



TOWARDS A COSMOPOLITAN MUSLIM IDENTITY:  
SINGAPOREAN MUSLIMS IN A GLOBALIZING  
WORLD

BY

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degree of Master of Arts in Muslim World Issues

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research attempts to critically examine the evolving identity of Singaporean Muslim society. Muslims in Singapore constitute a dominant minority group and plays influential role in maintaining the stability of Singapore as a harmonious multicultural and secular state. As Singapore is a highly globalized city state, Singaporean Muslims are thus very much influenced by the forces of globalization. This thesis seeks to understand and unravel how globalization influences and brings new trajectories to the religious identity of the Singaporean Muslims as they live as faithful members of the Islamic faith, while also trying to resonate with their status as a minority group in a largely secular and modernizing Singapore. Cosmopolitan identity is suggested as the way forward in this thesis as it enables Muslims in Singapore to embrace multiple identities. This concept of cosmopolitanism, while popularly attributed to Immanuel Kant, is inherently a concept promoted by Islam. This thesis brings into perspective the socio-historical examples of the Islamic tradition in addressing the issue of cosmopolitan society. It also discusses extensively the context of Singapore political landscape and explains how Muslims, as a minority group co-exist successfully while staying true to their Islamic faith and construct their progressive identity as Muslims as well as contributing citizens of Singapore.

## ملخص البحث

يرمي هذا البحث إلى فحص دقيق للهوية المتطورة للمجتمع المسلم في سنغافورة حيث يشكل المسلمون أقلية مهيمنة ولهم دور مؤثر في الحفاظ على استقرار سنغافورة كدولة علمانية متناغمة ومتعددة الثقافات. ونسبة لأن سنغافورة دولة مدنية معولة للغاية لذلك يتأثر المسلمون السنغافوريون بقوى العولمة إلى حد كبير. تسعى هذه الأطروحة إلى فهم وكشف كيفية تأثير العولمة و ما تجلبه من مسارات جديدة للهوية الدينية للمسلمين السنغافوريين، ولكونهم يعيشون كأعضاء مؤمنين بالعقيدة الإسلامية، فهم يطمحون ان تبقى هذه العقيدة معهم كأقلية في دولة علمانية. ويقترح الباحث في هذه الأطروحة تحديد هوية علمية خاصة بالمسلمين كطريق للتقدم إلى الأمام، لأن سنغافورة تحتضن اجناس متعددة . وهذا المفهوم "الكونية في الاسلام" رغم انه ينسب عموماً الى إيمانويل كانط الا انه في جوهره مفهوم يتبناه الإسلام. وسوف تجلب هذه الأطروحة في المنظور العام أمثلة إجتماعية و تاريخية للتقاليد الإسلامية في معالجة قضية المجتمع العالمي. كذلك تتطرق هذه الأطروحة وبنطاق واسع لسياق المشهد السياسي في سنغافورة، و تشرح كيف أن المسلمين كأقلية تتعايش مع الاخرينجاح مع الوفاء لعقيدهم الإسلامية و بناء هويتهم التدريجي كمسلمين فضلا عن انهم مواطنون سنغافوريون.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in Muslim World Issues.

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Ahmad F. Yousif  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in Muslim World Issues.

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**TOWARDS A COSMOPOLITAN MUSLIM IDENTITY:  
SINGAPOREAN MUSLIMS IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD**

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Alhamdulillah, all praises be to Allah s.w.t, the Master of Knowledge, the Educator of Humanity, for bestowing and impart intellectual capacity to humankind. Peace and blessings be upon the beloved Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. for transforming human societies from darkness to enlightenment, from ignorance to progress.

It is through the living example of the beloved Prophet s.a.w that Muslims are able to live and co-exist peacefully in different geographical localities and across time and era. The tradition left by the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w has indeed been a progressive and evolving and the eternal values and principles taught will always be relevant in the changing context of human societies. His enduring teachings of resilience, progressiveness and humility will continue to provide eternal guidance to humanity.

