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Summer
2021

Berita

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group Association for Asian Studies

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Letter from the Chair

In this issue, you'll see updates from our recent Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group annual business meeting, some articles and updates from new members, and more. Our annual meeting, held in conjunction with the annual Association for Asian Studies conference, was held, like the conference itself, virtually via Zoom. I was concerned that a Zoom meeting would be sparsely attended and difficult to engage with, but I was wrong: we met with nearly forty colleagues—from all time zones. It was the best attended meeting we've had in years, and in many ways, the most productive. In a year stunted by COVID, making connections with colleagues from all over the world was wonderful—and we mustn't let distance inhibit us again. From now on, we'll always have a Zoom component in our business meeting, so that people who aren't at the AAS can participate.

Because of COVID and the cancellation of last year's meeting, we awarded neither of our regular prizes for 2020, but we announced the 2019 John A. Lent Prize winner, Sandy Chang, of the University of Florida this year. Please read about her and her outstanding paper in this issue. Sandy will, as is our practice, serve as the judge for the 2021 Lent submissions—we'll be announcing that prize winner at the next MSB business meeting, scheduled for March 2022 in Hawaii. We are all hoping that meeting is held in person and we hope to see many of you there.

At our business meeting, we also elected the incoming chair of our group, Cheong Soon Gan, of the University of Wisconsin-Superior, who will be replacing me after I finish my final (and extra) year next March. To maintain continuity during COVID, our group concurred that I would remain in this position until next year. I'm delighted to do so. When Cheong Soon takes over as chair, I become "Chair Mentor"—or the *ex officio* chair, replacing Eric Thompson of the National University of Singapore (NUS), who has guided me so generously and wisely during my term. Serving as the Deputy Chair under Cheong Soon will be Elvin Ong, of NUS. Many of you will recall that Elvin received both the Lent Prize and the Provencher Prize when he was studying for his Master's and PhD degrees in the U.S. Now faculty at NUS, Elvin brings both a long record of engagement and a keen commitment to our MSB group.

We also discussed our need for a new editor for *Berita* starting after this issue. Dominik will become the "Berita Mentor" to the next editor. We are delighted that Sarena Abdullah, Universiti Sains Malaysia, has offered to fill that role—and we are in conversation with her (and any other volunteers) about moving *Berita* to an online platform and updating its format. If you are interested in helping with this initiative, please let us know. As always, we are eager to include any of your submissions to *Berita* and we welcome short articles, book reviews, member updates, updates from ongoing research, and announcements. Again, let us know.



Finally, and until we've created an online presence, to maintain a closer relationship with MSB, make sure you have asked for membership of our Facebook group: you can **find us on Facebook as "Official Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group (MSB)"**. There are three questions to answer before your membership is approved (this keeps out people selling Tupperware).

Best wishes,
Patricia Sloane-White
Chair, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB) Studies Group
pswhite@udel.edu

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John A. Lent Prize

The John A. Lent Prize is presented annually at the Association for Asian Studies Conference to the author of the Best Paper on Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei presented at the previous year's Association for Asian Studies Conference. Because the AAS 2020 Conference was cancelled, the prize was not awarded for 2020.

The judges for the 2019 John A. Lent Prize, Kikue Hamayotsu, Laura Elder, and chair Jeremy Taylor awarded the annual prize for the Best Paper presented at the previous year's Association for Asian Studies Conference to Sandy Chang for her paper, "Six Weddings and A Funeral: Marriage, Modernity, and Chinese Customary Law in the Straits Settlements, 1900s-1930s." The award was presented to her at the virtual MSB business meeting in March 2021.

The judges described Chang's paper as a compelling and well-written work of social and legal history. Using court and government documents, newspaper reports, and oral interviews now held in archives in Singapore and the UK, Chang explores a single – though widely reported – court case from 1908 to explore "...how polygamy in the Straits Settlements served as a site upon which jurists and colonial reformers – both British and Asian – articulated and formulated ideals of Chinese marriage and modernity, as well as diasporic identity and imperial subjecthood."

In addressing such questions, Chang explores what she refers to as a

"illogicality" of legal governance in the Straits Settlements, particularly in relation to marriage, as the colonial judiciary were free to adhere or overturn precedents relating to marriage law as it was applied to members of the Chinese community in the region. Such "illogicality" was exposed with the "Six Widows case" in 1908, during which competing ideas about spousal rights were openly debated following the death of the wealthy merchant Choo Eng Choon, and subsequent legal disputes over his estate. The case exposed the limits and inconsistencies of colonial understandings of Chinese marital customs and "Chineseness" itself. It also ignited wider attempts to legally standardize and "modernize" Chinese marriage in the Straits Settlements.

Chang's close reading of the "Six Widows Case" engages with a growing body of academic work on the gender and social history of the Straits Settlements as well as with the attempt to write the Straits Settlements back into the broader story of the British empire. She links debates in the late 19th and early 20th century Straits Settlements to parallel debates in India at the same time, for example. And her work also touches directly on growing scholarly interest in notions of "Chineseness" under colonial governance. Finally, Chang does an admirable job of giving agency to the women involved in the "Six Widows Case" themselves. The judges and the executive board of the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group warmly congratulate Sandy Chang for this outstanding paper.



In 2019, Sandy was finishing her PhD in history at the University of Texas. Currently, she is an assistant professor at the University of Florida, Department of History.

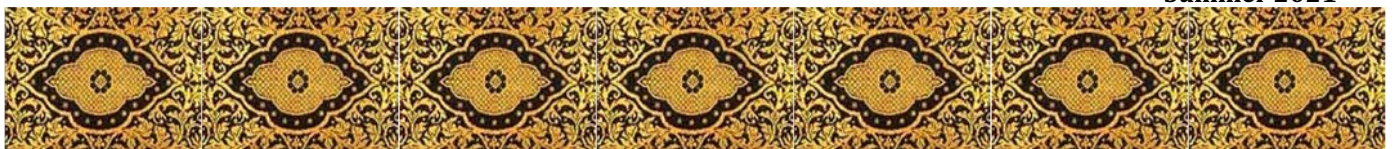
Provencher Travel Prize 2020

Every year, we award travel funds to a scholar presenting a paper at the annual AAS meeting. Although there were no travelers to this year's meeting, we decided to maintain the Provencher Travel award, but allow the money to be used to pay for the registration fee for the virtual conference. This year's Provencher Award was awarded to **Nursyazwani Jamaludin**, a PhD Student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. She presented "Refugee Playfulness: Rohingya's Everyday Strategies in Living Malaysia." Here is the abstract:

"Discussions surrounding refugee agency largely revolve around their role in humanitarian work and their everyday survival strategies. However, this paper seeks to push the boundaries of how we imagine refugees as rights-claiming subjects. In this paper, I propose the concept "refugee playfulness" to destabilize current understanding of refugees' everyday politics. Based on fieldwork and interviews with 58 Rohingya refugees in Klang Valley between 2017 to 2019, this paper interrogates the interstices of legal ambiguity and the potential for politics as

Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention for Refugees. As such, refugees are ambivalent bodies that vacillate between being a recognized person-of-concern with rights, and "bare life." In these ruptures where law is being suspended and rules are not sacred, many Rohingyas attempt to change the rules of relations and reconstruct their world. The UN card serves as the device for them to engage in this game of negotiations with the authorities. Rohingyas engage in these playful performances to change the visibility of their bodies and (re)configure their political subjectivities.

"In proposing *refugee playfulness*, I hope to contribute to growing discourses that contest the binaries of structure and agency, power and domination (Abu Lughod 1990; Ortner 2016; Siegman 2020). The double precariousness of refugees reinforces the need to study the ways they navigate – and play with – their liminal subject positions as they attempt to resist multiple forms and systems of power, which produces new subjectivities. Thinking with and through refugee playfulness offers a site to locate the potential of *doing* politics and *becoming* political within these ephemeral moments and liminal spaces, and to transform it into an enduring condition. It also opens up spaces for us to think about the playfulness of other marginalized groups. Play allows refugees the capacity to dream as they reimagine an alternative vision of the future where they could become accepted, recognized, and legible citizens with rights."



Announcements

Looking forward to the Annual Association for Asian Studies Conference



Next year's annual Association for Asian Studies Conference will take place from Thursday, March 24 to Sunday, March 27 at the Hawai'i Convention Center in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The panel **"Haze, Sand, Fire, Water" Environmental Crises in Southeast Asia** proposed by the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group has been named one of two "Designated Panels" by the Southeast Asian Council (SEAC) of the AAS. Read the abstract and panelists' abstracts below and be sure to visit our special panel in Hawaii—or look for a recording of the session we'll make available after the Conference. We'll send out details on the date and time of the session along with other announcements about the 2022 AAS Meeting later on this year.

