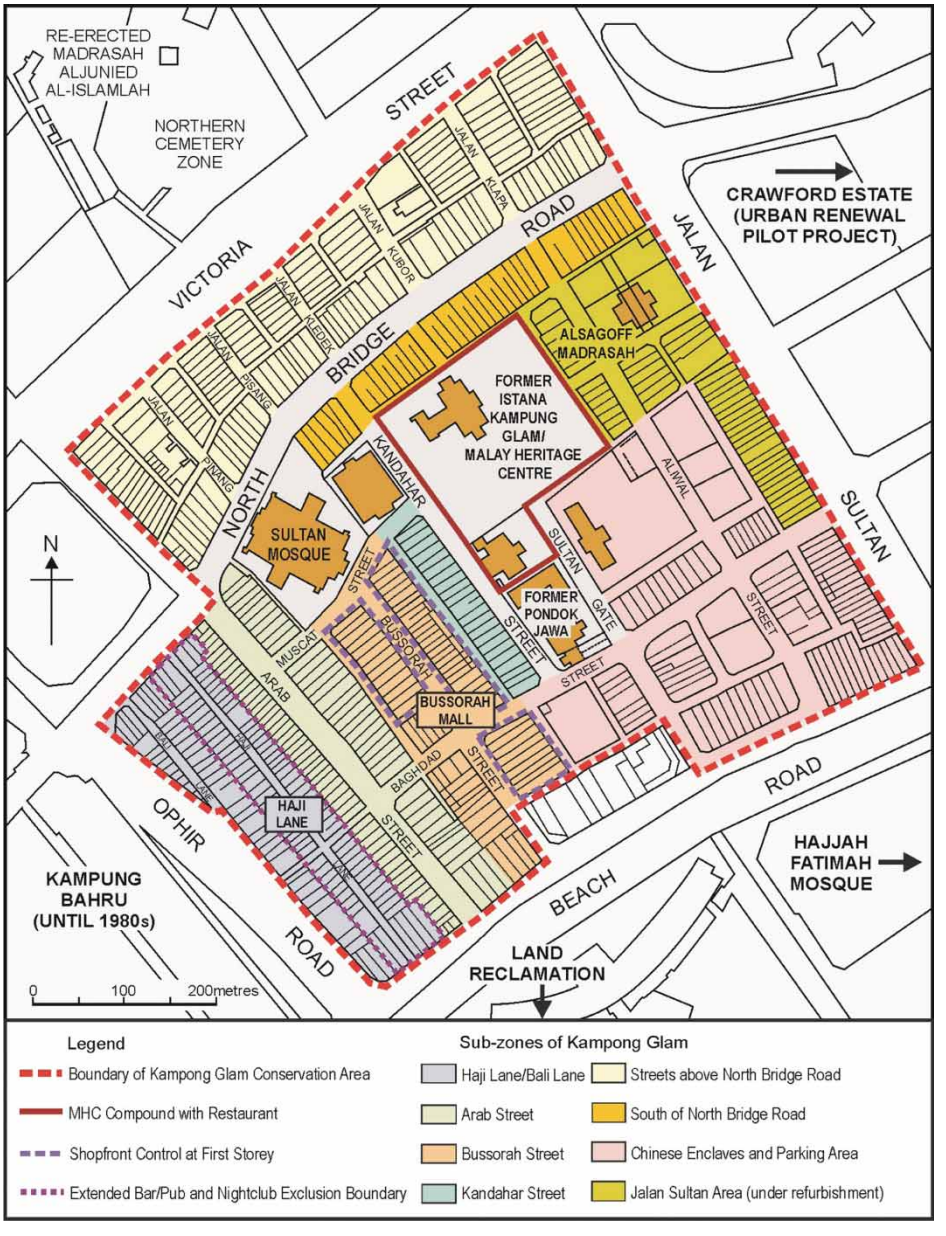

FIGURE 1 Map of Kampong Glam in 2009, by D. Tantow.

Kampong Glam has been designated to offer a perspective on the heritage of Singapore's Malay and Muslim people. However, the underlying cultural policies of heritage representation (i.e. politics of heritage) since independence have changed repeatedly, resulting in twists and turns in the local representation of Malay-Muslim heritage.

Three basic concepts competed for the prevalent definition of 'Malayness' in Singapore's Kampong Glam. Firstly, there is the Islamic umma – a utopia rather than a pragmatic road map to nationhood – aimed at incorporating all Muslims

FIGURE 2 Bird's eye view of Kampong Glam in 2009. Photo by D. Tantow.

in one united state free of colonial rule, the caliphate (Kahn 2006). In Southeast Asia, Malayness would therefore include Indian Muslim and Arab migrants in the local Malay population, using Malayness as an umbrella term for indigenous *and* immigrant Muslims (Anderson 2006). Secondly, the concept of *masuk Melayu* or 'entering' the Malay race required religious affiliation to Islam and the knowledge of Malay customs (*adat*) as key elements of Malayness. Upon adherence to Islamic principles *and* the practice of Malay cultural traits (e.g. usage of the Malay language or dressing in Malay style), select migrants could quite simply become Malay (Milner 1995). Thirdly, *bangsa Melayu,* translatable as 'Malay race', is the most exclusive definition of Malayness. In addition to being a Muslim (*agama* Islam) and a follower of Malay *adat*, the ethnic origins matter for *bangsa*. The origins of an individual are characterised by his or her *kerajaan*, i.e. as being the subject of a Malay local authority, usually a sultan. This third feature of defining Malayness according to *bangsa* marks an important difference to the two other concepts through the inclusion of genetic and territorial qualifiers (Milner 1995).

