

## VU Research Portal

**[Review of: A. Kusno (2010) The appearances of memory. Mnemonic practices of architecture and urban form in Indonesia]**

Colombijn, F.

***published in***

Singapore Journal of tropical Geography  
2011

***DOI (link to publisher)***

[10.1111/j.1467-9493.2011.00439.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.2011.00439.x)

***document version***

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

***citation for published version (APA)***

Colombijn, F. (2011). [Review of: A. Kusno (2010) The appearances of memory. Mnemonic practices of architecture and urban form in Indonesia]. *Singapore Journal of tropical Geography*, 32(3), 405-407.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.2011.00439.x>

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

## Book reviews

**Southeast Asia in World History** Craig A. Lockard. Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, 256 pages (ISBN 978-0-19-53381-9) (pbk).

If I were to recommend one general history of Southeast Asia to an interested nonspecialist, it would be Craig Lockard's *Southeast Asia in World History*. Lockard has capped a long career as a Southeast Asian and World historian with a magnificently accessible, superbly written and remarkably concise regional history. He ably manages to cover more than 2000 years of history in the space of just over 200 pages. Lockard's attention to the varied, historical popular cultures of the region is particularly evident, making for a lively engaging read which is about as far from dry history as one can get.

Lockard's first four chapters cover overlapping periods of historical development: from earliest times, before the second century BCE in Chapter 1, developing trade connections around 200 BCE to 800 CE in Chapter 2, the 'golden age' of early classical kingdoms from around 800 to 1400 in Chapter 3, and new cultural influences, particularly the spread of Islam and Theravada Buddhism from 1300 to 1750 in Chapter 4. Lockard makes the wise choice of overlapping periods rather than trying to definitively mark extensive changes in a broad region. Chapters 5 (1500–1750), 6 (1750–1914) and 7 (1800–1941) focus on successive waves of European colonialism across the region. The last three chapters cover the twentieth century, anticolonial struggles, nation building and, since 1970, the region's fast developing economies and generally authoritarian politics.

Lockard does not make any novel arguments about historical interpretation. Nevertheless, several themes stand out. First, Lockard manages to present a strong regional history rather than cobbling together multiple national histories. More than any other general account of Southeast Asian regional history to date, Lockard manages to eschew the powerful, even stifling modern national frames of historiography that dominate most attempts to write about Southeast Asia. Only in his penultimate chapter, covering 'Changing Politics since the 1970s', does Lockard's regional focus largely break down into a country-by-country account of political and economic histories.

Another theme running throughout Lockard's *Southeast Asia* is the emphasis on the role of women in Southeast Asian society, culture and history. Overall, the book is more of an economic and political history than a social history or a history of ideas and cultural development, though social and cultural themes are by no means absent. In part through his emphasis on women – individually and in general – as well as references to the lives of commoners, Lockard manages to avoid a historical account consisting of nothing more than warfare, states and the political manoeuvres of men of renown.

Lockard also spices up the narrative with a wide assortment of proverbs, lyrics, poetry, prose and other materials drawn from popular and courtly traditions from around the region and across the centuries. Previously, Lockard (1998) has written an important and expansive volume on contemporary popular music in Southeast Asia, *Dance of Life*. In the present book, he draws on his encyclopaedic knowledge of the region's expressive arts to add a great deal of flavour for the reader, though the substance of the text remains the historical narrative rather than the cultural and literary references.

Experts, including myself, will undoubtedly nitpick some of the details. Lockard has also left aside most of the debates over historical facts and interpretation in favour of a

clean narrative with relatively few qualifications and even fewer engagements with scholarly debates – of which Lockard is no doubt aware, having been a researcher and teacher of Southeast Asia for many decades. I could compile and recount a reasonably long list of these. But such debates are beside the point of a work like this, which aims to give nonspecialist readers an introduction to the region. Lockard has provided a superb text that any serious student of Southeast Asia should have in their shelves and a strong contender to be placed at the top the reading list for any introductory course on Southeast Asian history and culture.