Panel Abstract

Massive deforestation, transboundary haze, sand mining, altered rivers and erosion, depleted fish stocks, pollution. These are among the many increasingly serious environmental consequences that have come with Southeast Asia's rapid development and economic growth over recent decades, fueled by global and regional capital as well as mass movements of migrant labor. With a particular focus on stakeholders' roles in this regional/global process, this panel proposes to examine and compare the effects and impact of these crises on local livelihoods, land, and social cohesion, as well as the role they play in contestation, compromise, and cooptation across Southeast Asia, as presented through political participation, knowledge production, and public sentiment.

Presentation #1: Haze in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia: Contextualizing Public Sentiments within National- and Regional-Level Policy Approaches

Helena Varkkey, University of Malaya

Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia are the three countries that are usually the most affected by seasonal transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia. While haze is often presented as a 'regional environmental pollution problem', these three countries are linked to the causes of haze in varying ways, and the effects of haze are different in these countries as well. Our research measured public sentiments towards haze within these three countries through quantitative



surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. Our findings revealed interesting differences between how Malaysians, Singaporeans, and Indonesians perceived and understood the causes and effects of the haze, and their views on solutions to the problem. Understanding and managing public sentiment is important as this can help build social legitimacy and public acceptance of broader government efforts (Ives and Kendall 2014).

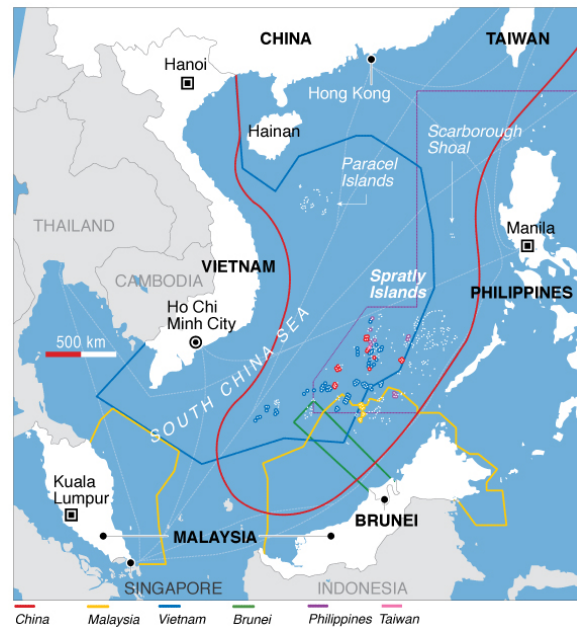
By transposing key policy approaches of the three countries (including Jokowi's 'go it alone' strategy, Malaysia's persistent diplomacy, and Singapore's extraterritorial law) against our study results, we consider to what extent these governments consider and understand public sentiments when undertaking policy decisions. Most notable is how sentiments on burden-sharing for haze among the three countries differ from official government stance. We argue that an improved understanding of public sentiment and values, especially among those most affected, can lead to more constructive cross-border engagement at both the government and society level.



Haze on Orchard Road in early September 2015 (Wikimedia Commons contributors)

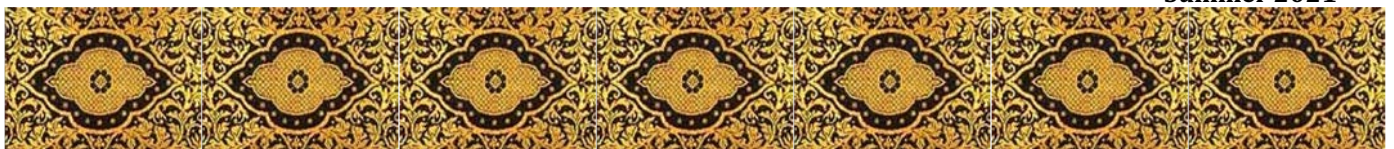
Presentation #2: Beyond Hydrocarbons in the South China Sea

Tabitha Grace Mallory, University of Washington



South China Sea claims map, by Voice of America, 2012 (Voice of America <https://tinyurl.com/3mu3bfvy>)

With the effects of climate change already being felt around the world, the transition to renewable energy resources is more important than ever. The South China Sea is estimated to have oil and gas reserves for which China, Vietnam, and the Philippines are targeting with active extraction programs. At the same time, many scientists now think that the South China Sea has the highest level of marine biodiversity in the world. South China Sea fisheries also feed and employ millions of people in the region. Conflicts over these resources have driven much of the territorial disputes in the region.



Yet drilling for hydrocarbons in the South China Sea not only continues our reliance on fossil fuels, but also contributes to geopolitical and security tensions in the region and threatens vulnerable marine habitats.

This paper will examine alternative energy options for the South China Sea littoral states, giving particular attention to China, Vietnam and the Philippines. The paper will review the energy sectors and needs of these countries and consider whether abandoning the hydrocarbons in the seabed is a viable option for these countries. By taking the oil and gas disputes off the table, would stakeholders be better able to make progress on remaining core contentions such as competing nationalisms, security concerns and fisheries management?

Presentation #3: Accelerated Development, Anticipated Dispossession: The Zero-Sum Game of Land Reclamation

Vanessa Koh, Yale University

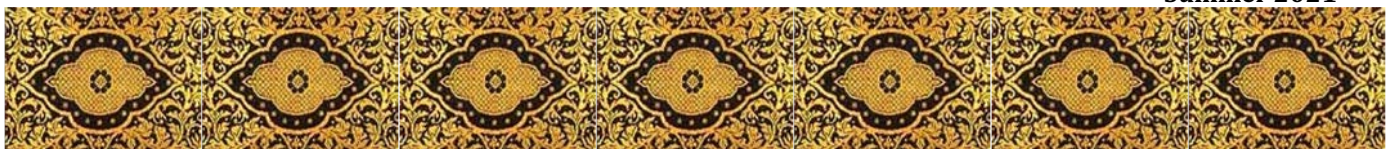
This paper examines the global phenomenon that is land reclamation through multi-sited work in Singapore and Cambodia that sits at the interface of environmental and urban anthropology, cultural geography, and science and technology studies. While countries like Malaysia and Nigeria have engaged in land reclamation in order to develop desirable property that will attract speculative foreign direct investment, land-scarce Singapore has been importing sand from neighboring countries such as Cambodia in an effort to “reclaim” land. Yet

as Singapore expands its city-state with an influx of sand, what are the social consequences for the communities who live in the source countries?

Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a fishing village in Cambodia’s Koh Kong province, this paper traces the way large-scale sand dredging of sea-beds has altered local ecologies, transformed social relations, and dispossessed villagers. Not only has sand extraction and reclamation eroded rivers and livelihoods due to dwindling crab catches, the removal of sand from riverbeds does not make its impact known immediately. I contend that land reclamation, as a form of “slow violence” (Nixon 2011), reveals a spatiotemporal distancing effect, as villagers anticipate the collapse of their houses that sit on the riverbank when the ground eventually gives way due to the removal of sediment.



Sand mining at the Tatai River in the Koh Kong Conservation Corridor, Cambodia 2012
(Wikimedia Commons contributors)



Presentation #4: Contesting Oil Palm Plantation Territories in Southern Myanmar

Miles Kenney-Lazar, National University of Singapore

In 1999, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) government of Myanmar (Burma) hatched a plan to transform the southern region of Tanintharyi into an edible 'oil bowl' via the planting and processing of palm oil. Their ambitious plans sought the establishment of 700,000 acres of oil palm plantations over a 30-year period. By 2013, the government seemed to have surpassed this goal as it had already granted 1.9 million acres of land to companies for planting oil palm. Such plantation concessions led to deforestation, dispossession of villagers' agricultural lands, labor abuses, and ethnic conflicts with Karen communities. At the same time, many areas have not been fully planted with oil palm trees, leaving their use and ownership uncertain. As democratic reforms were implemented in Myanmar starting in 2010, villagers took advantage of the opening political space to contest the control of their customary territories and seek to reclaim their lands. This paper examines their strategies for occupying and seeking to transform the construction of oil palm territories. It is based upon research conducted from November 2019 to February 2020 on villagers' responses to two Myanmar oil palm plantation companies. This was prior to the worsening of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and the military coup in February 2021, which have halted the expansion of the oil palm sector.

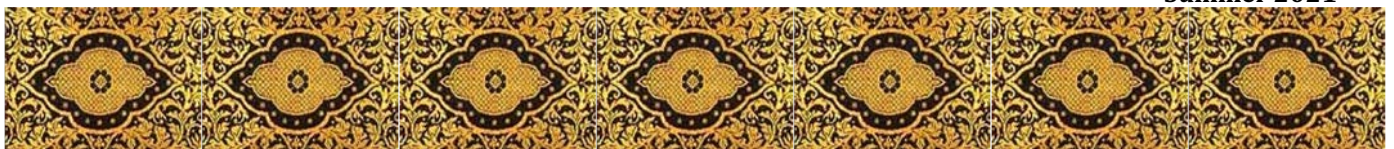
Although this paper focuses on Myanmar companies, it has important implications for Malaysian oil palm companies that had begun implementing projects in Myanmar.