For the representation of Malay-Muslim heritage, each concept carries particular challenges. An application of umma and *masuk Melayu* practices enabled easy integration into Kampong Glam's Malay society up to the point that Muslim migrants, as socio-economic and educational elites, spoke on behalf of the local Malay community, for instance as mediators to the colonial administration. Even though the migrants would take over Malay cultural practices in many aspects, the prominent societal role of Muslim migrants would ultimately cause a de-emphasis of indigenous Malay heritage. The practise of *bangsa Melayu* on the other hand, would highlight local and regional Malay heritage, but strip it of its inter-regional maritime connections and the socio-economic achievements made through trade.

While proponents continue to champion different definitions of Malayness, *bangsa Melayu* had, in principle, superseded *masuk Melayu* and striving for umma after the end of World War II in 1945. The preference for applying *bangsa Melayu* to define Malayness and Malay heritage continued in post-colonial Singapore for a substantial period of time. In principle, *bangsa Melayu* does not specify on settlement patterns, but the concept quickly received connotations of village dwelling as a key characteristic of a homogenous Malay community. From Singapore's independence in 1965 to the 1990s, the conceptualisation of Malays as non-enterprising and rural-dwellers prevented a prominent presentation of Malayness in centrally located Kampong Glam. The district was substituted by a 'Malay village' built in suburban Geylang Serai. How does Malay heritage and self-identification relate to nation building in Singapore? Benedict Anderson (2006: 6) defines nations as 'an imagined political community', elaborating that '[it] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion'. Hence, for successful nation building in multiracial Singapore, Malays are to feel a sense of belonging to the heritage of their ethnic community, however represented, *and* an attachment to the rapidly globalising city-state of Singapore as a whole. With the longstanding emphasis on Malay rural heritage, this double-layered identification turned out to be a virtual balancing act for many Singaporean Malays.

Kampong Glam's increasing popularity as a heritage tourism attraction today has, in principle, the potential to rectify stereotyping and orientalising depictions of Malayness. For an accurate representation of Malay-Muslim heritage in Kampong Glam, the role of Malays in Singapore's history needs to be revisited. This would enable a timely update on the storytelling for heritage tourism, including their urban legacy. In order to uncover the underlying reasons for the continuing orientalisation of Kampong Glam's Malay-Muslim community and heritage, I analysed academic texts and popular guidebooks. Interviews with experts on tourism planning executives and representatives of Kampong Glam's Malay and Muslim community complemented the literature studies. In addition, an in-depth survey of 120 local business operators was conducted to learn about the reactions to the representation of ethnic heritage by various parties. The business operators substituted local residents, since the bulk of Kampong Glam is presently a commercial zone with very limited residential usage (Tantow 2011). It is assumed that business operators spent the most substantial periods of time in the Kampong Glam heritage district, second only to the very few remaining residents.

The continuing orientalising of indigenous Malays (including occasional self-orientalising) shows that underlying politics of heritage continue to shape post-colonial tourism landscapes. The influences of cultural globalisation on representations of heritage are limited compared to the impact of politics of heritage as an integrated component of nation building.

Muslim natives and migrants – how the Malay-Muslim minority district came into being

Temasek, a Malay port settlement and imperial residence city, can be considered the 14th-century forerunner of modern Singapore, as archaeological excavations at Fort

Canning Hill, near present-day Kampong Glam, have revealed. However, Temasek's power and role as a maritime hub lasted for only about a century (Andaya 2008). It is unclear whether the area has continuously been inhabited. When Raffles, an officer of the East India Company, decided to build a port settlement on the southern tip of Singapore Island in 1819, the local *temenggong*'s[1] residence, a side-line of the Johor sultan family from the southern Malay Peninsula, was basic and surrounded by a settlement of not more than 100 inhabitants (Turnbull 2009). The total population of Singapore numbered only around 1,000 people at the time. The native population comprised Malay groups such as the *orang laut* (seafaring nomadic people) and the *orang gelam, orang kallang* and *orang selatar,* who roamed the rivers or waters near the shore for their subsistence. There was also a very small Chinese community of about 50 people living on the island close to the *temenggong* settlement.

After successful negotiations with the local *temenggong*, the colonial settlement was built on both sides of the Singapore River. The British colonial administration assigned particular city areas for settling to different ethnicities but stopped short of strictly enforcing racial segregation, allowing for the rise of hybrid cultures in Singapore and other Straits Settlements areas. Some land east of the river mouth was reserved for the local leader's *istana* (palace), around which present-day Kampong Glam evolved. Within the colonial port city of Singapore, the coastal settlement of Kampong Glam became the centre of the predominantly Malay Muslim community, where native Malays mixed with a rich spectrum of migrants, mostly from other Muslim societies. This paramount mingling of cultures in the 'colonial cosmopolis' of Singapore is an important distinction from the present-day practice of 'selective cosmopolitanism' (Yeoh 2004). Subsequently, it became impossible to clearly distinguish cultures and to determine which Asian culture was the leading one in the melting pot of the colonial cosmopolis of Singapore.

In contrast to this intermingling of cultures during colonial times, Singapore and Malaysia today, as the independent states which emanated from British Malaya, categorise their citizens rigidly and practice cosmopolitanism selectively with strict laws regulating migration patterns. As a consequence, the hybrid mingling of cultures, especially that of native Malays with Muslim migrants, was gradually replaced by an ever more rigid categorisation of cultures with an exclusive definition of Malayness according to *bangsa Melayu*. This can be exemplified by the perpetual change in representations of Malay-Muslim heritage in Kampong Glam.

Kampong Glam until 1945 – Muslim culture and maritime connections

The city's colonial founding father Raffles was keen to attract Arab migrants, whom he considered to be capable traders (Freitag 2002).[2] His open-door immigration policy subsequently set off inter-regional Muslim migration to the 'little racial melting pot of

[1]Minister in charge of defence and public safety.