## Reference

Lockard CA (1998) *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Eric Thompson

*Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore*

**Tourism and the Branded City: Film and Identity on the Pacific Rim** *Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and John G. Gammack*. Ashgate, Aldershot, Hants, Burlington, 2007, 216 pages (ISBN 978-0-7546-4829-1) (hbk).

*Tourism and the Branded City* is a rare and much needed attempt to inject a critical edge into tourism studies through an innovative examination of urban identities as they manifest in filmic, imaginative and physical spaces. From the early works of film theorists and critical theorists such as Giuliana Bruno (1997) and Henri Lefebvre (1991), the vital links between architecture, urban spaces, identities and travel were made explicit. However, a book-length engagement of how such issues play out across contemporary world cities in the Pacific Rim has been lacking. In addition to filling this void by providing up-to-date empirical insights regarding city branding and tourism marketing of Hong Kong, Shanghai and Sydney, and their intricate connections with film and resident identities, *Tourism and the Branded City* makes conceptual and methodological contributions.

The book's strongest theoretical contribution is situated in co-authors Donald and Gammack's use of 'structure of attention'. In remaking cultural theorist Raymond William's (1977: 132) 'structure of feeling', *Tourism and the Branded City* has given scholars and professionals an elegant but rigorous conceptual framework to engage with the production and consumption (or non-consumption) of urban aspirations, ideals and images as generated via city branding, cinematic projections and tourism marketing. The structure of attention approach seeks to provide an analytical tool for examining cultural and commercial objects and responses as 'images and ideas that provoke, demand and inspire attention' (p. 64). In doing so, Donald and Gammack are able to incorporate the emotional and affective elements into city branding and tourism research. To my mind, structure of attention is a useful concept that does away with the often implied and assumed (but artificial) division between production and consumption of urban images as provoking, demanding and inspiring attention in the city can be simultaneously acts of production and consumption. Using the SARS epidemic in 2003 as a backdrop (Chap. 3), the authors demonstrate the utility of this concept by weaving a skilful discussion of Hong Kong's city and film identities and the current and seemingly

irreconcilable contradictions of their structures of attention with the types of patriotism its central government demands.

Demonstrating how geography and urban studies can be innovatively aligned and researched, Donald and Grammack utilize freely sketched mind maps to understand the perceptions of Sydney sojourners regarding city icons (Chap. 4). While this exercise did not uncover groundbreaking insights, the chapter's nuanced discussion shows how sojourners' geographical imaginations can be usefully understood using Kevin Lynch's (1960) ideas of city use and clarity, and how sensing the city is a socially realized endeavour. This spatial analytical exercise is augmented by analyzing across diverse datasets such as notable working class films and changing city plans. The findings in this chapter shed light on issues of liminality, gentrification and fast-fading working class memories and spaces, and their entanglements with the branding of Sydney for tourism and investment.

Chapter 5 adds a chromatic twist to urban and city branding studies by focusing discussion on the cultural, affective and urban implications of colour in the filmic and lived-in spaces of the city. From the more subtle and exquisite contours and colours of Maggie Cheung's *qipao* in director Wong Kar-Wai's *In The Mood for Love* (Cantonese title: *Fa Yeung Nin Wa*; 2000) to the bold saturated technicolours of co-directors Zhang Yimou and Yang Fengliang's *Judou* (1990), the authors discuss the diverse uses of colour in such iconic films and their potential to shape the urban imagination of residents, tourists, investors and city planners. Questionnaire surveys among Sydney, Shanghai and Hong Kong city users complement their film analysis and yield interesting insights: Sydney was 'blue' (clean, harbour coast; p. 137) and Hong Kong and Shanghai were less conclusively 'red-orange' (*fengshui*, vibrancy; p. 136). While statistically too small for generalizations, such explorations point at possible ways of furthering our understanding of the complex production-consumption processes characterizing urban spaces.

The final findings chapter looks at the city of Shanghai (Chap. 6) and considers its many branding icons and propositions from the era of the opium trade through to the preparations for Shanghai Expo in 2010 (if a second edition is in the works, an analysis of the actual Expo experience and its aftermath for Shanghai would be pertinent). The discussion on the likely loss of structures of attention as a consequence of futuristic retina-based virtual reality devices (p. 84) anticipates the potential of new cinematic technologies (3-D and 'scented' films and TV) in remaking the spatial engagements and filmic identities of city users (which may also be another issue to consider in a second edition).