I am deeply humbled to be given various opportunities in the course of researching and writing for this thesis. The writing of this thesis has not been easy. However, the support and encouragement given by many people around me has been very positive.

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This thesis is far from perfect, however it is hope this humble efforts of studying the Muslims in Singapore will add to the richness of academic research that will benefit the *ummah*-at-large. Amin.

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# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization and post-modern world, the question of identity forms an important aspect that shapes and determines the socio-religious and socio-political landscape of today's world. Identity politics has been one of the most vital issues that plagued many societies around the world. It has been one of the key focuses of the post-colonial discourse. The questions of belonging, adherence, and loyalty are among essential factors that led to successful development of a society. Failures to address these questions effectively have led to major conflicts plaguing our world today. However, the conflicts arising today are not merely the by-product of our contemporary times, but are embedded in our historical development that shaped the make-up of the global community today.

First of all, the emergence of the nation-state system in the post-colonial era has redefined boundaries and shaped the interactions and exchanges between people. After the end of the colonization and western imperialism in post-World War Two, several independence states were formed with its boundaries defined by their former colonialists. The drawing up of boundaries by the former colonialist has led to various conflicts, including the Palestine-Israeli conflict, and the India-Pakistan conflict over the ownership of Kashmir. Additionally, many of these created nation-states are made up of heterogenous populations upon their independence as many immigrants had settled in, with some outnumbering the native populations during the colonization period. This has in fact resulted into many of the nation-states today to be made up of heterogeneous societies where identity markers play essential roles in shaping the

patterns of interactions and status of livelihood between people of diverse ethnic and religious groups.

Southeast Asia is a clear example to attest to this reality. Historically, the countries in this region have been colonized by the Dutch, Americans, Portuguese, Spaniards and British for hundreds of years. As a result, the region today is made up of diverse ethnic communities and home to several major religions of the world. However, prior to western imperialism, Southeast Asia has always been one of the key cultural crossroads, where Sinic, Hindu and Islamic civilizations have been co-existing. The Western-Christian civilization came together with the colonization. Today, Thailand and Myanmar (formerly Burma) are made up of majority Buddhists populations, while the Philippines being dominantly Catholics, with Muslims form one of the significant minorities in these countries. Indonesia, combined with Malaysia and Brunei on the other hand are dominantly Muslims, with Christians, Hindus and Buddhists forming significant number of minorities in Indonesia and Malaysia. In the case of Singapore, it is in a *sui generis* (unique) position. It is dominantly populated by the ethnic Chinese populations who are generally descendants of immigrants from the mainland China brought in by the British, where the Muslims, which the majority of them made up of the ethnic Malays are the native population which today constitute the numerical minorities of its population. At the same time, Singapore is geographically located between Malaysia and Indonesia, which led Singapore being dubbed as “the little red dot in a sea of green”<sup>1</sup>.

However, what exactly entails an identity of the nation? Is nation a social construct? According to Benedict Anderson, nations in essence are merely ‘imagined’

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Little Red Dot’ is a label given by former President of Indonesia, B.J. Habibie to describe Singapore as being a non-Muslim states situated between Muslim countries.

entities, which are socially constructed<sup>2</sup>. He believed that nations cannot be considered as actual communities as their notion of ‘communities’ were essentially an imagination of the people of a particular group who perceived themselves as the members belonging to that group.<sup>3</sup> These ‘imagined communities’ has however played significant role in determining their identity, with racial and religious markers and sometimes the conflation of both being utilized to determine their sense of identity. The national narratives, shared historical experiences, national symbols form the essential elements that defines one national identity. However, within a nation-state where multiple identities do exist as a result of the co-existing of various ethnic and religious groups, ethnic and religious conflicts may occur when nation-building project has either failed, or when racial politics are being utilized by the political actors to gain electoral votes.