Presentation #5: Risky Infrastructures: Low Wage Migrants and the Vulnerabilities of Transnational Immobility in Asia

Laavanya Kathiravelu, Nanyang Technical University

Sustaining development and economic growth in Singapore is dependent on the continual circulation of a low wage temporary population of men from "poorer" Asian states such as India and Bangladesh. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the inherent risks of such a migration system. Much of this riskiness is embedded in infrastructural configurations such as visa regimes, cheap airline travel, and remittance networks that define the mobilities of these migrants, who move to labor in occupations shunned by locals and the middle classes.

Existing research on migration infrastructure in Asia has focused on how contemporary migration regimes are sustained and stabilized. Disruptions, reconfigurations and vulnerabilities that also characterize such systems have received less attention. Speaking to issues of immobility and stasis that have been accentuated with the coronavirus epidemic, this paper draws from the experiences of low wage South Indian migrants, returnees and families left behind, to delineate a typology of infrastructural risk.



Analyzing 47 semi-structured interviews from both sending and receiving contexts, this paper argues that for low wage transnational migrants, infrastructural risk is heightened by lack of economic, temporal, and mobility capital. However, in a crisis characterized by immobility and closed borders, there have also emerged possibilities for more inclusive social justice outcomes. Through interrogating distinct but overlapping domains of migration infrastructure, this paper brings together and extends research on risk societies, shock mobility and transnational migration in order to develop better regional understandings of the effects of rapid development and growth on marginalized communities in Asia.

- To find out more about AAS 2022 in Hawaii, go to the [conference home page](#).
- Registration for the conference begins in September. Rates for registration and hotel rooms can be found [here](#).

¹Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 66, 28, Clark Kerr, "The Frantic Race to Remain Contemporary," *Daedalus*, Fall, 1964, Vol. 93, No. 4, pp. 1051-1070, *The Contemporary University*: U.S.A. (Boston: MIT University Press, 1964), p.

Article

Educating the Sultanate: The Melding of Higher Education and Islam in Brunei Darussalam

Moez Hayat

Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Researcher 2021-2022 in the Academy of Brunei Studies (APB) at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD)

The following is a modified version of the Statement of Grant Purpose of the research study supported by the Fulbright-Hays scholarship grant and the Universiti of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and its Academy of Brunei Studies (APB). The research is to be conducted over the course of a full academic year. The questions of the research and the research plan are included below.

Higher education is essential to the construction of a nation. As UC Berkeley President Clark Kerr once said, the university is "a prime instrument of national purpose," whose mission is to create "new knowledge" needed for a country's economic and social development.¹ That idea is certainly true in the former colonized countries of Asia and Africa – in Egypt, India, Indonesia, and Singapore to name a

1051, Seth Rosenfield, "Clark Kerr's Classic: The Uses of the University Turns 50," *California Magazine / Winter 2013 Information Issue*, *UC Berkeley Cal Alumni Association*, <https://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/winter-2013-information-issue/clark-kerr%E2%80%99s-classic-uses-university-turns-50>.



few examples – where Western-style institutions of higher education are viewed as essential to the development of liberal attitudes towards society and the nation.

Yet, this project intends to focus on a very different case study. Negara Brunei Darussalam is well known internationally as a conservative, oil-rich, absolute monarchy in Southeast Asia. It has drawn media attention for its implementation of Islamic Shariah criminal law in 2013. Lesser known is that under the rule of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Brunei has invested its vast oil-wealth into education. Since 1985 it has built fourteen universities and colleges, the first and most important being the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD).² The UBD is now the fourth-best university in Southeast Asia;³ it is a regional leader in terms of higher educational attainment in English language teaching, and environmental studies, particularly forest management.

At the same time, Brunei has worked to integrate its national ideology of Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) at all levels of its governance, education, and society. In this project, Brunei's universities have taken a leading role, with its Ministry of Religious affairs creating institutions and curriculum that teach Islamic values in all subjects,

according to the state MIB ideology. Yet unlike the nationalist Muslim states in Turkey or Pakistan where religion has become more prominent in educational discourse, Brunei's national religious project is led by a monarchy. At a time when monarchies in the Middle East like Jordan or even Saudi Arabia are encouraging the development of liberal educational models, Brunei stands alone for its openly religious program.

Therefore, this research will examine how Brunei has used its modern university to support its economic development and to strengthen its traditional, religious national identity. I argue that Brunei has successfully integrated its national, religious ideology with its higher education system to strengthen the traditional national character of the state. Brunei has done this by forming a partnership administratively with its religious and educational institutions, a process led by its monarchy. Specifically, at the UBD, Brunei has created a top-tier educational institution with a curriculum in line with its MIB ideology, demonstrating a model of state-led, top-down national Islamization that responds to the needs of a modern, Westernized bureaucratic state. The university education system and its flagship the UBD is therefore a critical

²For secondary education there are seven public and another seven private post-secondary institutions, see, "Government Education Institutions," *Ministry of Education Brunei Darussalam*, (2021), <https://www.moe.gov.bn/SitePages/Government%20Education%20Institutions.aspx>, and "Private Schools and Institutions," *Ministry of Education Brunei Darussalam*, (2021),

<https://www.moe.gov.bn/SitePages/Private%20Schools%20and%20Institutions.aspx#>.

³ Justhine De Guzman Uy, "Asean's best universities for 2020: Brunei joins Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines " <https://aecnewstoday.com/2019/aseans-best-universities-for-2020-brunei-joins-singapore-malaysia-philippines/>.



institution in the formation of the modern Bruneian national polity that buttresses the national ideology of MIB.

As for the research plan, the proposed project will occur in three stages. The first phase will consist of initial background research to familiarize myself with previous scholarship on the role of the national education system in Brunei. For this, I will rely on the resources available at the UBD University Library, as well as some resources available at the Brunei National Archives. Considering relevant academic scholarship on administrative and educational matters is published in English, and that English is widely spoken by almost all Bruneians, no foreign language study will be required by me; although, my knowledge of Arabic will allow me to examine Arabic language texts in the Islamic Studies curriculum if needed. I will mainly focus on government policy circulars and publications that detail the overall development of education policy towards higher education and the application of MIB teachings at the UBD.

After conducting the relevant document research and collecting the necessary background literature, I will take my research to the university community itself. My goal is to become embedded in the UBD in order to form a robust picture of the school's development, its campus environment, and the role of MIB in the formation of its current curriculum. Regarding quantitative statistics, I will be considering mainly the demographics of the student population, both domestic and

international students, with specific attention to enrollment in Islamic Studies and MIB classes and programs since they were first introduced and integrated into the university's curriculum.

Of course, the backbone of the study will be qualitative research to understand the human perspective on the role of higher education in Brunei. This will require interviews with faculty and staff at the UBD to understand the evolution of their teaching methods and the integration of MIB thought in their classes. Particular focus will be placed on the role of the Academy of Brunei Studies, with the proposed support of Dr. Haji Tassim bin Hj Abu Bakar and Dr. Charles Druce, in the development of MIB curriculum. Moreover, I would also like to interview officials from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs about the evolution of their policies towards the UBD in regard to both technical courses and the implementation of MIB teachings.

Finally, there is an anthropological element to this study. First, I plan on observing a semester of MIB classes to understand how the curriculum works in practice. This is possible as the major language of instruction in Brunei is English; with little prior study of Malay required. My goal is to understand the lived experience of MIB in the classroom and how it shapes classroom discussion and thought. Second, I would also like to interview students, Bruneians, Muslims, non-Muslims, non-Malay, and international students at the UBD. It is from these groups I would like to understand how the



university curriculum has shaped the student's national identity and religious thought as Bruneians and as college students. Ultimately this will allow me to understand the role MIB has played in shaping their worldview while at a modern institute of education.

Finally, I plan to present my findings to scholars and students at the UBD and to publish the work in relevant scholarly journals of Southeast Asia. Ultimately, I hope to include this as a section in my broader book-length academic study of Brunei, based on my Fulbright and previous research on the foreign policy of Brunei Darussalam as a constituent member of ASEAN and a smaller state in the international community. I hope to integrate both the domestic and international strands of my research into Brunei's politics to finalize a complete case study of Brunei as a model for conservative, modern politics in the contemporary Muslim world.