Methodologically, Donald and Grammack should be applauded for being reflexive and open in their discussion of methods and for persisting with a chapter-length discussion of methods (Chap. 1). It is helpful to learn about the theoretical models they draw upon (pp. 30–33), how they go about defining their constructs (pp. 40–44) and how they allow constructs to emerge freely from respondents and informants (pp. 34–37). Written in an accessible academic prose, the book should appeal to the academics and graduate students in architecture, cultural studies, geography, sociology, tourism management and urban studies. It should also be of use to the thinking and reflexive city brand manager and tourism marketer.

## References

- Bruno G (1997) Site-seeing: architecture and the moving image. *Wide Angle* 19 (4), 8–24.  
 Lefebvre H (1991) *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Lynch K (1960) *The Image of the City*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Williams R (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Chin-Ee Ong

*Heritage Studies Centre, Institute for Tourism Studies, Macao*

**Avian Influenza: Science, Policy and Politics** Ian Scoones (ed). Earthscan, United Kingdom, 2010, 288 pages (ISBN 9781849710961) (pbk).

The avian influenza outbreak in Hong Kong in 1997 marked it as the site of the first reported human deaths from the H5N1 virus. Since then, more countries, and many in Asia, have reported human cases of the virus. As of 19 November 2010, the number of confirmed human cases of the virus reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) since 2003 stood at 508, of which only 206 survived. This represents a mortality of 60 per cent, making avian influenza one of the most deadly influenza viruses. Yet, our attention on the avian influenza situation seems to have been overshadowed by more recent outbreaks such as the H1N1 (which, in comparison, is much less deadly), and the gloomy global economic situation. Have we let our guard down in containing the avian influenza? Are we prepared for the next outbreak when it arrives?

*Avian Influenza* is a recently published timely reminder that the more familiar and chilling biological effects of the virus are also driven by social and political economic forces. As part of the UK Economic and Social Research Council/Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability (STEPS) Centre's epidemic project, *Avian Influenza* presents the challenges that international organizations such as the WHO and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have had to deal with, and how the proposed management measures unfolded in the selected countries to result in some unexpected social consequences.

Through *Avian Influenza*, Ian Scoones, the book's editor and also co-director of the STEPS Centre, challenges the ambitious goal presented by the 'One World, One Health' framework which aims to integrate surveillance, treatment and management of both animal and human health. To Scoones the answers to the questions 'whose world' and 'whose health' remains unclear – hence the issues regarding equity and power arise. While agreeing with the intentions of 'One World, One Health', Scoones argues that there remain many reforms to be made to global governance of health before surveillance and management of global health can be truly harmonized and coordinated. As the book's subtitle *Science, Policy and Politics* makes clear, a deeper understanding of political economy at various scales is required before the ambitions of the global framework can be realized.

The book begins appropriately with an overview of 'The international response to avian influenza'. Here, Scoones makes reference to the handling of the recent H1N1 pandemic, pointing out the irony that not much in global health governance has changed since the 'One World, One Health' framework was set up. In Chapter 2, 'Unpacking the international response to avian influenza', Scoones and Paul Foster provide a rare glimpse into the complicated relations among international institutions and various national governments that have shaped responses to avian influenza.

The chapters following pull together four different empirical cases of divergent political, social and economic country contexts – Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. These chapters are similarly framed – an introductory section on the socio-

political background of the country, a timeline tracking the avian influenza epidemic, and finally a series of narratives on specific concerns and debates.

In Chapter 3 on Cambodia, Sophal Ear argues that the large inflow of aid has in fact overwhelmed the weak and corrupted state. In the case of Vietnam, in Chapter 4, Tuong Vu investigates why a country that adopted a comprehensive strategy in managing the virus still failed to perform better than neighbouring countries. In Chapter 6 on Thailand, Rachel Safman acknowledges the government's systematic approach in keeping the virus at bay, but draws attention to the unhappiness resulting from the neglect of voices of the duck farmers and, interestingly, cock-fighters, in contrast to the consideration given to the interests of large poultry producers.