[2]According to other sources (Othman 2002) Raffles disliked the Arabs. From this perspective, he only reluctantly accepted them as immigrants because of their commercial abilities. In any case, immigration was not restricted because local Malays were deemed to lack the 'competitive spirit' needed to boost the colonial economy (see Alatas 1977).

Singapore' during the early 19th century (Perkins 1984: 13). For the purpose of channelling migrants into city areas with culturally similar population groups, the Kampong Glam Muslim district had been laid out in 1820, only a year after Raffles' first landing near the Malay sultan's palace. The British established Sultan Hussein as the local Malay sultan, despite the fact that Singapore had previously been considered part of the Riau islands' sultanate, and thus the Dutch East Indies that is now Indonesia (Turnbull 2009). The newly installed Singapore sultan brought many family members from the Riau islands, strengthening the maritime connections of Kampong Glam's Malay community. However, this was not entirely according to Raffles' Arab settlement plans, since the Muslim migrant population of the area became quickly dominated by the Bugis, allegedly pirates and 'dubious' traders, who had just been evicted from the Dutch East Indies. In spite of this, Arab migrants settled in Kampong Glam in modest numbers, but those who came quickly became wealthy merchants (Freitag 2002).

Despite the vast scope of Muslim migration, the local Malay community continued to outnumber all other Muslim groups by 1911, after almost a hundred years of open-door immigration policy (Table 1). One reason for the continuing local dominance of the Malays was the quick incorporation of many regional Muslim migrants into the Malay community according to the possibility of *masuk Melayu* (Barnard 2004). The 1911 census, for instance, included migrants from nearby Sumatra and the Riau islands in the count of local Malays as these migrant groups were indistinguishable from the local Malay-Muslim population (Perkins 1984). This perspective placed the 11,000 Muslims from the centre and east of Indonesia (an aggregation of Boyanese, Bugis and Javanese people) as second in rank in the overall Muslim population count. Kampong Glam could welcome many migrants because Raffles had the area exclusively reserved for Sultan Hussein and his family trimmed to a smaller plot in 1823. This released valuable land for the settlement of local Malays and other Muslim migrant groups. Increasingly dissatisfied with the administrative practices of Sultan Hussein, Raffles bought out the Sultan's judicial power and land rights except for the compound of the Istana Kampong Glam (Turnbull 2009).

The differentiation between Malays and Boyanese, Bugis and Javanese bears witness to the principles of pluralism employed by the colonial administration (Othman 2002), which frequently drew a line between local Malays as *inlanders* and other *migrant orientals* (see second row of Table 1; Anderson 2006). Since *masuk Melayu* was the prevailing understanding of Malayness at the time, the local Malay community would not have differentiated between the first two groups of the census (Kahn 2006). However, it is more likely that the local Malay community would have drawn a line between themselves and

TABLE 1 Muslim population in Kampong Glam in the early 20th century

Population group	Numbers in 1911
Malays (including Malays from Sumatra)	22,000
Boyanese, Bugis, Javanese	11,000
Arabs	1,000

Source: author's arrangement, based on Perkins (1984).

the Arabs in accordance with the census (hence not employing the Islamic umma), but this is still a subject of discussion among local historians (cf. Ho 2002). Interestingly, Sumatra's Malays (including Malays from the Riau islands) are included in the category of local Malays, even though they emigrated from beyond the colonial borders. In this respect the colonial census is slightly inconsistent in its ethnic categorisation. The inclusion of Sumatra's Malays can be considered a concession to the locally prevalent view on Malayness and the self-identification of Kampong Glam's Malays.

Despite the numerical dominance of the Malays, Kampong Glam still constituted a melting pot with an abundance of hybrid Muslim cultures. Widespread hybridisation helped enlarge the local Malay community with the integration of some regional Muslim migrant groups, temporarily establishing 'Malay' as an umbrella term for most Muslims in Kampong Glam (Freitag 2002).[3] However, this majority was not reflected in the socio-cultural representation of Malay-Muslim heritage. While using 'Malay' as an umbrella term, Arab and Indian migrants tended to speak on behalf of the fellow Muslim Malays to the colonial administration, a fact that was initially widely accepted by local Malays, but then increasingly resented (Ho 2002). Among the Arab elite 'mediators' particularly were a fair number of proponents of the umma (Othman 2002), favouring pan-Islamic unity and considering Malayness merely as the regional specification of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Kampong Glam as a centre for Malay nationalism 1945 to 1965: Malays and Muslim migrants as separate groups

After World War II and the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, trends to 'racialise differences' between local Malays and Muslim migrants intensified. Many Malays became preoccupied with the *takrif* issue, that is, with the question what makes Malayness (cf. Djamour 1959, Iskander 2006). A substantial sector of the 'Singapore Malays in the 1950s shared the view that their community was separate and discrete' (Kahn 2006: 116) from other Muslim groups for the first time in history. A result of this change in self-perception was that one had to be born in the Malay Peninsula to be considered 'true Malay'. Most of the city's Malays thus came to reject alternative pan-Islamic ideas about a united Southeast Asian caliphate previously brought forward by Arab Islamic elites (Othman 2002). Malay reformers around Mohamed Eunos had called for a greater and more direct involvement – without mediators – of native Malays in politics and economic life since the 1930s. Being Muslim and speaking Malay were no longer considered sufficient requirements for inclusion in the community. Neither had the pan-Islamic visions of umma convinced the Malay public.

Instead, the Malay masses imagined their community as racially distinct from Muslim migrants, aware of their humble origins as local village dwellers. Despite such origins, the Malay elite discovered Kampong Glam's central location for their purposes of constructing 'Malayness' according to *bangsa Melayu* and organising Malay activism in the 1950s during the struggle for independence. This was in reaction to British political repression on the Malay Peninsula. Malay nationalists calling for an independent

[3]According to Ho (2002), the Arabs as the merchant elite retained an independent prominence despite their partial familiarisation with local culture and 'becoming' Malay remained easy until the 1920s. The simplicity of this process is well captured by its local description *masuk Melayu*.