Biographical note

Moez Hayat is an incoming 2021-2022 Fulbrighter and Visiting Researcher in the Academy of Brunei Studies (APB) at the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He completed his Master of Arts in Asian Studies at the Edmund A Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University with a concentration in South Asian and Southeast Asian studies. Previously, he graduated from Georgetown with a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service majoring in International Politics with a concentration in Foreign Policy Processes

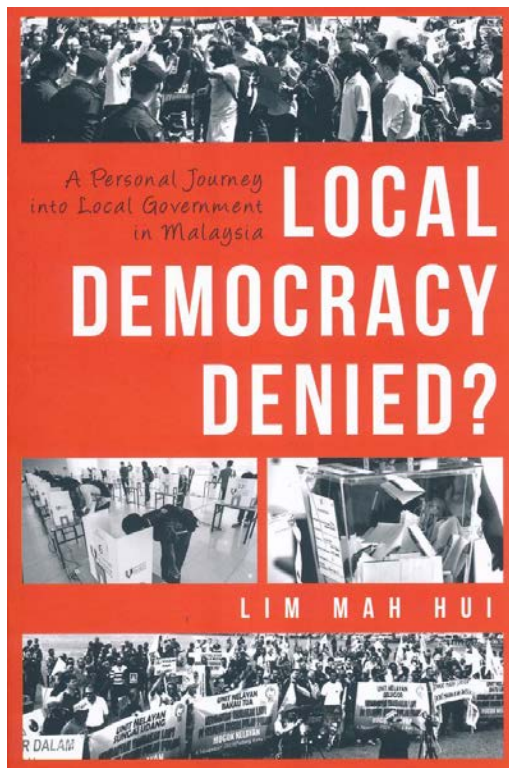
and a minor in Arabic language. At Georgetown he also completed a graduate Certificate in Diplomatic Studies through the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD) and an undergraduate Certificate in Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations through the Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (ACMCU). Moez studies foreign policy and security in the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia and has published in *The Diplomat*, the *East Asia Forum*, *The National Interest*, *Modern Diplomacy*, and the *Australian Outlook* on topics ranging from instability in Belarus to Brunei's role as the 2021 ASEAN Chair. He recently completed a graduate thesis titled "Forming an Abode Of Peace: An Assessment Of Brunei's Role in ASEAN From 1984–2020," that studies the foreign policy of Brunei Darussalam as a case study for smaller state international relations in Southeast Asia and the modern world. Moez is proficient in Arabic and Urdu-Hindi languages and is a student of Bahasa Indonesian and Malay. He resides in Shreveport, Louisiana and enjoys classical film and television, reading world news and history, and cooking South/Southeast Asian cuisine.



Book Review

Local Democracy Denied: A Personal Journey into Local Government in Malaysia (SIRD, Kuala Lumpur, 2020.)

Lim Mah Hui



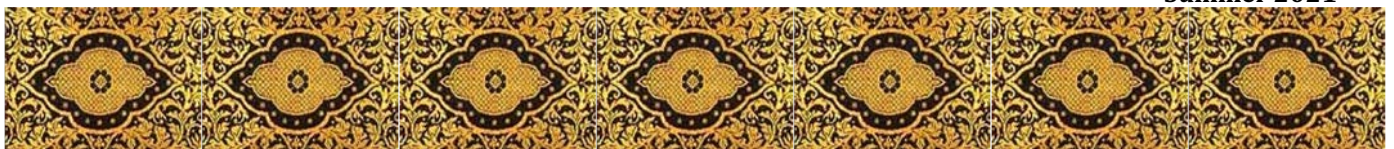
Review By Koay Su Lyn
National University of Singapore

Lim Mah Hui's 'Local Democracy Denied' is the latest invaluable resource to the existing pool of literature on local government and democracy. While this subject has often been one of academic examination, Lim

approaches it from the lens of his personal experience as a Penang city councillor from 2011 to 2016. Having set the scene with Penang Forum's mock election which saw his later appointment to the Penang City Council, Lim brings the reader into an interesting account of his life from the early days of growing up in Perak and Penang before enrolling into University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, to his later careers in academia and banking in major cities of the world prior to his return to Penang and service as nominated city councillor where he sought to utilize his professional experiences for the benefit of Penang. His personal story renders this book a semi-biographical piece that exposes readers to his upbringing and insightful life journey which in turn, shaped his views and imbued his political and social conscience. This enables readers a better appreciation of the principles he stood up for throughout his council tenure.

As local government (or the third tier of administration) involves the grassroots level, the reader would notice Lim's echoing call for improved public participation in the council's decision-making process throughout the chapters. This central theme is noteworthy since the current system of local government in Malaysia features an appointed council upon the demise of local elections in 1965. The lack of public engagement within the nominated system naturally leads to further top-down control by the state which erodes democratic practices. This resounding notion of public participation inevitably connects readers to the historical backdrop of local elections in Malaysia in Chapter Two. Many young

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Malaysians may not know that Penang was the birthplace of modern local government in the country. Indeed, the current City Council of George Town can trace its origins back to the British 'Committee of Assessors' formed as early 1801 that was subsequently bestowed with a status of a Municipal Committee in 1848. Although demands for wider franchise and better governance saw George Town's first local elections in 1857, it remained a short-lived one. Following changes in the landscape of municipal centers, elections ceased in 1913. It was not until after the Second World War that local elections were revived through the George Town Municipal Elections in 1951.

While Lim properly notes that local democracy was crucial in winning the hearts and minds of the local population during the Malayan Emergency (which started in 1948) as an alternative to communism, the fact that Penang was chosen to host the first elections in post-war Malaya, the precursor to its first general elections in 1959, is also significant. Following Penang's move to secede in 1949; spurred by economic discrimination owing to delays in the reinstatement of the island's free port, the British realized the alarming need to maintain national unity and political stability especially in the wake of the Malayan Union's failure.¹ The hosting of Malaya's first universal adult franchise elections in Penang was thus a legacy of British political response to the state's turmoil. Regardless, it paved the way towards a fully developed local government

by the late fifties to early sixties. Unfortunately, the transition from Malaya to Malaysia in 1963 witnessed serious challenges to the autonomy and independence of elected councils especially when councils were opposition-dominated and constantly rebelled against the states. Coupled with allegations of corruption and malpractices under an unfavorable political climate of the Indonesian Confrontation, local elections were suspended nationwide in 1965 and never again revived. With the transfer of local government powers to the state, a centralized administration commenced henceforth.

In fact, Penang witnessed greater centralization under its second Chief Minister, Lim Chong Eu through the integration of the state's two local authorities on the island and three on the mainland of Seberang Perai into two single-integrated entities covering the island and mainland respectively in 1974. A move designated to ensure uniformity and standardization of decisions at state-local level, the appointed council nonetheless failed to eliminate partisan politics. Such was evident in the Penang Urban Centre (now known as Kompleks Tun Abdul Razak or Komtar) case where political differences saw intense conflicts between appointees from the state-ruled, Gerakan and federal-affiliated, Barisan Nasional; giving rise to a problematic council which hindered state plans.² In response, Lim Chong Eu implemented the Local Government Act of

¹ Clive J. Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonisation, Nationalism and Separatism*, London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 1996, p.48.

² The appointees of this council consisted of 18 Barisan members from the old Alliance Party (which consists of representatives from United Malays National Organisation



1976 which effectively dismissed the troubled council by altering its number of appointed councilors in favor of the state's ruling party.³ This move effectively tightened the state's grip over local government, rendering it both the creator and supervisor of local authorities.⁴ Today, as councilors remain state appointees based on their political affiliations, they continue to be inevitably obliged to toe the lines determined by their political masters (the state). As testified by the author's own experience, there remains a limit to the independence of appointed councilors given that the system of local governments till date continues as a legacy of their historical trajectories. However, not all is doom and gloom.

Moving forward, Lim Mah Hui believes that much can still be done in enabling democratic practices within the nominated system. Here, the reader returns to his central argument of public participation. As the absence of local elections and the deeply centralized nature of the system should not be an obstruction to citizen participation, Lim strongly opines that the public should

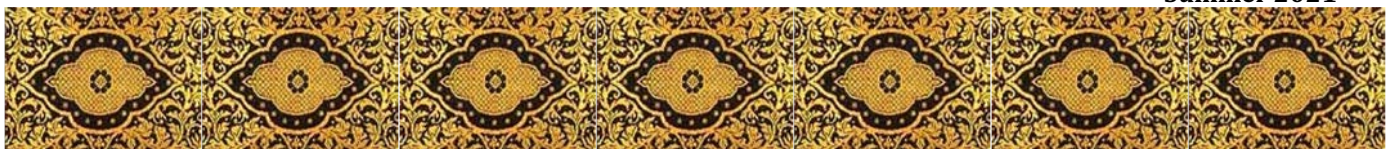
be encouraged to participate even more given that decisions and policies at the local level typically those involving planning and development were bound to affect their daily lives more directly than that of the state and federal governments. Given that many within the Malaysian public remain unaware of their rights and roles within local government, the ensuing chapters of Lim's book serves as a crucial point of education. Spanning across thirteen chapters, Lim systematically lays down the structure and functions of local government followed by its relationship with the state in Chapters Three and Four. In fact, his simple style and terms in detailing the intricate workings, technicalities and functions of local government and democracy succinctly makes these chapters easily comprehensible to both the general public including the layperson with little knowledge on local government, and academics alike. Chapters 5 to 12 then take the reader into Lim's interesting experiences and encounters within the council as a civil-society-appointed councilor. They also include his critical views, ideas and visions on the practical issues faced by the council

(UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)), 8 from Gerakan and 8 from non-political organisations. Although the Gerakan had abandoned its opposition stand by 1974 and had become a founding partner of ruling coalition of Barisan Nasional, its recognition by other component members within the Barisan took a while to materialise. Conflicts in the council worsened during the period of the urban center project as Barisan appointees protested against the project as a sole "Gerakan idea". Later, this opposing fraction voted against giving up council land at the site for the project's development; rendering it a huge stumbling block to state plans (Phang Siew Nooi, "Administration of Urban Development in Penang: The Case of the Penang Urban Centre", M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1978,

pp.143-145).