Chapter 5 on Indonesia is perhaps the most tightly argued and interesting empirical chapter. Readers are presented the diverse challenges existing in the management of the avian influenza virus in the archipelago. The implications of the ongoing decentralization for the control of any diseases are also well explained by Forster. The section on Indonesia's refusal to supply free virus samples to the WHO for the production of vaccines during a challenging time for affected countries is a gripping read.

Despite the empirical chapters suggesting that there is a long way to go before the 'One World, One Health' framework can truly live up to its vision, the book concludes with a chapter that looks forward 'Towards a one world, one health approach'. Here, Scoones elaborates at great length on 10 challenges that should be overcome if the framework is to be successful, seemingly optimistic that its intentions are still worth pursuing.

Taking into account that many of the interviews for the respective chapters were conducted only in 2009, the publishing of *Avian Influenza* in 2010 must itself be seen as an accomplishment. The use of readable prose with very little jargon (and when used, clearly explained) makes this book accessible by anyone interested in epidemics and pandemics in general. The emphasis on issues that jump scales in interactions between science and society make this an appealing read for geographers, particularly those concerned with the geographies of disease and development, and public health. Although certain chapters are unduly lengthy or repetitive in parts (such as the concluding one and the Cambodia chapter respectively), by and large, *Avian Influenza* enriches and challenges readers' imagination and understanding of the politics and policies that are entangled in the science of this virus.

William Yeo

*Department of Geography, University College London*

**Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines** Linda A. Newson. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2009, 420 pages (ISBN: 978-0-8248-3272-8) (hbk)

In *Conquest and Pestilence in the Early Spanish Philippines* Linda A. Newson, a Latin America specialist, turns her attention to the Philippines. After what was initially expected to be a short foray, what results is a book that provides a demographic and pathological profile of the sixteenth century Philippines in ways that reflect comparatively with the Latin American context. Why, for example, did 'old world' diseases not decimate Philippine populations as they did those in the Americas? How did Philippine settlement patterns and trade relations with other Southeast Asian societies lead to colonial policies that were distinct from those employed in the 'new world'? Newson's analysis is made in a spirit of lateral, dialogical contemplation of Spain's colonial possessions. If only for this

reason alone, the book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Philippine human geography at the time of early colonial contact.

Newson scrutinizes the same official administrative and missionary records that would be familiar to generations of Filipino historians. These sources were problematic because they were restricted to communities 'under the bells', or only to those who were registered as 'units' of the colonial government's administrative and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Newson devotes an entire chapter to the pitfalls of the archival research, commenting specifically on the problems of reliability and availability when dealing with particular Spanish sources. More than a caveat to her own population estimates (which, she admits, must be regarded as prone to a margin of error), this chapter is a valuable exemplar of the necessary methodological convergence between human geography and historiography, demonstrating the level of meticulousness that is required to confront formidable epistemological challenges.

Newson emphasizes how the distinctive features of Philippine climate, geography and settlement patterns impacted the success or failure of the colonial enterprise in different regions of the archipelago. The central Visayas region, where the Spanish had first settled, is treated as analytically distinct from the northern region of Luzon, where they established the capital. Newson uses identical heuristic frameworks for each region, which may make the book appear rigid and prosaic on this score, until one considers that the deficiencies of previous works on the same topic lie precisely in not taking such regional variations into consideration. The relative proximity of Cebu to Mindanao, for example, would render Spanish settlements more susceptible to Moro raids and as such determined their prioritization of defence. The environmental conditions and natural resources of Luzon, meanwhile, encouraged certain types of agriculture and production and enabled the Spanish administration to enhance their shipbuilding capabilities for transpacific mercantile connections with Acapulco.