Malaya subsequently gathered in Singapore, particularly around Kampong Glam (Kahn 2006). The central location of the district was instrumental in the evolution of a Malay press and publishing scene. Kampong Glam's heritage thus featured prominently in the building of Malay identity but with a different emphasis from that of the 19th-century cosmopolitan outlook.

The most prominent embodiment of popular culture in the Singapore and British Malaya of the 1950s and 1960s was P. Ramlee who frequently acted as a simple, honest and virtuous Malay 'country boy' in many of his films. In his comedy *Labu and Lebi*, for instance, P. Ramlee plays a servant to the rich businessmen Haji Bakhil. After showing a glimpse of Kampong Glam's Sultan Mosque at the start of the film, Haji Bakhil is immediately shown presenting his nearby shop. Social anthropologist Joel Kahn (2006: 133) sums up the nationalist message of the film: 'Haji Bakhil – merchant, pious Muslim and of Indonesian origin – is all that a virtuous Malay is not. Unlike the good Malay, he is money-grubbing, patriarchal and sanctimonious.' When Singapore seceded from merger (1963–1965) with Malaysia which brought about the two countries' respective independence, both Singaporean Malays and Malaysian representatives made claims to the popular legacy of P. Ramlee's films (Hong and Huang 2008).

Kampong Glam's heritage was re-interpreted as a home for a racially defined and homogenous Malay community. Such representations of heritage de-emphasised diversity and the cultural intermingling with fellow Muslim communities as unwanted components of Malayness. In contrast to the previously practised *masuk Melayu* and the once relatively widespread idea of the pan-Islamic umma, this change in attitude towards an exclusive definition of Malayness contained the vital components, i.e. rigid racial categorisations, of what would later become known as the Singapore's government policy of multiracialism. The self-definition of Malays as a homogenous group along racial lines, set off by their nationalist leaders and quickly popular, made their integration into the post-independence CMIO-scheme easier to process. The new racial definitions of Malayness and the prominence of Malay activism in Kampong Glam meant that the district was increasingly linked with Malay nationalist ideas as opposed to its more cosmopolitan and pan-Islamic character of the 19th century (Hanna 1966).

In the wake of race riots between the Chinese and Malays in the 1960s, this fact rendered the area's ethnic heritage problematic especially after Singapore's 'divorce' from Malaysia as a predominantly Chinese city-state. The association with Malay communalism (and occasionally radicalism) still haunts the representation of Kampong Glam's Malay-Muslim heritage. Such association is an important cause for the current portrayal of the trading legacy of the Arabs over an emphasis of Malay empowerment and cultural development.

The first two decades after independence in 1965: the CMIO-scheme and cultural heritage

After independence, Singapore's government agencies quickly began to emphasise the ethnically diverse heritage of the city-state for tourism purposes. However, the STB initially presented ethnic heritage only at central locations in purposefully created themed places, featuring select components (e.g. handicraft, cuisine) of the ethnic culture. Compared to these 'instant' attractions, the stories of the real ethno-cultural heritage districts such as Kampong Glam were relatively more problematic to

present. It was only gradually that the Singapore government became more confident in publicly displaying heritage in its original surroundings, mostly as a means to upholding traditional Asian values since 'governing elites noted with great apprehension the increasing Westernisation of Singapore' (Chang and Yeoh 1999: 104). Prompted by such fears, Singapore's URA gazetted heritage districts in 1989, enabling partner agencies such as the STB to showcase various ethnic groups and their cultures for tourists and locals alike (Saunders 2005). Some re-interpretation of ethnic legacies had to be undertaken for their display at traditional ethnic heritage sites, particularly in Kampong Glam with its reputation as a centre for Malay nationalism.

Heritage in Kampong Glam 1989–1999 – the litmus test for nation building?

The URA (1989) officially designated Kampong Glam as Singapore's Malay-Muslim heritage district but no improvement of the historic shophouses was undertaken for some years though the refurbishment of Chinatown's built heritage was already in full swing (see Yeoh and Kong 1994). This can be explained by the particular part Kampong Glam had in the struggle for independence. The district's previous role as a venue for emerging Malay nationalism and Muslim communalism was not considered to be an adequate symbol for multicultural harmony as envisioned by Singapore's nation building policy (Kahn 2006). The government was uneasy about Malay Muslim history and was therefore reluctant to highlight its legacy at a central location, resulting in prolonged urban decay in Kampong Glam.

Singapore's Malay community did not actively support the revitalisation of the district either. Since most Singaporeans including Malays had been re-settled to new towns on the periphery, centrally located Kampong Glam was relatively inconvenient to frequent for daily necessities such as grocery shopping. Land reclamation had eliminated its harbour function. Singaporean Malays were also largely oblivious of the key role that Kampong Glam had played in the struggle for independence. After all, this mission was accomplished, independence had been achieved but special privileges were only granted to Malays in Malaysia. All this had apparently left Kampong Glam without any essential function for Singaporean Malays and revitalisation would have to start by finding a new meaning for the district's heritage. Kampong Glam had many roles in history. It was trading post, royal precinct, pan-Islamic pilgrim hub *and* centre for Malay communalist activities. Cultural policy makers who had only recently drafted the strategy of heritage enhancement against westernisation were aware of the rich history of Kampong Glam but as yet unable to make a meaningful interpretation (Muzaini 2002).

