



Radicals: Resistance and Protest in Colonial Malaya

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied

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Radicals tells the story of a group of radical Malay men and women from ordinary social backgrounds who chose to oppose foreign rule of their homeland, knowing full well that by embarking on this path of resistance, they would risk imprisonment or death. Their ranks included teachers, journalists, intellectuals, housewives, peasants, preachers, and youths. They formed, led, and contributed to the founding of political parties, grassroots organizations, unions, newspapers, periodicals, and schools that spread their ideas across the country in the aftermath of the Great Depression, when colonialism was at its height and evident in all areas of life in their country. But when their efforts to uproot foreign dominance faltered in the face of the sanctions the state imposed upon them, some of these radicals chose to take up arms, while others engaged in aggressive protests and acts of civil disobedience to uphold their rights. While some died fighting and hundreds were incarcerated, many lived to resist colonialism until their country attained its independence in August 1957, all of these Malay radicals were devoted to becoming free men and women and to claiming their right to be treated as equals in a world riddled with prejudice and contradictions.

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied's innovative study brings to light the less charted and unanalyzed terrain of the radical experience—becoming and being radical. He argues that the experiences and histories of radicals in colonial Malaya can be elucidated in a more nuanced way by interrogating them alongside evolving local and global circumstances and by analyzing them through the lenses of a set of overarching and interconnected mobilizing concepts—a set of ideas, visions, and notions that the radicals used to reason and justify their advent—that were internalized, lived, and utilized in the course of their activism. These mobilizing concepts were their weapons and armor, employed to organize, strategize, protect, and consolidate themselves when menaced by the tentacles of the colonial state as they embarked upon the agonizing path towards independence. Those interested in Malaysian history, colonial history, radical movements, and resistance groups will enjoy this fascinating study.

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