Two insights offered in the book are particularly noteworthy. The first relates to the well-known fact that the introduction of old world diseases by Spanish conquistadors devastated native civilizations in North and South America. That this did not occur in the Philippines has encouraged the belief that indigenous populations there were generally healthier or simply had immunity from such ailments. Newson argues that it was low population densities and specific climatic conditions that prevented the diseases from reaching catastrophic proportions. To corroborate this, Newson consults vernacular dictionaries to identify local terms for familiar diseases, thus extrapolating the microbial profile of the time. She also considers Chinese and Japanese sources to determine how patterns of trade had conditioned reactions to particular kinds of pestilence and medical conditions.

The second insight is her refinement of the contact population estimate from a commonly cited figure of about 1.43 million to 1.57 million, which she arrives at by considering many factors beyond the statistical. By meticulously describing the climatic, cultural and political conditions under which the colonial encounter occurred in the Philippines, Newson's analysis highlights the volatile terrain in which cultures and agendas clashed. She examines how configurations of political power, including the pernicious threat of Muslim raids, interpolity conflict and the Dutch-Spanish theatre of war, heavily influenced Spanish allocation and distribution of resources and manpower. In the same vein, she probes into how the tenacity of pre-existing indigenous cultural practices, particularly in terms of sexual relations, clashed with missionary policies and subsequently contributed to low fertility. The portrait that she paints is of a colonial encounter that was far more complex and violent than what has been imagined.



What these observations suggest is that although the Spanish sought a 'totalizing' reformation of the native geobody, early European colonial missions were forced to adapt to vicissitudes that they did not face in the new world. The attempts to mould native bodies were often undermined by the fact that missions to the islands were often severely understaffed and underfunded, in contrast to the sheer magnitude involved in the early period of conquest and settlement of the Americas. While historical accounts tend to highlight the many cases of native capitulation to Spanish dominion, Newson's analysis brings out the ways in which Spanish colonialists were themselves placed on the back foot amidst tumultuous climatic, political and social challenges.

It is perhaps a legacy of nineteenth-century independence movements that Filipino analyses of their own colonial history have focused on retracing connections to South-east Asia at the expense of Latin America. John Leddy Phelan's (1959) *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses* is one of the early works that inspired conversation between Latin Americanists and Filipinists. Yet it is only in recent years that Latin American studies have begun to be fostered in earnest in the Philippines, and Newson's contribution is certainly a welcome voice in this regard. This is a work that is cogently written and structured. The demographic and pathological profiles that Newson present seem more credible than previous ones because she utilizes a wider and more creative interpretive field in scrutinizing often unreliable and sketchy data. In taking local culture and politics seriously in the analysis of Philippine human geography, Newson presents novel, often insightful, and very plausible scenarios that contribute greatly towards advancing our knowledge about the Philippines at the point of colonial contact.

## Reference

Phelan JL (1959) *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Julius Bautista

*Department of Southeast Asian Studies and the Asia Research Institute,  
National University of Singapore*

**The Appearances of Memory. Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia** Abidin Kusno. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010, xv + 332 pages (ISBN 978-0-8223-4647-0) (pbk).

In *The Appearances of Memory* Abidin Kusno analyzes how the fears, anxieties, expectations and other thoughts of Indonesian urbanites have been embodied in architecture and urban space. In Kusno's view, the built environment is not merely the product of these various thoughts, but is as much a constitutive element in the making of history of the Indonesian cities. In his own words: 'This book focuses on the visual environment and the ways in which it helps to articulate a general anxiety over the sense of change in everyday life' (p. 3).

Kusno focuses on periods of critical social transformation (modernization in the early twentieth century, the Indonesian revolution, the fall of President Suharto, and the years of reform thereafter). The unmanaged anxieties of these periods cast long shadows backwards and forwards in time:



buildings serve as a reminder of the practices of the past and the starting point for both the performance of unfinished fantasies and the desire to overcome troubling memories and remake oneself within, as well as beyond, one's particular time and place (p. 3). [...] Architecture and the urban environment help to shape memories of political crises in the past. A self-critical consciousness, 'working through both managed and unmanaged memories of hopes and anxieties [...] is formed in and through the changing realm of the visual and spatial environment (p. 14).