However, the equal treatment of all cultures as the axiom of Singapore's nation building made it imperative that the Malay Muslim community had a heritage district similar to the Chinese and Indian communities (Yeoh and Huang 1996). Accordingly, the heritage awareness campaign of 1989 aptly identified three inner-city areas as ethnic heritage districts, with Chinatown and Little India sparking little controversy. Given its historical record, Kampong Glam was the natural and legitimate choice to represent the Malay and Muslim community (URA 1991). However, the question of precisely whose heritage to present in Kampong Glam remained. Planners were in a quandary. The showcasing of a Malay-Muslim heritage district was required for

FIGURE 3 Shop houses on Kampong Glam's North Bridge Road in 2006. Photo by D. Tantow.

nation building, but divisive elements closely associated with Kampong Glam, such as Malay activism and Muslim communalism, should remain unmentioned.

One solution was to pay lip service only to the heritage district of Kampong Glam for revitalisation and the enhancement of ethnic heritage in the area. This deficient approach was practised up to the mid 1990s in Kampong Glam when the district was initially overlooked in conservation (Fig. 3). Most Singaporean Malays tended to gravitate to the less central Geylang Serai for ethnic food or clothing. Since 1985, the 'Malay Village', a replica of a Malay kampung, had opened its doors as a heritage attraction in Geylang Serai, rendering the 'added-value' of Kampong Glam as a heritage district ever more questionable. A further emphasis on Geylang Serai and its Malay vernacular culture, however, would leave Singaporean Malays without connection to their urban legacy. Moreover, the progressing refurbishment efforts in Chinatown (and to lesser degree in Little India), made the neglect of Kampong Glam and its Malay-Muslim heritage unsustainable in the long run. The head of the URA's conservation department, Kelvin Ang, explained that given the situation, the implementation of a commercial flagship project in Kampong Glam was to boost the revitalisation of the area.[4]

When the commercial flagship of Bussorah 'mall' (a pedestranised street with shophouses) in the heart of Kampong Glam was completed, the STB took over promotional activities. In cooperation with its marketing partner, the Kampong Glam business association, the STB initiated an ideology-free advertising campaign, which did not feature

[4]Personal communication, 22 April 2008.

substantial information about ethnic history. Unlike Chinatown, for instance, Kampong Glam does not have informative signposting, as a manager of the STB's 'Attractions Division' acknowledges.[5] If anything cultural at all, Arab heritage was highlighted with the initiation of an exoticising 'Sultan of Spice' walking tour, which featured visits of selected shops along Bussorah Street. When concentrating on ethno-cultural history, similar themes on the Arab trading legacy subsequently substituted local Malay-Muslim heritage in the core zone of Kampong Glam. Despite such teething troubles the new openness towards a prominent display of Malay Muslim heritage in Singapore's urban fabric was a major step forward for a balanced representation of historic areas in the 1980s (Tantow 2009).

Recent developments since the late 1990s: a rediscovery of cosmopolitan Muslim heritage

Another ethnic policy adjustment took place during the 1990s. The Singapore government began experimenting with defining racial categories less rigidly and allowing some leeway for hybrid cultures and cosmopolitan connections in heritage representations. In order to make Singaporeans 'naturally' appreciative of foreign cultural influences, the government aimed at re-shaping Singapore's urban environment into a 'global hub for the arts and culture' (Neo 2010). Singaporeans (even those who do not travel) would become more accustomed to those cosmopolitan influences (Yeoh and Huang 2004). Specially designed policies were initiated, 'aimed at re-imaging Singapore as a culturally vibrant "Renaissance City"' (Yeoh 2003: 11). State agencies such as the STB and URA acted accordingly and earmarked transnational components of heritage for presentation to local and foreign visitors (STB 1996). For Kampong Glam, the STB focused on maritime and Arab elements of the port settlement's history for heritage representation to indicate the nation's cosmopolitan past as a potent resource for ever more global interconnectedness in the future. The good news for the district was that its ethnic attractions – yet to be defined as Malay, Arab or generally 'Muslim' – were now eligible for enhanced marketing. Kampong Glam's former role as a port settlement and pilgrim tourism hub was useful as the STB and URA re-interpreted Malayness according to pre-war *masuk Melayu* emphasising Arab components of its heritage. The term 'renaissance city' was especially coined to tie the government's cosmopolitanism-inspired social engineering to Singapore's historic legacy as an open port city and maritime hub.

While the government expect Singaporeans to adopt a cosmopolitan perspective on culture as citizens of a 'global hub', its underlying legal framework on racial and ethnic policy, the CMIO scheme, remains unchanged. The blurring of distinctiveness in Singapore's ethnicities is still discouraged in many fields and affirmative action for minorities is ruled out. Singapore's Malay minority community, particularly, is below the nationwide average in income and education and socioeconomic data indicates that the community is relatively poorly networked beyond the region (Stimpfl 2006). This suggests that Singaporean Malays have relatively little in common with the transnational merchant elite or global business class the government started to highlight for heritage representation in Kampong Glam. The Malay community has mixed feelings about the 'renaissance city' theme of Kampong Glam and its implicit re-interpretation of

[5]Quek Ling Xiang, personal communication, 11 June 2009.

Malayness. The pride in seeing Kampong Glam more prominently represented among the city-state's heritage districts is coupled with the fear of distorting the area's Malay legacy. A Malay business owner elaborates:

> I think that, yes, the URA's efforts of conservation are much appreciated here. We need the heritage here and the tourists to come and see. But in all those years, the tourism board [the STB] as such has not done a lot for Malays. So now they come with all these initiatives and sometimes I am confused what they want. They must understand that Kampong Glam is all we have in Singapore.[6]

Despite many Singaporean Malays' reservation about identifying with the cosmopolitan turn of heritage representation in Kampong Glam, the re-interpretation of Malayness offers an opportunity finally to step out of the shadow of Chinatown and Little India when it comes to displaying an urban trading legacy. However, the shift in emphasis is not without pitfalls as exemplified by the changing character of Bussorah Street in the landscaping of the district's main artery and the subsequent marketing of this flagship project as an open-air 'mall'. The new pedestrian space which had featured subtle Arab architectural elements in the mid 1990s was steadily extended with ornamentation of Middle Eastern mosaic or geometric tile design (Fig. 4), followed by 'gateway arches' (Fig. 5) to the main artery in 2011.

