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Cynthia Joseph. 2014. Growing up female in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Abingdon: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-62922-5. x + 212pp.

The book reports on the results of the author's longitudinal ethnography involving a group of over 20 young Malaysian women of Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnicities. It traces the education and career trajectories of these women from their fourth year of high school till their early twenties. It also promises to inform us of how young women negotiate ethnic and gender politics amid fluid community, national and global forces.

The first chapter traces the history of ethnic politics through five time periods: pre-British colonization; the colonial period; political independence in 1957; the enactment of the New Economic Policy; the economic boom and the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis; and present-day Malaysia. Readers gain a more nuanced understanding of the genesis of present-day cultural and ethnic politics, as well as social divisions and inequalities, which will form the backdrop for the research study. Chapter two provides further contextual information with regard to how cultural and ethnic politics have played out within the Malaysian education system. The author points out that despite increases in education participation over the past six decades, problems of ethnic and socioeconomic inequities persist. A key contributor to these inequities comes in the form of the government's four-decade-old New Economic Policy, which explicitly provides for affirmative action programmes targeted mainly at the majority ethnic Malay community.

The next chapter outlines the "multiple, shifting and contradictory discourses" that these young women grapple with daily. These include stereotyped ideal visions of femininity and the impact of global consumer culture. Joseph claims

that the women do not passively accept the diverse images of femininity presented to them, but instead find their own ways of negotiating their personal identity. Chapter four describes the prevalent school culture in Joseph's school research site, a public all-girls' secondary school in the state of Penang. Among the key features of this culture are the inordinate emphasis given to academic achievement. The school also streams and tracks students in ways that reinforce subject hierarchies and privilege high achieving students over low achieving students. Joseph's research methods include in-depth interviews with students and teachers, participant observations and student essays. Herein lies one of the main strengths of this book: the use of student narratives to provide readers an authentic glimpse into these young women's lives.

Chapters five and six are devoted to academically high achieving girls and academically low achieving girls respectively. Despite the different foci, there is a remarkable commonality in how these girls straddle ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic politics as they make their way through high school. Joseph introduces the notion of active or passive resistance to school and cultural norms with regard to academic achievement and notions of being a 'good woman.'

In chapter seven, Joseph presents the results of interviews she conducted when the women are 22 years old and have transited past high school into the world of higher education. The process of negotiating personal identities continues and readers are led through the ways in which ethnic and gender politics, affirmative action policies and family financial resources contribute to the divergent choices and paths taken by the women. Likewise, chapter eight discusses the impact of the knowledge economy, materialism and global consumption, as well as transcultural identities on their career choices. The

following chapter continues in the same vein with regard to notions of marriage, sexuality and gender relations.

The book is refreshingly candid in allowing women's voices to assume centre-stage. It teases out the complex intermeshing of family, community, school, nation and global forces at a key period in these women's lives. Joseph urges readers to give careful thought to how students are privileged or marginalized, as well as to how educational inequities can be better addressed.

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