The book consists of nine chapters, grouped in four sections, preceded by an introduction to the book as a whole. The chapters cover a wide range of topics and six of the nine chapters have been published before. Nevertheless, the book forms a remarkably coherent whole, partly because, as far as I could see, the earlier published materials have been rewritten for this book. Most chapters begin by recapitulating the main conclusions of the previous chapter and pointing out the link with the current one.

The book opens with a discussion of the 'looseness' of the centre of the state since the fall of Suharto in May 1998, which encourages citizens in Jakarta to act on their own, 'creating a condition in which everyone safeguards his or her own space' (p. 37). Many middle class people wish to forget the violence and insecurity during the May 1998 riots, when there was heavy loss of property, people were killed, and Chinese women were gang-raped. Both the state and many citizens long for and work towards a certain order and 'normalcy'. The crucial point is that in striving for normalcy (for instance, by rebuilding destroyed shops) the memories of the 1998 terror are silenced, 'thereby enacting still further violence through the suppression of the stories [of the Chinese women and shopkeepers]' (p. 103).

It is impossible to summarize all of the contents, but Kusno also delves into shopping malls and 'superblocks', mosques and guardhouses, the reuse of colonial architectural styles, and the dissonance between feudal power in the older Javanese centres and modernization (explaining why political radicalism emerged in Solo and Yogyakarta, rather than in the more 'modern' cities of Jakarta/Batavia and Surabaya). These are important topics, usually overlooked by other scholars.

To a large degree the book is Kusno's own reading of Indonesian society, and he reveals daring connections between phenomena that at first seem unrelated. The book is quite interpretative, often startling and fascinatingly so. For instance, the exclusive bus lanes in Jakarta, Kusno writes, 'can be seen as an "apparatus" of power that, through the experience of riding the bus across the city, seeks to reintegrate "Indonesians" [into the state] through imageries of progress, authority, and discipline' (p. 50). Perhaps. But how can Kusno tell that, and to what degree does this interpretation correspond with an empirical reality? It does not appear that Kusno has interviewed city planners, or bus company directors, bus drivers or passengers on the matter. The empirical underpinning of much of the argument throughout the book is relatively thin, remains unclear, or is based on just a few sources. For instance, the first chapters rely heavily on newspaper clippings. Kusno also makes use of and discusses in detail the ideas of a few novelists and architects, but I wonder how widely their ideas are known, let alone shared, by a wider public. These sources give the book a middle class outlook. A regrettable flaw, in my view, is the neglect of Dutch texts from colonial times, which reduces the relevance of Kusno's historical analysis. Interpretation of contemporary pictures, although worthwhile in itself, cannot replace reading of texts.

For instance, Kusno argues that the 1930s were defined as '*zaman normal*' (normal times), following from the revolutionary enthusiasm of Indonesian nationalists which was quelled after the failed communist uprising of 1926/1927. Unruliness was sup-

pressed and, as an illustration of this intensified state control, Kusno mentions the building of new market halls and the fact that vendors were 'no longer allowed to move freely on the streets' (p. 189) – a picture of the new market in Malang plays a prominent role in making this point. However, to the best of my knowledge, the term *zaman normal* was not in vogue until the 1940s, and marked contrast to the uncertainty of the Japanese occupation and Indonesian revolution. State action against hawkers in the 1930s was not a change of attitude towards an old predicament, but a response to a new problem, the mushrooming in the number of hawkers as a consequence of the global depression.

More than in his previous work, Kusno has attempted to draw in examples from other Indonesian cities aside from Jakarta, but also contends that the capital city is the exemplary centre of the state and therefore warrants most attention. He definitely has a point, but I wished he had paid more attention to other cities too. Urban life looks very different in, say, Surabaya (where urban leaders are proud of having preserved *kampung*s in the inner city and of having avoided the worst traffic congestion, consciously comparing their city with Jakarta), Padang (where people are deeply pessimistic about their city, located away from the centre of political power and under imminent threat of a devastating tsunami), and Medan (where Chinese form more than a tiny minority of the population).

