

Ford, Michele and Lenore Lyons (eds.) (2012) *Men and Masculinities in Southeast Asia*. London and New York: Routledge. 163 pages. ISBN: 978-0-415-48223-3.

Sex, violence and status are prominent themes running throughout the collected essays in *Men and Masculinities in Southeast Asia*, edited by Michele Ford and Lenore Lyons. In addition to an introductory chapter on contemporary gender and masculinity theory, the volume offers eight case studies of contemporary masculinity, spanning work in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Timor Leste (East Timor). These are particularly valuable contributions, in that they all focus on heterosexual masculinities. As the editors note, while there is a growing body of literature on heterosexual men within gender studies, it remains small compared to studies of women and 'queer' sexualities. The essays in this volume provide rare and revealing insights into the ways in which sex, violence and status play out in the lives of men in diverse contexts across Southeast Asia.

Ford and Lyons' introduction provides a concise and extensively referenced overview of the state of the field in scholarship on masculinity in Southeast Asia and globally. They emphasize that while scholarship that 'render(s) masculinity visible' (p. 1) exists for Southeast Asia, the extent of such work is not great as compared to other topics in gender studies. In particular, as they note, studies of heteronormative masculinities are particularly sparse. Their introduction turns principally on an interrogation of R. W. Connell's notion of 'hegemonic masculinity', which is arguably the most extensively used concept in contemporary scholarship on men and masculinity. In keeping with current scholarship, the introduction and essays that follow both build on Connell's construct and critique it. The contributions provide important non-Western cases and voices to a field (gender studies generally and masculinity studies specifically) that overwhelmingly draws on research conducted in the West (Australia, Europe and North America). The introduction does not, however, weave together the central themes of the volume (at least as I found them) — of sex, violence and status — nor fully discuss the lacunae that attention to these themes and not others produces.

It is striking that this otherwise diverse collection of essays continually returns to themes that would seem to reflect a raw, almost reductionist notion of the heterosexual male. Not every essay discusses all three themes of sex, violence and status, but their prevalence and interrelationship in the essays is remarkable. Sex and sex-seeking are the central theme of contributions by Pattana Kitiarsa on Thai labour migrant's sexual practices in Singapore and the chapter by Sophie Williams *et al.* on Singaporean men's online discussions of sex tourism in Batam, the Indonesian island a short ferry ride from Singapore. In other chapters, though not the main focus, the sexual motivations of masculine behaviour are an important part of the story in chapters on Filipino men by Steve McKay and Don Eliseo Lucero-Prisno, Vietnamese men by Hung Cam Thai, and Cambodian men by Trude Jacobsen. Likewise, violence is a primary theme in essays on gender-based violence in Timor-Leste by Henri Myrritten, honour, territoriality and violence among 'jago' (street thugs or strongmen) in Indonesia by Ian Wilson, and institutionalised and subaltern martial identities among Malay National Service conscripts in Singapore by Lyons and Ford. Masculine violence appears as a secondary theme elsewhere, such as the evolution of a rape-culture in Cambodia (Trude, p. 97). Status and status-seeking is a less overt yet even more prevalent theme than sex or violence. Whether in terms of race or ethnicity, class, personal prestige, territorial

dominance or respect within an online community, the importance of status to heterosexual men finds expression in every essay in the volume.

Ford and Lyons' introduction to the volume places the book and the essays squarely within the reigning consensus within gender studies, which emphasizes the social construction of gender and of masculinities. The essays attest to the fact that heterosexual masculinities are not the same everywhere. At the same time, the reiteration of sex, violence and status as conditions that impinge on heterosexual men across diverse contexts also suggests that a dogmatically particularistic and reductionist adherence to social constructionism — that gender is everywhere solely and uniquely socially constructed — may be nearly as misguided as biological or other reductionist approaches to gender and sexuality. Something, and I would suggest that it is dynamics of human heterosexuality which transcend specific historical and cultural contexts, would seem to return analysis of masculinity continually back to themes of sex, violence and status. Performance of heterosexuality requires men everywhere to seek status, as that is what makes them attractive to women. Status-seeking and sexual competition also put men at risk to be perpetrators of violence, victims of violence, or both. 'Gender-based violence', which Myritten (pp. 103–117) uses to refer to violence against women, should also include violence by men against other men in pursuit of masculine, gendered and heterosexual goals.

About halfway through reading this book, I began to wonder: Is sex, violence and status-seeking all that there is to men's lives? Perhaps *Sex, Violence and Status among Men in Southeast Asia* might have been a more accurate and attention-getting title for the volume? Certainly there are hints of other aspects of masculinity and men's lives found in the essays, such as fathering, most in evidence in the first essay on Filipino seafarers. Other themes found elsewhere in Southeast Asian gender studies, such as masculine piety, are missing from the volume altogether.

While explicit attention to these lacunae in the editors' introduction would have been useful, this in no way detracts from the fact that *Men and Masculinities in Southeast Asia*, is a major contribution to both gender studies globally and to Asian social research generally. Most of the essays are theoretically insightful without being clumsily analytical or jargon-filled. Moreover, the essays are consistently well-written and engaging. While a collection like this will appeal primarily to Asian studies and gender specialists, those who teach on these subjects will find much to offer that will appeal to students in undergraduate courses. The essays are sure to spark interest, discussion and debate among experts and students alike. The introduction alone, while geared toward Southeast Asia, would make for an excellent required text in any gender studies course or seminar on masculinities. While much more remains to be said and written on masculinities in Southeast Asia and beyond, individually and as a whole the authors and editors of this volume have made an important contribution to gender and masculinity studies.

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