

how complex and reciprocal exchanges between local, colonial and transnational forces shaped intellectual life in this time and place.

If the book has weaknesses, they stem from its strengths. Hansen ends her study in the 1930s, when Buddhist modernist ideas ‘would cease to function as a modernism in the sense of an opposing critique, ethos or movement but increasingly as the dominant religious discourse’ (p. 181). Buddhism’s place in Khmer nationalism is explicitly not Hansen’s research interest, but the book does end a bit abruptly, and some general reflections on the relationship between Khmer Buddhism and post-colonial Cambodia would have been welcome. Finally, the subtlety of Hansen’s picture of the intersections between Khmer Buddhism and the global trends and forces collectively referred to as ‘modernity’ makes her regular reference to theorists of this phenomenon who focus on the European context (notably David Harvey) a little puzzling. The theoretical parameters that this helps her to establish are diffuse, and they do not contribute much to the nuanced theoretical position that she ultimately constructs through her own case study. If anything, Hansen’s work is proof that studies of global modernity need not assume as a starting point theoretical literature grounded in European case studies.

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*Houses in motion: The experience of place and the problem of belief in urban Malaysia*

By RICHARD BAXSTROM

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Brickfields is unbelievable. According to *Houses in Motion*, the Tamil-Malaysian inhabitants of the Brickfields area of Kuala Lumpur are unable to ‘believe’ their place in the world and therefore lack a basis for action in the face of rapid and overbearing development in the first years of the twenty-first century. The book frames this problem by drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and, to a lesser extent, other – primarily French – contemporary theorists (such as Henri Lefebvre). The author emphasises the shock and disillusionment of Brickfields residents as their neighbourhood is redeveloped. Their helplessness is due to their social, cultural and religious marginalisation within a Malay-Muslim-dominated nation and an aggressive modernist Islamic developmentalist state. Unfortunately, neither the ‘Malaysian case’ nor Deleuzian theory are deeply illuminated or transformed by their engagement in this text.

Chapters 1 and 2 present a traditional historical narrative that does not directly address the book’s framing analytic of place and belief; there is no attention paid, for

example, to how Brickfields might have been made 'believable' or not to its inhabitants historically. Some passages contain jarring inaccuracies. Kuala Lumpur was founded in the 1850s, not the 1870s (p. 26), unless by 'founded' one means the date at which the British made it their administrative centre, rather than the date at which it was first settled by Chinese tin miners. Reference to 'the enactment of the New Development Policy (NDP) in 1971' (p. 62) is likewise inaccurate. In Malaysia, the NDP refers to the framework established in 1991 replacing the New Economic Policy (generally dated *c.* 1971–90). I do not mean to nit-pick on errata, but these are extremely significant dates and events in the history of Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia respectively — errors which reflect the book's generally thin engagement with the broader urban, national or for that matter, regional socio-cultural and historical contexts within which Brickfields is embedded.

Chapters 3–5 present contemporary ethnographic material. Chapter 3 is the strongest, most interesting section of the book. The ethnographic accounts provide interesting windows on relations to 'the state' (especially, p. 96–108). Chapter 4 also contains interesting ethnographic bits — particularly in a section on 'gangsters', which provides nuanced insights into the relationship of the 'community' to criminal gangs, how these have transformed over time and how they are mediated. However, the other two archetype-like 'figures' (strangers and counterfeiters, in addition to gangsters) are not well conceived. The category of 'strangers' conflates a wide variety of recognisable, not truly 'strange' categories of people such as 'tourists'. Likewise, the concept of 'counterfeiters' is an awkward import from James Siegel's work on Java to cover a variety of activities generally thought of and referred to as 'corruption'.

In Chapter 5, the book shifts from 'belief in general terms' to 'belief in a more religious register' (pp. 177–9). The promising idea is proposed, but not substantively carried through, that understanding Tamil Hindu experience in Brickfields should frame their concerns not as part of a diaspora whose point of reference is Tamil Nadu or Hinduism in India, but rather in terms of the ways in which their point of reference is constructing a life as Malaysians (p. 181). The substance of the chapter is on the organisation of religious practices and in particular negotiations over the relocation of temple sites in the context of rapid development (especially of the KL Monorail project). In so doing, the book universalises 'belief' following Deleuze translated into English in a post-Christian, post-Enlightenment tradition and applies it to Tamil Hindu experience in Malaysia without engaging theoretically with either local configurations of religiosity or, more broadly, Tamil-Hindu culture, cosmology and practice.

For example, a long passage provides a promising set of events for interpretive purposes and understanding of complex social relations, in which the KL Monorail developers consult with local temples in order to appease supernatural forces thought to be responsible for accidents and delays (pp. 194–205). Ultimately, these are portrayed as negotiation between the 'local' community and 'the state' (conflating corporate and state initiatives). Much hints to a more complex and interesting situation. 'Ong' as the pseudonym of the woman interviewed from the KL Monorail implies that she is Chinese. If that is the case, far from being an encounter or negotiation between the exclusivist, monotheistic Islamic state and the subaltern Hindu community in a clash over 'belief', the exchange is perhaps between religious pluralists in

search of an efficacious (practical rather than 'belief'-based) solution. However, such interpretations are left dangling, as the book does not provide enough information about Ong and others involved: for example, are they Christian, Buddhist or practitioners of what is called 'Chinese religion' in Malaysia, the latter often having close, positive associations with Hindu polytheism in Malaysia and Singapore?

This book may be of interest to Deluze scholars and followers of the Stanford University Press *Cultural Memories* series, as an example of how their general theories can be applied indiscriminately to (but in no way challenged or changed by) cultural others around the world. It certainly is a good example within contemporary American anthropology of the triumph of trendy theory over detailed ethnography (with such *passé* concerns as local linguistic competence). Scholars interested in and knowledgeable about the latter are likely to find the depth of descriptive material, presentation and interpretation disappointing.

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*The scripting of a national history: Singapore and its pasts*

By HONG LYSA and HUANG JIANLI

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This volume, co-authored by Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli, is another addition to a series of publications that have emerged over the last decade or so as part of an important academic trend in Singapore history. This trend, which primarily makes the case for alternative and revisionist historical narratives as a counter to the state discourse and national narrative that have been promulgated in the education curriculum in Singapore, presents an increasing number of possibilities for generating a diverse range of collective social memories of Singapore's past during the decolonisation and independence periods after the Second World War.

The volume, comprising a collection of previously published papers and book chapters, focuses on three key aspects of Singapore history: (1) the historiographical critique of the construction of the Singapore Story; (2) the forgotten history and marginalisation of historical personalities from the Chinese-speaking community; and (3) the state's co-opting of selected historical personalities and places in scripting the national narrative. The papers are collectively an important contribution to the field of Singapore history, primarily because they provide a detailed expository of the complexity that has characterised the crafting of the post-1965 era, and the utilisation of speeches by Singapore's first generation of political leaders, particularly Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore's first Prime Minister until 1990), in steering and shaping the national narrative towards their viewpoint and perspective of the past as they saw and remembered it. They attempt to subvert and question the 'national narrative', or the