One aspect of the exercise with its Arab theme could be the courting of Middle Eastern tourists though they only account for 0.8% (STB 2008) of approximately 10 million tourists. Even for Kampong Glam as the Muslim-Muslim heritage district, the tourism count conducted during my fieldwork (February 2008) – albeit not statistically significant – was only a slightly higher share of 1.76% of Middle Eastern tourists on the spot. Furthermore, an Arab theme simply due to tourism demand for a particular group would be against official tourism policy which seeks to make Singapore a Muslim-friendly destination by providing certain amenities (such as a halal food guide), but does not generally single out specific areas for Muslim visitors (Henderson 2010). The efforts to 'restore' Bussorah Street went beyond simply catering to perceived demand in popular tourism.

The background for such a focus on the Middle East was the inter-regional connection of the Arab-Hadraumat pilgrim brokers (from the southwest Arabian Peninsula) of Kampong Glam, who had turned Singapore into a pilgrim tourism hub by the end of the 19th century. The hub served as 'a bridge across time' to the late 20th century with its cosmopolitan fervour, when the government's latest cultural policy adjustment required a contribution from Singapore's ethnic heritage districts to underline the city's legacy as a 'tourism capital' and 'global city' (Chang and Lim 2004). The tourism legacy of Kampong Glam matched perfectly – with the exception of a detail, namely the low profile of the Malays in the pilgrim business. Historically, Arab traders organised the haj travel with the help of the Bugis[7] from eastern Indonesia. Thus Kampong Glam's Muslim legacy played a role in the representation of cosmopolitan heritage (Fig. 5) except that the local Malay contribution was largely missing. With such a pragmatic

[6]Personal communication, 24 February 2008.

[7]A Malay ethnic group that was excluded from the narrow definition of 'Malay' according to *bangsa Melayu* practice in Singapore since the 1950s (Kahn 2006).

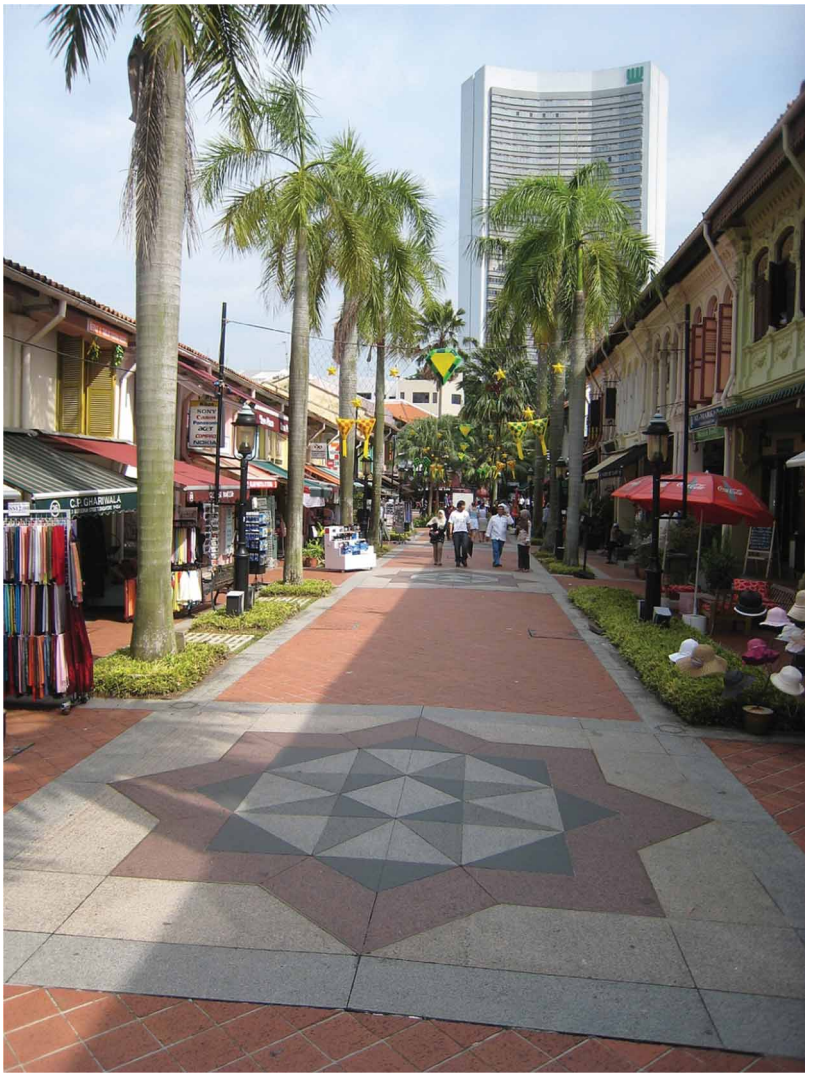

FIGURE 4 Bussorah Street with tile design. Photo by D. Tantow 2009.

emphasis, the sensitivities of the Malay community were subordinate. Since some tourism planners continued to believe that local Malay heritage lacked the marketable and policy-conforming cosmopolitan component, its representation once again was side-stepped.