The focus on the nation-state systems in identity constructions has been the dominant discourse of post-colonial era, however the onslaught of globalisation has paved a way for a new post-modernist discourse. This will inevitably lead to the deconstruction of various established concept. Globalization has led society to evolve from modern to post-modern societies. Globalization has been one of the most significant phenomenon that have unleashed new dynamisms in the realm of socio-politics, socio-economic and socio-cultures. Globalization has led to unprecedented transformation to human communications, by making the world more inter-connected than ever before. This has enabled rapid increase in cross-border economic, social and technological exchange. In short, globalization is turning the world into a ‘global village’ that set to reshape global political, economic and cultural landscape. It has led

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, p. 233.

to major seismic-shift in global politics and resulted into the rethinking of identity constructions.

Globalization also affect the way religion is being perceived and practice, which eventually will reconstruct religious identity of the various religious groups. One of the potential effects of globalization is the homogenization of culture together with the dynamic increases of secularization, which both pose major challenges to faith communities around the world<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, a critical question remained to be answered if indeed globalization brings more challenges or actually provided prospects for the future of faith. Post-modernist discourse attempts to postulate that the world we are living today is not fundamentally a secularized world, but indeed we are moving towards a post-secular society, where religion and secularism are in the political terms regarded as ‘zero-sum-game’<sup>5</sup>. Instead, religion clearly still matters and remains one of the most important factors that help to shape the global politics. Clearly, religion will not be diluted because of globalization but will continue to flourish by hopping on the tide of globalization. What is thus important is to ensure a peaceful co-existence between various faith communities that is committed to a certain form of universal values and ethics. The cosmopolitan identity will therefore help to explain the evolving identity that promotes this sense of universality and identifying a common denominator among humankind, in contrast to Samuel Huntington’s argument that conflict will continue to exist between nations with its primary axis will be along cultural and religious lines.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: SAGE Publications, 2008) p.159.

<sup>5</sup> Jurgen Habermas, Notes on Post-Secular Society, in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 25, 2008, pp.17–29, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). pp. 19-20.

In this regard, cosmopolitanism as a global political theory reinvigorated a new dynamism to the discourse of identity-politics, including to faith communities-at-large. Cosmopolitanism emphasizes moral obligations, together with the recognition of both unity and diversity of the human race. It goes beyond pluralism and multiculturalism and maintains recognition of the universal and the global. It allows people to have multiple identities, allegiance and interests<sup>7</sup>. It emphasises on effective communication between people of different religious, racial, political and sexual denominators in paving the way for peaceful co-existence<sup>8</sup>. For the Islamic faith, the recognition of unity and diversity of humankind is clearly being upheld in its primary texts, the Quran and the *Sunnah*. Though the term cosmopolitanism is absent from the vocabulary of classical Islamic thought, the concept is arguably not fully at odds with the tradition of Islam. It is important to assess the viability and compatibility of cosmopolitanism in the light of Islamic teachings in the contemporary context.

This research attempts to critically examine the evolving identity of Muslims in Singapore. Commonly known as the Singaporean Muslims, the Muslims community constitute a dominant minority group and plays an influential role in maintaining the stability of Singapore as a multicultural and secular state. Being a small republic and one of the most industrialized nations in Southeast Asia, Singapore has been four times named as “the most globalized nation” by the United States-based Foreign Policy magazine<sup>9</sup>. Singaporean Muslims are consequently very much

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<sup>7</sup> Amartya, Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), p.137.

<sup>8</sup> Kwane Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics In A World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006) pp.xvii-xxi.

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Policy, *The Globalization Index 2007*. 11 October, 2011. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2007/10/11/the\\_globalization\\_index\\_2007](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2007/10/11/the_globalization_index_2007). Retrieved 18 May 2013.

influenced by the forces of globalization and arguably one of the most globalized Muslim community.

This thesis henceforth seeks to understand how globalization shape and bring new trajectories to religious identity of the Singaporean Muslim-minority in the context of Singapore being a secular republic with multi-religious and multi-racial populations, under the auspice of a dominant one-party- political system.

