

Blurring the Future

AI Regurgitation and the
Singapore Muslim Community

by James McGrail

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In 2014, the Singaporean state began its Smart Nation project with Data Spark: a collaboration with the state-owned telecoms company Singtel. The project placed thousands of cameras and sensors around the city, in order to create a data feedback loop which could inform government policy. Since 2017, with assistance from Japanese tech conglomerate NEC, these cameras have been equipped with AI-enabled facial recognition software. In the intervening years, this network has expanded. By 2030, the Singaporean police aims to have 200,000 cameras across the Island. The state positions itself as a testbed for techno-governance, and a hub for AI in Southeast Asia. The Singaporean state imagines its future as one where technology and data feedback loops ensure the smooth functioning of government policy.

Situated Within this wider techno-governance milieu is MUIS, the Islamic Religious Authority.

As a statutory board, MUIS has close ties to the ruling PAP (People's Action Party). Consequently, the religious authority often find themselves acting as intermediaries between the State and the Singapore Muslim Community. This position can be fraught given the governments historical marginalisation of the Muslim community. MUIS, therefore, represents a site where the governments techno-futurist imaginaries come into contact with the messy reality of people's everyday lives. This thesis arises from this tension, explores how MUIS takes up government- promoted AI technologies for religious governance, and examines how these technological innovations are received by Singaporean Muslims.

Throughout this thesis the author asks, "What futures are imagined by Muslims in a Singapore dominated by AI-enabled technologies?"



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