While Kampong Glam's local Malay-Muslim heritage of communalism and activism was indeed less frowned upon after the cosmopolitan turn in heritage representation, it still remained marginalised because international connections were deemed to be absent. The Singapore government continued to construct Singapore-Malay culture as inward-looking, rural and homogenous after independence and ignored existing transnational Malay networks in official representations of heritage. After secession from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore was suspicious of transnational Malay networks and primarily considered them as a security threat (Kahn 2006). In principle, the government's recent

FIGURE 5 Pointed gateway arch to Muscat Street next to the T-junction with Bussorah Street. Sultan Mosque is on the right. Photo by D. Tantow 2012.

cosmopolitan turn provides an opportunity for a more prominent showcasing of Malay heritage, but Singapore's Malay community must play an active part in scripting its contributions to cosmopolitanism for an accurate representation. Prompted by the STB's relentless emphasising of global connections, numerous newspaper articles have begun to stress the cosmopolitan environment and 'Arab buzz' in Kampong Glam over its 'Malayness' (cf. Yong 2007). Most press reports agree that the district has become trendy and beginning to draw a reasonably huge crowd of mostly young visitors especially on weekends (cf. Yong 2007). Given the under-representation of Malay culture in cosmopolitan rhetoric so far, it is worth enquiring why Kampong Glam's Malay community has not contested the unduly dominating Arab component.

Cosmopolitanism and Malayness – a mismatch?

The Singapore government, always quick to categorise its citizens according to race and social status, did not intend to apply its cosmopolitan aspirations to all Singaporeans (Barr and Skrbiš 2008). Applying an inherently elitist approach of classical cosmopolitanism (cf. Pietersee 2006), cosmopolitan Singaporeans were defined as business-savvy

degree holders who travelled frequently and took up key positions in the public and private sectors. Complementary to its cosmopolitan elite, however, Singapore is also home to a population the government labels as 'heartlanders', average or low income individuals who live in public housing estates (and whose life is centred around these 'New Towns') as opposed to private housing developments. In the recent decade, a striking 99% of Malays falls into that category, the national average is about 85% (Chih 2003; Rahim 1998). Given these contemporary circumstances, it is not hard to imagine why the cosmopolitan traits in the history of Singapore's Malay community were easily overlooked and why the community's ability to eventually represent a cosmopolitan Singapore in the future was likewise put into question. It seems that one possible result of such perceptions is that Malay and Muslim heritage has been divided into an Arab-cosmopolitan and a local 'heartlander' Malay component. Some members of the Malay community have begun to engage in self-orientalisation, deeming their community unfit to be part of Singapore's cosmopolitan legacy. A Malay office worker on lunch break explains:

> Us Malays are mostly located in the East and most are most comfortable there, for instance at Geylang Serai. City life is too complicated. With or without conservation, the nostalgic heydays of Kampong Glam in the 1950s are over.[8]

Ultimately, some Malay community leaders came to define the relatively peripheral Geylang Serai neighbourhood as the 'cultural heart of the Malay community' (Ismail 2009) and a possible substitute for Kampong Glam. Accordingly, the STB website states that ever since the British dissolved a floating Malay village on the Singapore River in the 1840s, the Malays had moved to the periphery and subsequently 'congregated in Geylang', with a second wave of migration to the outskirt area following the urbanisation of Kampong Glam in the 1920s (STB 2009). Geylang Serai is now promoted as Malay 'heartland', where visitors can gaze at locally rooted Malay culture. In contrast, Malay culture in Kampong Glam is often merely referenced for its role in the past, mentioning the *istana* as the historic seat of Malay royalty.

Ismail (2009) furthers this dichotomy in his contributing chapter 'Maintaining identity in a globalised world'. This well intended intellectual effort to spare Geylang Serai from gentrification and high profile marketing is unfortunate because it perpetuates a siege mentality, depicting local Malay culture as fundamentally incongruent with tourism and cosmopolitan transnational connections. The supposition is that fellow Muslim groups like the Arabs of Kampong Glam should once again act as mediators of Malay interests. They would take over the representation of the Malays when it comes to super-communal matters such as showcasing a global heritage attraction in Kampong Glam, while peripheral Geylang Serai serves as a sanctuary for Malay lived culture and remains best untouched or minimally influenced by tourism. Ironically, such an action of fellow Muslim migrant groups on behalf of the local Malays is exactly what caused their socio-cultural marginalisation and the neglect of Malay heritage in the first place.

This common splitting of Malay-Muslim heritage into Arab-international and Malay-local by government agencies such as the STB and some Malay community

[8]Personal communication, 3 March 2008.

TABLE 2 Textual analysis of Kampong Glam's heritage portrayed in guidebooks

Ethnic representation of Kampong Glam in guidebooks– predominant mention of ethnicity or cultural affiliation in %					
Regional focus of guidebook	Kampong Glam as … Malay (%)	Kampong Glam as … Arab (%)	Kampong Glam as … Bugis & transnational Malay (%)	Kampong Glam as … Muslim/ Islamic unspecified (%)	Tie of Muslim (general) and Arab (specific) representation (%)
Singapore	13.3	20	20	40	6.7
Singapore & Malaysia	25	50	0	25	0
Several SE Asian countries, including Singapore	33.33	0	0	66.7	0

Source: compiled from 22 contemporary guidebooks featuring Kampong Glam.

representatives affected the heritage representation in international travel literature. Singapore's tourism board is resourceful and takes a key role in shaping Islamic tourism to Singapore and in determining respective heritage sites and their characteristics (Henderson 2010). Despite abundant resources, the complex splitting of an Arab-international and Malay-local component of heritage proved hard to communicate and resulted in a fairly random representation of Kampong Glam in travel promotion. The suggestions provided range from 'Arab quarter' (frequently featured by the STB) to 'Malay district' (initially favoured by the URA), and have only recently led to a predominant compound representation as 'Malay *and* Muslim precinct'.[9]

The long lasting uncertainty about the ethno-cultural labelling of Kampong Glam by Singaporean stakeholders is reflected in the district's inconsistent representation in tourism guidebooks (Table 2). Most refer to an unspecified 'Islamic' or 'Muslim' label when introducing Kampong Glam particularly for guidebooks with a broad geographical scope and a comparatively short section on Singapore heritage. Malaysian and local guidebooks prefer the Arab affiliation over a Malay emphasis. Only the most closely focused guidebooks, geographically limited to Singapore, mention a cosmopolitan Malay component, highlighting the Bugis and other Malay groups as transnational traders.