In the second chapter, this thesis will focus on the conflation between Muslims and the Malay race. While Muslims in other parts of the globe are generally not confined to any particular ethnicity, including the Arabs, Muslims in the Singapore and Malaysia are generally assumed to be of the Islamic faith. There are however a small but growing numbers of Malays who have renounced Islam, and this issue is a sensitive one in both nations which is often being swept under the carpet. Nonetheless, Islam continues to be almost synonymous with being Malay as the traditions and cultures are embedded intrinsically by the Islamic faith. In the past, people of other ethnic groups who have converted to Islam had to adopt the Malay name culture and traditions. Subsequently becoming Malays, in what is known as “*masuk Melayu*”. In Singapore today, the term Malay/Muslim is used in the media, and by politicians and community leaders to refer to the Malay/Muslim community. It is however important to note that not all Muslims are of the Malay ethnicity. There are significant number of Indian or of the South Asian descents, Chinese who had mainly converted to Islam, the Arabs and a small minority of Caucasians who has embraced Islam. Even so, the discourse on Islam in Singapore is mainly attributed to the Malay ethnicity, resulting into the conflation between Islam and the Malay ethnicity. Major issues of the Malay community are therefore regarded as the Islamic issues as well, and Muslims of other ethnicity are generally regarded as being part of the larger Malay/Muslim community.

This chapter will discuss in depth this conflation of Malay/Muslim identity by highlighting the origin of Islam in the region and its development in Singapore, and bring into focus the perception towards Islam through critically analyzing the notion of “*The Malay Problem*” from the time of the colonial period to post-independence Singapore.

In the third chapter, this thesis will discuss the evolving identity of the Singaporean Muslims through analyzing the aspect of cosmopolitanism embedded in the multicultural experience of the Muslim community in Singapore. In doing so, this research will critically analyze the roles played by the religious institutions through focussing on the *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore - MUIS), and the mosque institution in Singapore. MUIS is a statutory board under the purview of the Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY) making it a government-related entity, The relations played by MUIS in transmitting the cosmopolitan values to Singaporean Muslims is crucial in instilling confidence for the Singaporean Muslims to live their lives as faithful members of the faith, as member of multicultural Singapore society, and as the member of global community to a large extent.

In addition to these institutions, the special legal positions of the Muslims community will also be addressed in this chapter. Despite being a secular state, with the Muslims being one of the minorities, Singaporean constitution attests to the special position of the Malays and the Islamic faith. Muslims in Singapore are exempted from being included in some of the common law such as in the matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance and religious endowments (*waqf*). The Administration of the Muslims Law Act (AMLA), guided by the Syariah system co-exist with common law system in Singapore. The Syariah Court (SYC) applies special laws

enacted exclusively for Singaporean Muslims and the decision is legally binding which cannot be challenged in the High Court. This clearly shows a formal model of legal pluralism where aspects of the Syariah can be enacted exclusively for the Muslims community and had been well received by the Muslims in Singapore and by the secular state. In addition to these special legal provisions for Muslims, the interfaith and inter-religious relations between Singaporean Muslims and people of other faiths and ethnicity will also be discussed in this chapter. The aspect of integration and interfaith relations is crucial in understanding the cosmopolitan nature of the Singaporean Muslims as they interact with the 'Others. Beyond inter-ethnic and inter-religious integration and relations, this chapter will also analyze the establishment of the Muslim-based *Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation* (RLAF) which focuses in providing humanitarian assistance to people of all racial and religious groups, locally and globally. This Foundation has indeed demonstrate the cosmopolitan nature of Singaporean Muslims as they readily lend help and assistance to fellow members of humanity regardless of their religious affiliations.