³ While the 1976 Act permitted a maximum appointment of 24 councilors, the state only appointed the minimum number of 8 based on the reason that Penang was after all, a small place and does not require too many councilors. The new council's composition saw 4 out of 8 members from Gerakan with only 2 from the former Council by virtue of their posts as District Officers from the South-West and North-East districts, 1 independent and 1 sole UMNO member who declined in protest over the unfair representation given to other members of the Barisan Nasional (Ibid, p.147).

⁴ M.W.Norris, *Local Government in Peninsula Malaysia*, Britain: Gower Pub Co. 1st Ed, 1980, p.100.



pertaining to law enforcement, finance, planning and development, urban services, and waste management. Often, his critical stance left him vilified including an instance of being openly called a 'liar' by the Chief Minister. Nevertheless, his dissenting views remain crucial in shedding a balanced and politically untainted light on current issues faced by Penang especially in the highly-contested issues on landslides, planning and development and more crucially, law enforcement and political will. To that, these eye-opening chapters serve as the book's unique feature throughout the pages of the author's personal journey.

Lim returns to his main argument of public participation in his concluding Chapter 13. Having revisited the origins and historical trajectories of local government followed by its contemporary structure, issues and challenges faced within, the reader would now be thoroughly equipped with better understanding and knowledge in comprehending Lim's forward-looking vision and hope in reconstructing local democracy in this chapter. As the current system of local government lacked the three crucial pillars of public participation, representation, and subsidiarity; what Lim properly terms as 'triple deficits', he continues his appeal for strengthened public participation via an active and sincere engagement in all planning stages. This meaningful endeavor in turn compels greater transparency and accountability within state governments. More interestingly, he debuts the notion of implementing the proportional representation (PR) electoral system into

the elective local government system should elections be revived in harmonizing the balance of power between different ethnic/religious groups while preventing domination by a single large party. Although the restoration of local elections in Malaysia remains to be seen, Lim's innovative ideas and critical perspectives propounded in this book remain crucial in educating and inspiring the general public and aspiring statesmen/councilors alike by challenging conventional narratives and conceptions on the practices of local government and democracy in Malaysia while providing a politically neutral account in balancing current insights and on-goings pertaining to the workings and practices of local government in Penang.

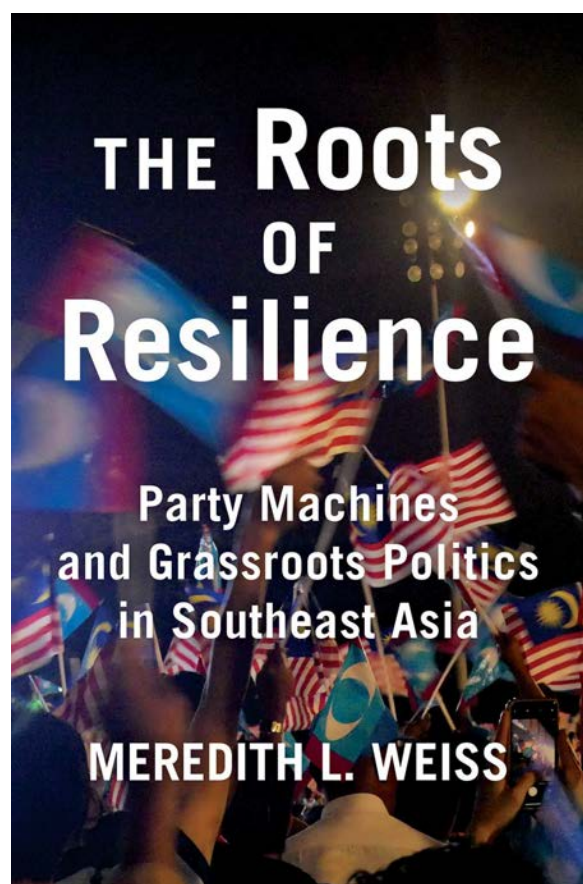
The Roots of Resilience: Party Machines and Grassroots Politics in Singapore and Malaysia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020.)

Meredith L. Weiss

Review By Mohamed Salihin Subhan, University of British Columbia

Malaysia and Singapore are commonly used for comparative analysis in the region because these two countries "looked like no others in the world—except for each other" (Slater 2012, pg. 19). On one hand, *The Roots of Resilience* follows this trend, with Meredith Weiss leveraging on this pairing to answer one question: why is electoral turnover insufficient for real regime change?





On the other hand, Weiss breaks from convention by moving across the macro, meso, and micro level of party behaviour to explain the resilience of electoral authoritarian regimes. By shifting across levels of analysis, Weiss provides a wonderfully comprehensive theoretical and analytical breakdown of the concept of authoritarian acculturation, which is where citizens are conditioned over time to accept and internalise a form of politics that entrenches electoral authoritarianism. *The Roots of Resilience* is a must-read for scholars interested in the party politics of hybrid regimes in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction which summarizes Weiss's main argument. Chapter 2 unpacks the theory of electoral authoritarian regime durability. Weiss extends existing theories of clientelism to form a theoretical and analytical framework for her concept of authoritarian acculturation, focusing on the institutional makeup of electoral politics at the macro level, political party structures at the meso level, and party connections with the ground at the micro level. This framework is used to structure the Malaysian and Singaporean case studies in Chapters 3 to 6 which are buttressed by archival research and elite interviews. Chapter 3 and 4 cover the historical origins of electoral authoritarianism in both countries during the immediate post-independence period, while Chapters 5 and 6 cover the more contemporary developments. Finally, Chapter 7 recaps the main argument, emphasizes the inferential leverage of the Malaysia-Singapore comparative case study and provides some possible directions for transition away from electoral authoritarianism.

The Roots of Resilience will no doubt appeal to both scholars of politics in general and Southeast Asianists in particular. For the general academic audience, Weiss widens the ontological space in the study of electoral authoritarian regimes. Regime durability is not built only through elections but also through the actions taken between elections, such as changing the rules of party politics, building up party capacity for voter



outreach, and instilling the culture of political patronage. Weiss also explains in detail a causal mechanism for this regime durability. Dominant political parties construct political machines of clientelism and partisan patronage which results in the institutionalisation of accountability and loyalty that is oriented more around local outreach and management than national politics. Citizens then become acculturated to this mode of politics, incentivizing opposition parties to adopt similar tactics – thus perpetuating the new status quo and enhancing regime durability. For Southeast Asianists, *The Roots of Resilience* pulls off the nuance needed to do justice to the Malaysia-Singapore comparison, with a comprehensive sweep of political developments since independence that belie the book's slim profile. The case-study chapters merit inclusion in any graduate or undergraduate course on Southeast Asian politics.

The Roots of Resilience also points to promising directions for further research. One such direction is testing alternative theories in the case studies. While Chapter 2 does engage with alternative theories for the durability of electoral authoritarian regimes, the case study chapters fail to explicitly promote Weiss's main argument over those alternatives. For example, in the Malaysian case study Weiss points to the failure of the reformist Pakatan Harapan government in reforming Malaysian politics as proof that authoritarian acculturation has taken root to such an extent that even a reformist government can fail to effect meaningful change. However, this argument ignores the

possibility that the Pakatan Harapan government's failure to reform could be due to other factors such as coalitional politics. Another direction for further research concerns the possibilities for potential reform that Weiss puts forth for electoral authoritarian regimes. In particular, the possibility that ideology may elevate the importance of nonmaterial priorities for citizens when evaluating political candidates merits further research. While the current literature on religion and voting seem to confound this theory (see Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2012), it is inarguable that there is a growing segment of society who are looking for alternatives to the hegemonic neoliberal and capitalist ideals which have been largely discredited.

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Review Essay

Multispecies and Post-Humanist Work in Borneo – Recent Contributions and Possible Futures

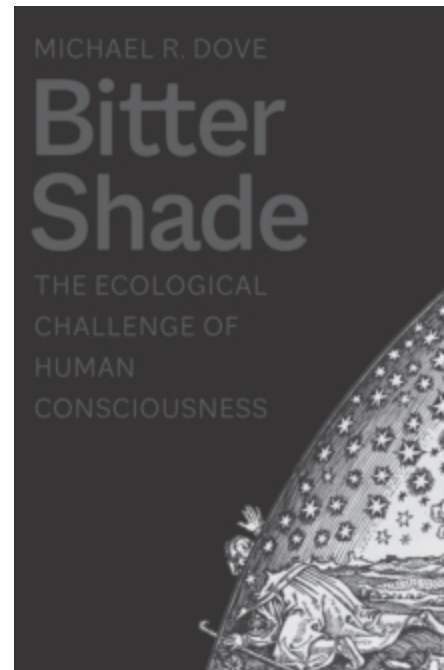
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Dove, Michael R. *Bitter Shade: the Ecological Challenge of Human Consciousness*. Yale Agrarian Studies Series. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.)