As a counter-narrative to the common construction of Malayness as 'anti-cosmopolitan', some new initiatives are indeed aimed at acknowledging Malay contributions to Singapore's interconnectedness. Zainul Abidin, Chairman of the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF), states that historical connections between Singaporean Malays 'and their Bugis, Javanese, Boyanese and Acehnese cousins from Indonesia' are something a future

[9]Quek Ling Xiang, STB spokesperson for Kampong Glam, personal communication, 11 June 2009.

exhibition in Kampong Glam's Malay Heritage Centre should 'dive into'.[10] He and other MHF representatives do not believe in the gap between Malayness and cosmopolitan connections. Kampong Glam remains a focal point of the Malay community but revitalisation requires some effort. The foundation promotes 'Heritage on the Move', a travelling exhibition to different venues in Singapore's heartlands to strengthen community ties with Kampong Glam. A public lecture series covers different aspects of Malayness with a recent session explicitly focusing on Malay heritage and Kampong Glam's maritime connections. Ancient Malay intra-regional connections have gradually become more prominent and have occasionally made their way into official representations of heritage, for instance in the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). A Bugis trading ship replica in the MHC compound provided a temporary emphasis of a legacy of transnational networks of the Malay community. In mid 2012, the ship was removed for refurbishment of the centre and it is unclear whether it will be displayed upon completion of works.

Initiatives for the highlighting of the cosmopolitan aspects of Malay heritage are only now slowly increasing. Many existing initiatives had only limited success in changing the representations of Malay heritage as powerful imaginations of the Arab community as the only 'true' cosmopolitans among Singapore's Muslim people remain in place and are hard to overcome (Kahn 2006). The constructed dichotomy between simple/peripheral Geylang with its 'lived culture' and urban/glamorous Kampong Glam does not help the cause since Kampong Glam is frequently depicted as 'un-Malay' owing to its historical associations replete with foreign visitors, migrants and global influences (Imran 2007).

However, the STB's new nomenclature of Kampong Glam as 'Malay and Muslim' leaves room for cosmopolitan representations of the Malay community. Travelling exhibitions and lecture series inform Singaporeans about Kampong Glam's significance for Malay history. The annual Ramadan Bazaar in Kampong Glam is increasingly popular and brings new faces to the area. A Malay shop owner says:

> Not only in Geylang, but here too, the essence of Malay culture has survived. This is where people come to buy the *baju kurong* [traditional female dress] and *songkok* [headdress], from all over town. We aim for the Malay and Arab middle class and we notice customers are coming back to Kampong Glam. The historic feel here is real. People notice and return.[11]

Ultimately, both Geylang and Kampong Glam show different valuable aspects of Malay culture in Singapore. The mental gap between exclusionary Singaporean 'Malayness' and a more cosmopolitan representation of Malay Muslim heritage historically based on *masuk Melayu* has been reduced though not closed.

Conclusion

Kampong Glam has a cosmopolitan legacy from the colonial era when the district served as a melting pot for Muslim migrant and local/regional Malay cultures. Muslim

[10] *Straits Times,* 28 March 2009, p. 27

[11] Personal communication, 3 March 2008.

migrants could initially be accepted as Malay through *masuk Melayu*. A growing frustration of Singapore's indigenous Malay community with the patronising attitude of the Arab and Indian Muslim elite, however, caused subsequent calls for emancipation. *Bangsa Melayu*, a racial and more territorial definition of Malayness became prevalent after 1945 when the future progress of Singapore's Malays was believed to be achieved by a spatial and cultural separation of local Malays from urban environments and other Muslim migrant groups. Subsequently, communalism and activism of the ever more exclusionist definition of the Malay community became a major obstacle for the prominent display of Malay heritage after independence. When the multicultural state of Singapore engaged in nation building after 1965, Kampong Glam's venues of Malay activism were most strongly recalled for triggering race riots. The cultural achievements of the district's Malay community and its urban buzz, on the other hand, were then largely ignored.

In terms of heritage representation after independence, Kampong Glam has since then taken on the constant role of the latecomer. Even though it became an official heritage district in 1989 along with Chinatown and Little India, no improvement initiatives followed since it remained unclear what Kampong Glam was meant to represent. Finally, a commercial flagship project on Bussorah Street was initiated to halt the severe decay, albeit without making much progress in terms of defining the cultural heritage in Kampong Glam. This waiting game has made the local Malay and Muslim heritage vulnerable to distortions.

Indications for this vulnerability appeared up in the 1990s when the Singapore government embarked cosmopolitan cultural policies to correct the orientalisation of local Malays as village-dwellers. Tourism brokers, led by the STB, saw the opportunity to finally represent Malay and Muslim heritage in Kampong Glam more prominently and hastily re-constructed the legacy of transnational maritime connections of the former port settlement. The STB had, however, underestimated the persistence of powerful stereotypes about Malays as locally rooted, non-enterprising rural inhabitants (today, suburban heartlanders), which other government agencies had only partially tackled or ignored. The persistence of such stereotypes led to a paradoxical perception of cultural qualities which hindered and delayed the representation of Malay heritage at a time of potential opportunity. If Kampong Glam is cosmopolitan – so the simple but misleading supposition goes – it cannot be Malay in character (cf. Ismail 2009). An 'Arab buzz' was unduly pushed to compensate for ostensible 'Malay shortcomings' so that Singapore's nation building project of an interconnected global city state could proceed smoothly. The representation of Kampong Glam as 'less Malay than Arab' is thus not self-evident, but a consequence of a narrow conceptualisation of Malay heritage and an exclusionary take on Malayness. Recent initiatives to boost the Malay character of Kampong Glam are best understood in the context of initial neglect of existing Malay contributions to cosmopolitan connections.

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