In the fourth chapter, this thesis will discuss the challenges facing the Malay/Muslim community as they seek to live as faithful Muslims while adhering to the secular principles of the state. In the case of Islamic education, Singaporean Muslims strongly lobby for their rights to maintain the existence of their religious schools for Muslim students. There are six full-time Islamic schools known as the *madrasah* currently operating full-time and self-funded by the community. In the 1990s, the Singapore government questioned the credibility and effectiveness of *madrasah* institutions. Several politicians expressed concern with regards to the quality of the *madrasah* graduate and their prospects of thriving in Singapore's economy. Other issues raised by the government include the integration aspects of the

*madrasah* students as they are educated in a homogenous Muslim environment. Therefore, concerns over their ability to integrate with the Singaporean society-at-large and to what extent they would be able to develop a sense of a national identity were raised. This chapter will critically examine this issue as it reflects a form of convergence between the secular government of Singapore and its Muslim community in their negotiation to achieve a win-win situation that bring mutual benefits to both the government and the Muslim community. The development of the *madrasah* issue as well as its resolution may well be understood as an example of the Muslim community adopting the cosmopolitan identity in ensuring the continuous existence of the *madrasah* institutions serve both the interests of the Islamic faith as well as the interest of the secular state.

In the concluding chapter, this thesis will discuss the way forward for Singaporean Muslims as they embrace the changing demography of Singapore. As a small-nation state with no natural resources, Singapore had to depend on its people for its economic well-being. The government announced in early 2013 that they are anticipating a population growth of 6.9 million of population from the existing 4 million. This implies that Singapore will be more diverse and cosmopolitan, as the population increase will be through immigration, as the total fertility rate in the republic has been very low. This population increase may also include Muslim migrants from various parts of the globe, bringing more diversity to the Muslim landscape in the republic.

This chapter will conclude by reinforcing the dynamic Muslim identity in Singapore as the embrace changes and fit themselves within the secular, multicultural and fluid Singapore society. The way forward will therefore be to embrace cosmopolitan identity as it allows one to have multiple identities and manifest it

without having to contradict one loyalty from another. This cosmopolitan identity is inherently within the Islamic paradigm and the case study of Muslims in Singapore will provide how this can be manifested effectively.

## **1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For this particular research, a content analysis approach will be utilized, resting on the available literature, including books on Islam and globalization in general as well as those specifically dealing on issues of the Muslim-minority in pluralistic secular states. This will be supplemented by a closer analysis of the relevant academic journals, working papers and reports published by renowned academic think-tanks globally, addressing the issue of globalization, cosmopolitanism and contemporary Islamic thought. This will be supplemented with open-ended interviews with segments of Muslim community in Singapore. This research will also utilize available data to provide the quantitative aspect of the studies. With regards to data on Muslims in Singapore, studies done by Singapore-based think-thanks like Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) will be based. Additionally, data collected by local Muslims institutions including Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) will help to supplement and support this research.

## **1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

While there are plethora of literature on Islam and globalization and Islam and modernity or Islam and cosmopolitanism, there have been very few researches done on Singaporean Muslims as a case study. Many of the literature on the effect of globalization on Muslims and on cosmopolitan identity are centred on the Western

societies, either in America, Europe or Australia. Muslims in Singapore, although a significant minority, are not immigrants, like their counterparts in the Western society. Therefore, choosing Muslims in Singapore as a case study will provide a fresh and unique experience and add value to the existing literature on Islam and cosmopolitanism.

In *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, Olivier Roy critically analyzed the impact of globalization on Muslim society across the globe. He identified that one-third of the total Muslim populations are living as minorities and eventually this led to the question of allegiance and identities. His research pays special attention to Muslims living as minority in various Western societies. He argued that Muslims in the West generally face challenges in reconciling their Islamic *weltanschauung* with their Western identity. This will eventually lead to the crisis of identity amongst Muslims, between staying faithfully to the religion of Islam and responding to the challenges of westernization as a result of globalization. His research suggests that the rising Islamic awareness amongst westerners Muslims has been accompanied by a surge in westernization. He therefore argued that Islamic revivalism in the west are essentially as a result of westernization, instead of the clashing of civilizations.

