

Malaysia: Siti Kasim: An inconvenient woman

Sunday 18 August 2019, by [KASIM Siti](#), [THAYAPARAN S](#) (Date first published: 13 February 2019).

“If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

— Abigail Adams, The Letters of John and Abigail Adams

COMMENT | For those of us who view religious extremism, which is reaching critical levels as the existential threat facing this country, Siti Kasim is the raised middle finger to the religious bigots, fascist crypto-Islamists and race supremacists who have control and influence in this country.

Whether fighting for the rights of women, indigenous people, the LGBTQ community or opposing radical Islam, Siti Kasim has made herself a target for the religious bureaucracy and political operatives in the establishment.

While most Muslims who do not support the darker paths of Islam are content to hope for a moderate agenda from the political and religious elite, Siti openly advocates a progressive agenda for all Malaysians.

In this interview, Siti reminds us why people who read are dangerous to the established order of things, and continues in her effort to save Malaysia from the political and religious class who view her as a threat to their dominion.

Siti Kasim is an inconvenient reminder that the progressive forces in this country that could save Malaysia are being marginalised, and that speaking truth to power is problematic in these partisan times.

Do you think the persecution you face is based on the fact that you are a woman questioning religious dogma?

Yes, being an outspoken woman does not sit well with the patriarchy culture of radical Islamism. Also, a woman who does not conform to their view on how a Muslim woman should be.

How do you cope with the harassment you receive?

I try to ignore and focus on my causes. Of course, I can't run away from reading the nasty messages sent to me, but I take it in my stride and believe that what I am doing is right for my country and my fellow Malaysians. The supportive messages I receive give me the strength to continue, and I know I am on the right path. I thank God for giving me a strong constitution to face all the negativity thrown at me.

What do you think is the Attorney-General's Chambers' (AGC) role in the current charges against you?

I am not sure what is the AGC's role in the current [charges](#) against me. (*Note: This interview was conducted before the AGC dropped the charges against Siti Kasim for showing her middle finger to hecklers in a forum.*) From what's stated by OCCI Fadzil, he received the endorsement to charge me from the previous AGC. I believe it's selective persecution against me by certain quarters within the government.

How do you engage with Muslims who believe in the Islamist mode of thinking and believe that sanctions against you are justified?

You have no hope of engaging with them. These are people who are indoctrinated in radical Islamism. The teachings, the mentality of which is no different from that of Talibanism and ISIS terrorists. Only Taliban and ISIS terrorists will sanction others for being different from them. The only difference between them and the Taliban and ISIS is that they have no power or weapons to carry out their threats. When they have those, the country will be torn asunder.

Yet our government does not seem to realise that we have a serious terrorist mentality bred with extreme prejudice inside our society, which needs to be eradicated. This is a serious problem today.

Malay-Muslims are participating in and leading terrorist organisations all around the world. We have groups like Skuad Badar, which is nothing more than a terrorist organisation without weapons terrorising people. We have people like Amri Che Mat and Pastor Koh disappearing in plain daylight and never to be heard again. We should be terrified. Not talking about it is not going to make it go away. We need to tackle it head-on with extreme conviction.

Does being a "liberal" Muslim who appeals to a certain demographic bring with it more problems when engaging in the Islamic discourse?

It should not be. Remember our Rukun Negara has the word 'liberal' in it, and it was written by Malay leadership at a time when Malay society needed to progress. In fact, most of the liberal Muslims I know have more knowledge about the Quran than the majority of the Malay population because liberals read more on their own and don't depend on the cleric class to tell them about their religion.

Do you think that Mujahid Yusof Rawa is doing enough to offer a counter-narrative in the Islamic discourse in this country?

No. They are still not facing the fact that our religious-bent Malaysian education system is delivering to us every year a more radicalised Islamist generation who are intolerant and increasingly militant in mindset. It is no surprise that PAS is increasing in strength, and Umno has to be more radical Islamist than before in order to gain Malay votes.

We need to change this mindset by changing education to go back to our secular humanist roots. The roots that made the Malays progressive and more developed in the 80s.

What do you think is the most important issue facing the Orang Asal community in this country and what has the Harapan government done to address this issue?

First, I'd like to correct the usage of Orang Asal and Orang Asli. The 'Orang Asal' term is used for Sabah and Sarawak indigenous people, whilst Orang Asli is for those in the peninsula.

The Orang Asli are largely forest or agriculture based, although several individuals have achieved levels of educational and economic success comparable to those of the dominant population.

Nevertheless, it is no hidden secret that the Orang Asli rank among the most marginalised of Malaysians today, not just in terms of numbers, but in their ability to determine their own fate.

The once politically autonomous and independent people are but a pale likeness of their ancestors.

Much of this has to do with the fact that the Malaysian nation state does not recognise the Orang Asli as a separate people - that is, as distinct groups associated with particular territorial bases and requiring 'government' on a different basis from that of the other communities.

But, as can be discerned from their demands, the Orang Asli are not, at least not yet, seeking self-determination in the sense that they want to secede from the Malaysian nation-state. Rather, the desire is to exercise full autonomy in their traditional territories, both in the control and ownership of their lands, and in the determination of their way of life and in the way they deal with the dominant society.

The issue of Orang Asli land rights is but the most visible and deeply-felt manifestation of the principal problem facing the Orang Asli viz-a-viz the unwillingness of the state to recognise the Orang Asli as a distinct people.

Using the 'land rights' problem as a strategy for Orang Asli political mobilisation is rational because the issue is deeply felt among the communities, easily identifiable, and it is the source of much social stress for the Orang Asli.

With the recent suit which our federal government initiated against the Kelantan state government, it can be seen that the Pakatan Harapan government is attempting to correct the wrongs. We have also seen more Orang Asli senators being appointed when they came into power.

From our engagement with the current government, we can see there is a lot more improvement than before, at least with the current minister in charge of Orang Asli Affairs. We hope the Harapan government will continue with its determination in trying to solve our Orang Asli problems.

Do you believe that Harapan has a moderate Islamic agenda?

They have, but they do not know how to go about it. They do not have the leadership for it. The political will is missing. I will be talking in more detail on this subject in my column soon.

Do you think it is important for non-Muslims to speak up when they witness Islamic transgressions or does this make the situation worse?

Yes. We need them to stand up for fellow Malaysians, and Malays who are being persecuted by the conservative Islamist authorities, to ensure Malaysia will always be the home for their children and grandchildren to live in and prosper. When any public policy is based on any religious ideology, every citizen must have the right to speak up about it.

Is the press doing its part in highlighting Islamic provocations?

No. It has not done enough to highlight and criticise.

Why do think "moderate" Muslims are afraid to speak up?

Just look at the social media comments by their so-called fellow Muslims against anyone who does not conform to them. The amount of vile comments, threats of sanctions, harassment, persecution and even threat of physical harm by the Islamist elements in Malay society are enough to scare away

and silence many Muslims.

Do you think the Malay community needs Islamic departments at state and federal levels?

Under ideal conditions, the answer would have been 'no', but in our environment we need a federal department that can monitor and revamp radical Islamic teaching that is going on today to abolish them. That should be their job. We don't need them to do dakwah (proselytisation). No government should be using tax money to propagate any religion.

S THAYAPARAN is Commander (Rtd) of the Royal Malaysian Navy. A retired barrister-at-law, he is one of the founding members of Persatuan Patriot Kebangsaan.

S Thayaparan
Siti Kasim

[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Malaysiakini

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/columns/463761>