Parreñas, Juno Salazar. *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation*. Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific arts, Anthropological Voices. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.)

I found myself once again stepping out into the heat of Kuching's humid night. In the dark of the little balcony I sidestepped the whirring exterior unit of my apartment's air-conditioning as I glared angrily if blindly in the direction of the offending sound. Again, cats were copulating in the dark on the corrugated metal slats overhanging the downstairs outdoor kitchen. For a bunch of creatures famed for their ability to sneak they had elected a very loud setting for their efforts at reproducing the species. The



warbling yowl of the female was high-pitched enough sonically to offset the bass like thunderous wobble of the metal bedding. Sleep deprived I spoke to them in loud Danish, “Would you please do that somewhere else!” At my interjection, the sound of feline lovemaking stopped suddenly. A moment of relative silence hung in the air before the hurried thumping sounds of scattering cats left me alone on the balcony. They had been polite enough to leave, though they would be back tomorrow night.

My project for this text is to review two recent books that seek to understand aspects of Borneo through the interactions of human Borneans and their lived environment. These two books are Juno Parreñas's *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in*

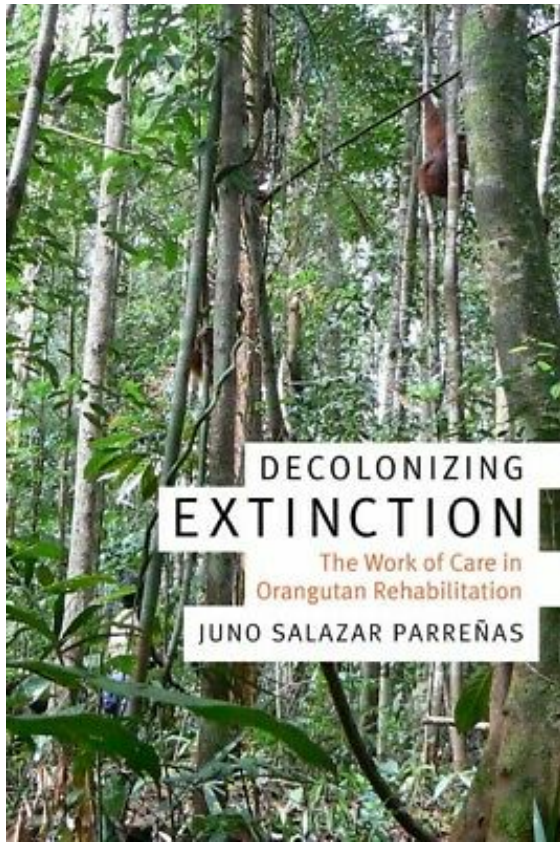


Orangutan Rehabilitation (2018) and Michael Dove's *Bitter Shade: the Ecological Challenge of Human Consciousness* (2021). Why then, one might ask, does this essay start with a story about cats in heat? The answer is twofold. Firstly, I read these books as exemplars of the on-going multi-species turn in anthropology and social sciences and attempts to think about animals, ecologies and sociality across these distinctions. As I respond to them, I assess them in relation to my own multi-species work on felinity and street cats in Sarawak's capital, Kuching. Secondly, both books provide an account of what role animals and nonhuman life has in Borneo and what sort of encounters enable us to understand these issues. While neither author claims to exhaust the matter, their respective emphasis on plants and orangutans necessarily foreground particular relationships. By drawing on the awkwardness and humorous absurdity of my own attempt to persuade a clowder of cats in heat to fuck elsewhere, I point towards ways to expand upon the work of these writers through an ethnographic encounter whose absurdity challenges some of the lacunae of multispecies work in Borneo and beyond.

Both books I want to discuss are compelling scholarship and worth reading. They treat their respective topics with insight and nuance and display impressive command of theory, regional literature and ethnographic styles. Dove presents his project as an attempt to contend with human efforts to think about and through their environment and he does so by presenting a series of case studies which, "although they are culturally and historically embedded in the places and

peoples from which they come, attest to universal human recognition of this quandary – which is a quandary of human consciousness – and the effort, however imperfect, to resolve it." (Dove, 2021, p. 202) Dove thus sets himself a self-consciously Batesonian problem of the human mind's relation to its environment, ecologies of mind to adapt Bateson's (1977) title. His case studies center on Borneo, building on his long engagement with the Kantu of west Kalimantan to address Ibanic bird auguries for swiddens, animal tales, the political economy of rice and the role of weeds. He ranges beyond those to build tacit comparisons to peasant ideas about shade in Pakistan and volcano cosmology in Java. Dove's focus is thus preeminently, though not exclusively, on plants and the complicated socio-history by which they come to take up importance for human lives and societies. In this sense, *Bitter Shade* reads as an extension of Dove's earlier work on rubber production and Bornean small holder livelihoods in his excellent monograph *The Banana Tree at the Gate* (Dove, 2011). Yet, in this new book, Dove works to make a more theoretical contribution by depicting ecological relations in ways that are informed by both the ontological turn (Holbraad et al., 2014; see for example: Kohn, 2015; Viveiros de Castro, 2015) and perspectivism (see for example: Kohn, 2013; Lima, 2000; Viveiros de Castro, 1998), but without confining his thinking to either of these. Dove prefers to wield a diverse array of theorists aleatorily to cope with the larger problem of ecological thinking in contextually sensitive ways.





Whereas Dove builds a comparative inquiry to examine a fundamental human challenge of seeing “life itself”, Parreñas builds a deeply focused account of care-work in orangutan rehabilitation in Sarawak. Parreñas gives the reader an ethnographically close look at this challenging interspecies care work through long and detailed ethnographic descriptions of situations, exchanges and discussions she had with her human and non-human interlocutors. The book is divided into three parts. The first, ‘relations’ in which she describes how interspecies relations and various notions of care are practiced in rehabilitating orangutans to live in the wild

without human aid. In the second section, called ‘Enclosures’ she shifts to critically discussing the practices of orangutan rehabilitation and the structural conditions attempting it in terms of gender and space. Finally, in the third section ‘Futures’, Parreñas considers what is likely to come of all this and what sort of life is permitted for orangutans in rehabilitation. The picture that emerges is bleak as orangutans as well as human Sarawakians seem left to die in stunted unfree conditions circumscribed by political economical cruelties that deny autonomous life. Taken as a whole, the book reads as a tragic eulogy for a species which seems destined to die out in the face of Anthropocene mass extinction. At times one is unsure whether that species is orangutans or homo sapiens. Indeed, Parreñas is explicit that the book is about conditions of death and life in the Anthropocene: “The contingency of our present circumstances frames the central question that guides this book: How are we to live and die in this present age of extinction, when colonial legacies help determine who and what is in better position to survive?” (Parreñas, 2018, p. 8). She incorporates extensive theoretical literature to get to this point, but what strikes me as the most potent contribution is the way she uses the framework of decolonizing to ask what we should even ask of conservation efforts like orangutan rehabilitation. Given the cruelties and impossibilities of actually rebuilding viable habitats and populations of orangutan, she seems to suggest, would it not perhaps be kinder to both caretakers and orangutans to admit that the rehabilitation center is more of a hospice for a soon-to-be extinct species

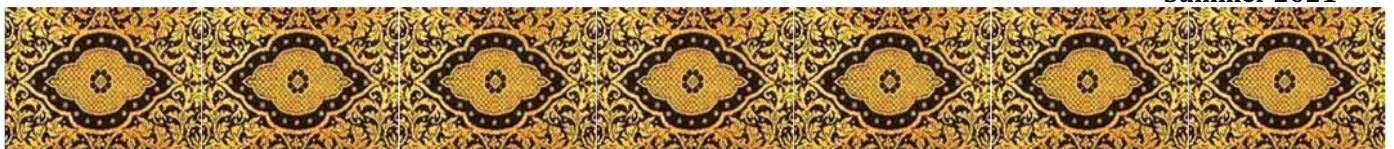


and focus on palliative care which offers kindness and minimizing suffering in the face of inevitable death?