Tariq Ramadan's *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* similarly discussed the impact of globalization to Muslim society across the globe. He highlights that the Muslim world is not exempt for the phenomena of globalization, which "contains the paradox that at the same time it causes old traditional points of reference to disappear, it reawakens passionate affirmations of identity that often verge on withdrawal and self-exclusion".<sup>10</sup> His study of the Muslim society in the West revealed that there amongst them who resisted against westernization by adopting a bipolar vision of this

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<sup>10</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.4.

world, identifying the West as the 'Other'. Under the multiculturalism practices in many European societies, Muslims tend to set up their own ghettos and living a distinct lifestyle by exporting 'Islamic' culture inherited from their ancestral land of origins.

The literatures of both Tariq Ramadan and Olivier Roy are very essential for this thesis as it laid out the general factors that impact the Muslims community as a result of globalization. This will help in understanding the issues of identity politics facing the Muslims in Singapore. As an island city-state, Singapore is a highly globalized nation, therefore issues facing the global Muslims community will have a deep impact for the local Muslims community in Singapore.

In *Muslims as Minorities: History and Social Realities of Muslims in Singapore*, Singapore-based scholars, Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied focus on Singapore as case study of understanding the issues faced by the minorities in a secular world. Their research provides relevant foundation for this thesis. Their studies provide comprehensive insights on the issues and challenges facing the Muslim in Singapore. They argued that the issues faced by the Muslims in Singapore are fundamentally not unique to the local Muslims community. According to them, the issues and challenges facing the Muslims in Singapore are generally similar to their counterparts in the western society, as they live with the backdrop of secularized and globalizing society.

Their studies emphasised that primarily, "the turn of the turn of the new century is an age of the 'Islamic Threat'" for better or worse and that "the irruption of Islam into the political landscape is often thought of as an anachronism"<sup>11</sup>. As

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<sup>11</sup> Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Muslims as Minorities: History and Social Realities of Muslims in Singapore* (Bangi: Penerbitan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2009), pp.7-15.

Singaporean Muslims are not living in a silo and enclosed environment, they are largely affected by global development. The global war on terror which put the spotlight on Islam and Muslims seemingly provides a picture of Islam as being incompatible with the modern era. They pointed out that their studies on Muslims as minorities is however not based on prevailing discourse amongst intellectuals and laymen, which tend to single out Muslims as a homogeneous entity. Instead, they provide an alternative discourse by revisiting “the place of Islam in secular settings”, with Singapore chosen as a case study for practical and personal reasons of the authors, whom are both Singaporean Muslims.

In the first place, Muslims in Singapore are undergoing a state of transition, which put them in a complex situation of reconciling between their religious obligations and demands of the secular state. Concomitantly, in the effort to decouple religion from politics, the studied pointed out that the secular state had taken a paradoxical role in “determining the interpretation of Islam”<sup>12</sup>. They elaborated that, the generally perceived as “elites of the secular state have, in many instances, assumed the position of religious actors and vice-versa.” These paradoxes laid the conditions for the augmentation of resistance tendencies among Muslim minorities in secular states such as Singapore. Their strategies in asserting the Islamic identity amidst seismic shifts in the local and global arenas are explored most productively in their empirically grounded studies.

In *Muslims of Singapore: Piety, Politics and Policies*, Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, Alexis A. Pereira and Bryan S. Turner examine the Muslims lifestyle and their role in the multicultural secularist state of Singapore. Their studies highlight the distinct features and context of Muslims in Singapore, living as a minority community

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.9

vis-à-vis Muslims living as minority in the western societies. While the western Muslims similarly living in the predominantly secular states, the western states are generally governed within the framework of liberal democracy. In Singapore however, the political system is very much less open, functioning as a hegemonic state that practices illiberal form of democracy. Though committed to the policy of multiculturalism, Singapore government deliberately adopting a policy of managing religions including Islam. The top-down approach in regulating religious society in Singapore is primarily to prevent religious cleavages from turning into a major political axis that may potentially destabilize the multi-religious settings of the Republic. In examining this state policy, they highlight some positive efforts of the authority in upgrading the Muslim community through paternalist strategies of education, training and improvements. These strategies had profound impact to Muslims in Singapore and had significantly shaped their identity. At the same time, global and regional events surrounding Islam and Muslim, including September 11 and Islamic revivalism will also have direct impact to Muslims in Singapore. The challenges facing the Singaporean Muslims are thus in many ways similar to those in the west, especially in reconciling their identity as a Muslim and their identity as a member of a multicultural and secular nation.