Both books, in these distinct ways, confront us with complicated ethical and conceptual problems about how human beings relate to the species we live and die alongside. To build these arguments they draw on distinct theoretical frameworks. Dove, as mentioned takes up problems of ontology, ecology and perspectivism and thus concerns himself with a Batesonian question of how the world works and how particular peoples think about those issues. This enables him to articulate comparisons between issues across different plants and spaces and thus enables his comparative ambitions in ways that at times reminds the reader of Bateson's use of diverse examples to build a single theoretical argument. Yet this does seem to lead Dove into generalizations that do foreclose some nuances and complications. Writing about "the Kantu" or "the Aryans" and the ontologies of these peoples risks a degree of homogenizing and singularizing (Dove, 2021, pp. 134, 146). At least that would seem to be the implication of Parreñas's detailed discussions of disagreements among workers and volunteers in her field site. Parreñas is far more interested in the affective ambivalences of rehabilitation care than cosmologies or ontologies. Accordingly, she draws extensively on recent critical feminist approaches to multispecies anthropology (Barad, 2007; Berlant, 2011; Tsing, 2015). In particular, Donna Haraway's idea of companion species as the biosocial nexus of multiple species comes through as an important

inspiration (Haraway, 2003). Also, issues of gender and sexuality orient Parreñas's work. In a particularly compelling discussion of the gender dynamics of forced copulation among orangutans as facilitated by the rehabilitation center, Parreñas shows how heteronormativity and reproductive imperatives are embedded in the project of species conservation. Parreñas's insistence on ambivalence and disquiet makes her work difficult to cite and transpose to different problems, it seems to me. It is both the strength and the limitation of her book that it is so committed to a particular analysis of orangutan rehabilitation and its disquieting ambivalences. Her pessimistic appraisal of it is convincing, but its applicability across species and sites is not clear. There have been successes in species preservation work, and so one is left wondering whether those efforts too should be problematized for their commitments to ideas such as reproductive futurism? I take it that Parreñas wants to problematize and complicate rather than provide generalizable claims, but preservation of species diversity seems a very necessary effort in light of Anthropocene mass extinction and climate crisis. Can we be politically satisfied with problematization and palliative ambitions in light of that kind of urgency?

While both of these books concern themselves with Bornean people, practices and conditions neither of them concern themselves with Borneo as such. Paradoxically then, they are very concerned with Bornean ecologies while they do not foreground Borneo as the issue under consideration. Despite this, they both draw



on Borneanist scholarship extensively. Both take significant inspiration in the work of Anna Tsing, whose influence is perhaps even greater in multispecies work than it is in Bornean studies. Beyond Tsing's influence, they take up different angles on Bornean multispecies concerns. Parreñas foregrounds animals and the Bornean notions of kinship they are engaged in. In doing so she draws on Hose & McDougall's efforts to understand the Iban Nyarong – a kind of reincarnation of elders in animal bodies (see also Hose and McDougall, 1901; Parreñas, 2018, pp. 126-7). In contrast, Dove takes up the influential line of Derek Freeman's Report on the Iban (2004). Like Freeman, Dove centers rice cultivation in understanding Bornean ontological accounts. Unlike Freeman, Dove does not portray rice cultivation as an independent driver of cultural concerns, but labors to contextualize and complicate such ideas by placing rice cultivation within trajectories of power and political economy in Southeast Asia.

Both authors thus find contemporary relevance for long standing concerns in Borneanist scholarship. Yet while this clearly demonstrates the ongoing relevance of these issues to contemporary issues, it also presages some of the ways these books partake in established patterns of Borneanist scholarship. Particularly the way both books grasp Bornean issues through Dayak interlocutors and situate their studies in rural or periurban settings. Dayak interlocutors get pride of place, and by extension evince the perspectives of Chinese and Malay populations. When these groups

are mentioned it is typically to deride Dayaks for eating pork or as external dominators. Dove, for example, only has indexed mention of Malay people. Similarly, both these books continue the pronounced pattern in Borneanism of identifying the Bornean with the rural. Neither swidden agriculture or the arboreal habitats of orangutans are urban phenomena, and so I am of course not criticizing these meritorious books for not including cities into their analyses. What I am trying to point out is that there are many urban aspects to multispecies sociality and to Borneo. Thus, as we try to pose ourselves questions informed by these significant books about what sort of research to undertake, it is important to note what issues and aspects are left unattended.

For illustration I return to my own ongoing PhD work about Kuching. The cats I started this essay with might not seem like particularly Bornean creatures, and yet they are significant elements of Kuching's urban space. They are represented in murals, artwork and park hedges just as physical cats fill people's homes as pets and the streets as strays. They are in very widespread ways a companion species to many Sarawakians and Kuchingites, as indeed they are many places in the world. Indeed the city is even called Kuching, though admittedly whether that has any substantive reference to felines is not clear (cf. Cerava, 2019; Lockard, 1987). From my own fieldwork, cats are important not just as cheap pest control to limit the city's rat population, but also as cyphers for expressing political sensibilities. My interlocutors would often invoke cats to



express the contradictory dynamics of political relationships in which predatory cunning mixes with social and humorous charms. As I am currently working to elaborate in my PhD thesis, these feline metaphors are deeply informed by Sarawakian democratic politics and statecraft. As such attention to urban animals is not only an empirical object that often goes unexamined in Borneanist work as well as multispecies work broadly, but also illustrative of political reasoning in Sarawak.

Cats are not alone as urban animals. Much could be said about monitor lizards adapting to sewer habitats, the microbiological politics of puddle management on construction sites to minimize dengue proliferation or indeed the territoriality and spatial politics of roaming dogs (Rungby, under review). Plants, too, co-inhabit the urban. Weeds crack the sidewalks, trees grant shade and liveability and vines claim abandoned buildings. Yet one thing that is particularly striking about cats is their comicality. Sarawakian social media, no less than the rest of the internet, have found cats a great way to lampoon the absurdities of modern life. Humor and absurdity often gets disregarded as merely expressive of something else. In contrast to the kind of tragic storytelling Parreñas weaves out of orangutan rehabilitation or the comparative contemplations of “seeing life itself” that Dove builds, the absurd comicality of yelling at copulating cats is not a self-consciously serious concern. Yet it is one of these confounding encounters one has with animals, and cats in particular where their

strangeness leaves one in the lurch. One which would often produce the enigmatic response, “haha, yeah I know” from my Kuchingite friends. Alan Klima (2019) has remarked at length upon the ways research writing becomes straightjacketed by genre concerns of seriousness. As multispecies anthropology grows and proliferates perhaps loosening the genre conventions of seriousness can open us up to think about the many encounters like my intro in which absurdity and difference eclipse co-presence and relationality. Both these books do impressive work to empathize with plant life and orangutans respectively and to understand how such life is part of social and political history. I wonder, however, whether one new place to reflect upon in light of these efforts is to deal more attentively with the humorous weirdness of animals. This is not to deny the importance of understanding what humans share with non-humans, but to point out that I am not convinced the errant and often confounding encounters of the urban space should be disregarded as unimportant simply for being absurd.

In conclusion, both these books certainly merit careful reading and thinking. Though they cover quite an impressive breadth of concerns both Bornean and from within the multispecies canon, they do not seem to exhaust the kinds of multispecies problematics we might deal with as we continue efforts to work on Malaysian and Bornean social life. Cats in this context is but one of the spaces of inquiry we could and perhaps start opening as multispecies concerns and post-humanist works like these



two books continue to contribute importantly to Bornean studies.

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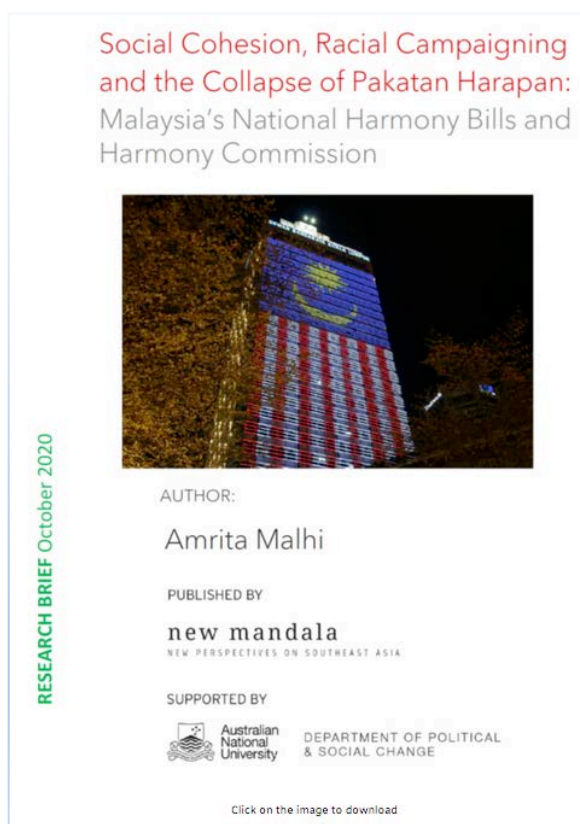
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Publications and Articles

Social Cohesion, Racial Campaigning and the Collapse of Pakatan Harapan: Malaysia's National Harmony Bills and Harmony Commission

Amrita Malhi



In late 2020, Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's government announced a return to the *Rukun Negara*, a set of five National Principles drawn up in 1970 after

the crisis of 1969. That announcement has ended (for now) the proposal for three "National Harmony" laws originally proposed in 2014 under former Prime Minister Najib Razak. Consisting of a Racial and Religious Hate Crimes Bill, a National Harmony and Reconciliation Bill, and a National Harmony and Reconciliation Commission Bill, the three laws were slated for introduction by the short-lived Pakatan Harapan government until the anti-ICERD campaign rendered them politically toxic.

Amrita Malhi's 2020 report, available on [New Mandala](#) as part of The Australian National University's "Supporting the Rules-Based Order in Southeast Asia" project, argues that the Bills' failure and Pakatan's collapse after the anti-ICERD campaign have their roots in the same problem.

That problem is the erosion of Malaysia's model for managing social cohesion through high growth and a wide distribution of benefits, albeit in a racially structured manner, under the New Economic Policy. In present economic and political conditions, it is unclear whether Malaysia's famed tolerance can withstand being continually tested by racial and religious political campaigning.

The National Harmony Laws could not have addressed this deeper problem, although they could potentially help to manage discrimination and hate speech if Malaysia finds a way to recover from its present crisis.

Summer 2021



Two books on Brunei

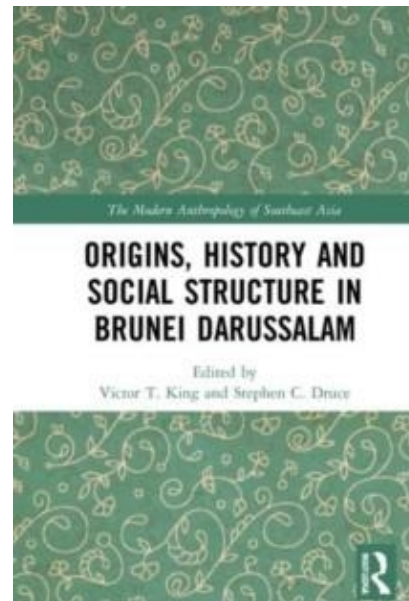
The following two books present the results of a collaborative project by Universiti Brunei Darussalam's Academy of Brunei Studies and Institute of Asian Studies, led by Professor Victor T. King and Dr. Stephen C. Druce. Both books represent a celebration and evaluation of Professor Donald Brown's important work on Brunei, the best known of which is the 1970 monograph published by the Brunei Museum.

The first book, *Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam*, is dedicated to Pengiran Dato Paduka Haji Shariffuddin bin Pengiran Metali (1936–2018), the first Director of the Brunei Museum. The books comprise of chapters by the editors and major international and local scholars, including former Academy of Brunei Studies Director, Dato Paduka Haji Abdul Latif bin Haji Ibrahim, and present Director, Dr. Haji Tassim bin Abu Bakar. Professor Donald Brown also presents a Prologue to *Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam* and an Epilogue to *Continuity and Change in Brunei Darussalam*.

Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam

Edited by Victor T. King, Stephen C. Druce

This wide-ranging book re-evaluates in detail the early history and historiography of Brunei Darussalam, the origins of the sultanate, its genealogical foundations and the structure and administration of Brunei society. Contributors draw on the seminal work of Donald E. Brown whose major



monograph on the sultanate was published in 1970 and marked the beginnings of advanced sociological, anthropological and historical research on Brunei. Among the key issues addressed are status systems, titles and social stratification, Chinese sources for the study of Brunei, Malay oral and written histories and traditions, the symbolism, meanings and origins of coronation rituals, previously unknown sources for the study of Brunei history and the processes of incorporation of minority populations into the sultanate.

Contributions by leading scholars of Brunei, Borneo and the wider Indonesian-Malay world, both from within Brunei Darussalam and beyond, address some central preoccupations which Brown raised and which have been the subject of continued debate in Austronesian and Southeast Asian studies. A novel contribution to the study of

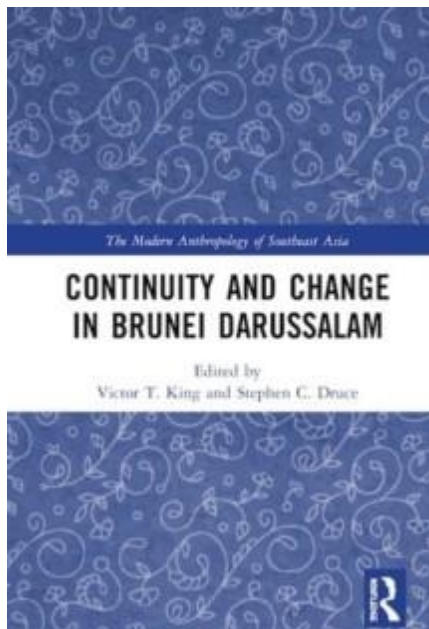


the history of Brunei Darussalam, this book will be of interest to scholars of Southeast Asian history, Asian history, Colonial and Imperial history and anthropology.

King, V.T., & Druce, S.C. (Eds.). (2020). *Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003096573>

Continuity and Change in Brunei Darussalam

Edited By Victor T. King, Stephen C. Druce



This book analyses the processes of social and economic change in Brunei Darussalam. Drawing on recent studies undertaken by both locally based scholars and senior researchers from outside the state, the book explores the underlying strengths, characteristics, and uniqueness of Malay

Islamic Monarchy in Brunei Darussalam in a historical context and examines these in an increasingly challenging regional and global environment.

It considers events in Brunei's recent history and current socio-cultural transformations, which give expression to the traumatic years of decolonisation in Southeast Asia. A wide range of issues focus on foreign, non-Bruneian narratives of Brunei as against insider or domestic accounts of the sultanate, the status of minority ethnic groups in Brunei and the concept of 'Brunei society', as well as changes in the character and composition of the famous 'water village', Kampong Ayer, as the cultural heartland of Brunei Malay culture and the socio-cultural and economic effects of the resettlement of substantial segments of the population from a 'life on water' to a 'life on land'. A timely and very important study on Brunei Darussalam, the book will be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists, historians, geographers, and area studies specialists in Southeast Asian Studies and Asian Studies.

King, V.T., & Druce, S.C. (Eds.). (2020). *Continuity and Change in Brunei Darussalam* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429021794>



Members' articles and activities

Here is a note from **Michael Peletz** regarding some of his recent scholarly activities and articles.

1. "Are Women Getting (More) Justice? Malaysia's *Sharia* Judiciary in Ethnographic and Historical Perspective", *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 52(3):652-684, 2018.
2. "Neoliberalism and the Punitive Turn in Southeast Asia and Beyond: Implications for Gender, Sexuality, and Graduated Pluralism", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 26(3):612-632, 2020.
3. "Neoliberal Globalization, the Punitive, and the Pastoral", *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 10(3):1058-1060, 2020. (This short piece is part of a commemorative forum focusing on the scholarship and legacy of prominent U.C., Berkeley anthropologist and fellow Malaysianist, Aihwa Ong. The other essays in the forum may also be of interest to *Berita* readers.)
4. "Hegemonic Muslim Masculinities and Their Others: Perspectives from South and Southeast Asia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 63(3), July 2021 (14,000 words; in press).
5. "Islamic Courts, Gender, and the 'Conservative Turn' in Muslim Southeast Asia", in *The Routledge Handbook of Islam in Southeast Asia*, edited by Khairudin Aljunied.

London and New York: Routledge. (12,000 words; in press).

6. "Empathy, Solidarity, and the Work of Law and Humanitarianism", *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 11, Summer 2021 (in press).
7. Other recent activities include a keynote address delivered (virtually) "in" Leiden, Netherlands, at the University of Leiden's Centre for the Study of Islam and Society, on May 20, 2020. The address focused on my newest book, *Sharia Transformations: Cultural Politics and the Rebranding of an Islamic Judiciary* (University of California Press, 2020).
8. I also participated in a panel titled "New Books on Islamic Law and Society", organized by members of the Law and Society Association in connection with the association's annual meetings, which were held May 26-30, 2021. This presentation also focused on *Sharia Transformations*.

MSB Group Member **Koh Sin Yee** (Monash University Malaysia) also sent us a selection of some recent articles she authored and co-authored:

1. Koh, S. Y. (2021). The interurban migration industry: 'Migration products' and the materialisation of urban speculation at Iskandar Malaysia. *Urban Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098021992219>



2. Koh, S. Y., Hoon, C.-Y., & Haji-Othman, N. A. (2021). "Mandarin fever" and Chinese language-learning in Brunei's middle schools: Discrepant discourses, multifaceted realities and institutional barriers. *Asian Studies Review*, 45(2), 325-344.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2020.1801577>

3. Koh, S. Y., Zhao, Y., & Shin, H. B. (2021). *The micropolitics of speculative green urbanism at Forest City, Iskandar Malaysia* (Geography and Environment Discussion Paper Series, No. 21). Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science.
[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108216/2/Paper_21_new .pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108216/2/Paper_21_new.pdf)

Editorial Information

Berita is the official publication of the Malaysian/Singapore/Brunei (MSB) Studies Group. A part of the Association of Asian Studies, we are a cross-disciplinary network of scholars, students, and observers with research and other professional interests in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. *Berita* is available through the new Ohio Open Library at:
<https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/berita/>

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