In discussing the concept of ‘multiculturalism’, Will Kymlicka’s *Multicultural Citizenship* provide a theoretical argument that will help this thesis to understand the position of Muslims in Singapore. Although the case study cited in his work is based on the Canadian Quebecois, his profound argument on “group differentiated” rights is very relevant to the Muslims in Singapore. The Constitution of Singapore clearly allows the Muslims in Singapore to be governed in accordance to their interpretation of their religious laws on some matters, including family law and inheritance. The

special rights here given to the Muslims in Singapore as a minority group are akin to some of the proposal provided by Kymlicka. He however based his argument in favour of minority rights based on the liberal theories of freedom. This however may not necessarily be applicable to the Singapore society, as they are relatively illiberal in many of the State's policies.

Henceforth, the idea of cosmopolitan identity, beyond multiculturalism may be the way forward for Muslims in Singapore. In understanding cosmopolitanism, Jeremy Waldron discusses the Kantian concept of cosmopolitan right in *What is Cosmopolitan?* He identifies how Kantian concept of cosmopolitan right differs from our supposed understanding of the word. Like criminal law, family law, cosmopolitan rights has its presuppositions. In his own argument of a cosmopolitan culture, Waldron describes it as distinctiveness of a culture and inevitably focuses on differences.<sup>13</sup> In the introduction chapter of *The Cosmopolitan Reader*, Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held (2010) bring to light contemporary discourses of cosmopolitan thought. They maintain that cosmopolitanism acknowledges the universality of the human race and this essentially emphasizes “universal commitments to respect the moral worth of individual everywhere”.<sup>14</sup>

In discussing the case study of Muslims in Singapore, contemporary cosmopolitan thought is fundamentally important in understanding how Singaporean Muslim makes sense with their multiple identities and allegiance. Beyond the geographical, religion, social, cultural and economic boundaries, Muslims in Singapore have been trying to develop their own identity.

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<sup>13</sup> James Walrdon, What is Cosmopolitanism? In G. W. Brown & D. Held (eds), *The Cosmopolitan Reader* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 163-175, pp. 164-167.

<sup>14</sup> Garrett Wallace Brown & David Held, Introduction In Garrett Wallace Brown, David Held (eds), *The Cosmopolitan Reader* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 15-16, p.15.

#### 1.4 ISLAM AND GLOBALIZATION

In *Lexus And The Olive*, Thomas Friedman argues that there are two countervailing forces of globalisation. The ‘Lexus’ is referred to modernisation and ‘the Olive tree’ as the human need for identity and belonging<sup>15</sup>. Modernisation reignites the quest of identity and belonging as people of diverse cultural and religious traditions from across the globe calls for the need of coexistence in a common space made closer by globalisation. Globalization has consequently reemphasized the centrality of identity and a sense of affinity within a particular society. Modern values are being actively propagated and influences the global society-at-large. While some societies embrace modernity, together with its set of systems and values, others are more cautious in embracing modernity for fear of eroding their religious and cultural traditions.

With regards to religion and religiosity, modernisation led to various trajectories, bringing both prospects and challenges to the future of faiths in today’s age of globalization. In fact, one of the paradoxes of modernization is the increase awareness of religious consciousness and the revitalization of religion in the globalised era. As people becoming more modernised, religion continued to be the identity marker that define modern societies. The interaction amongst various religious groups may cement inter-religious relationships and promote religious coexistence, nevertheless religious cleavages refused to disappear. In today’s globalising world, religious cleavages continued to be one of the most salient forces that may lead to major fault lines.

While some religious groups have proactively ride on the platform of modernization and globalization to advance their religious cause, there are also those

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p.16.