A very positive point, which partly undoes the lack of substantial empirical evidence, is his extensive use and discussion of other authors like Rudolf Mrázek and Takashi Shiraishi. Whereas many scholars strew references merely to impress the reader, Kusno discusses the work of others extensively. The biggest strength of the book lies in its fascinating views, often presented in a fine, personal style of writing. Although I was often not convinced by his argument, Abidin Kusno has definitely given me plenty to think about.

Freek Colombijn  
VU University Amsterdam

**City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain** Andrew M. Gardner. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2010, 216 pages (ISBN 978-0-7602-0) (pbk)

Andrew Gardner brings an anthropological lens to the study of Bahrain. This is part of a burgeoning field of scholarship bringing critical attention to the Persian Gulf and the distinctive character of urban modernities in the region.

The title of this study highlights the focus on migrant labour, which as with the other Gulf states comprises 80 per cent of Bahrain's population, making them a numerical majority. Drawing on rich ethnographic data, Gardner locates the everyday lived experiences of Indian migrant workers within a transnational, historically framed, political, economic, social and cultural matrix.

Gardner takes a political economy approach that foregrounds difference, division and profound inequality. While the Indian migrants themselves are socially divided the most significant division structuring their lives is the ethno-political mark of citizenship. Indian migrants to Bahrain are excluded from citizenship irrespective of the length of time spent in Bahrain. Their exclusion from membership in the national community underlines their inequality vis à vis citizens, making them highly vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

The book traces the systematic violence that pervades 'the minute texture of [the] everyday life' (Gupta, 2006: 211) of Indian migrants in Bahrain that is channelled through the 'kafala [system which] has emerged as a fulcrum of abuse' (p. 69). The 'kafala' system refers to the cultural practices and legal framework for governing, organizing and managing migrant labour inflows to Bahrain. The system, common to all Gulf states, evolved out of the practices used to organize labour in the pearling industry.

Gardner undertakes a critical analysis of the different dimensions of this system which articulate with recruitment strategies to enable the control, domination and exploitation of migrant labour, with those at the bottom of this sharp hierarchy of labour most subjugated. The system ensures that proletariat Indian migrants arrive in Bahrain through the legal channels yet keeps them on the verge of illegality, further increasing their vulnerability and hyperexploitation.

The workers enter Bahrain through the kafala system which binds them to particular sponsor or 'kafeel' (corporation or individual) and a particular job creating the conditions for extreme exploitation and abuse. The system confers on the kafeel such a degree of control over proletariat migrant workers which leads Gardner to suggest that this is a new, modern form of slavery. The degree of control is exemplified in the retention of workers' passports, which allows the kafeel to get away with not honouring the contract and withholding pay from employees. The level of the workers' disempowerment and lack of political rights is further underlined by the difficulty of successfully prosecuting the kafeel and recovering owed wages, and the problem of finding alternative employment without a passport (still held by the kafeel) thereby forcing workers into illegality and greater vulnerability. Thus, in addition to the hyperexploitation of labour, passport retention can be a source of additional profit. It can be a bargaining tool to use to persuade workers to drop court cases for payment of wages owed so that workers can move on to another job legally and avoid the even greater vulnerability of illegality. At other times the kafeel can charge for the return of a passport if it is required prior to the end of a term of contract, for example in the cases where a worker needs to return home in case of a sickness or a family emergency.

The conditions that guarantee labour's complicity in maintaining this master/slave relationship derive from the growing social polarization in India feeding populations into the Gulf. This then articulates with the escalating costs of a work visa (USD 3000 at the time of the study) to purchase the opportunity to slave in the Gulf, attracted by the prospect of improving their standard of living. Raising money to purchase this opportunity frequently locks labour into debt, which with declining wages can take proletariat workers virtually the whole term of the contract (two years) to pay off. Thus, Indian migrant workers enter Bahrain on a highly unequal basis which is then reinforced spatially throughout their sojourn.

The sociospatial segregation between citizens and noncitizens in Bahrain as with other Gulf states is acute, reflecting a sense amongst Bahrainis that Indian workers are a polluting presence. Few Indian workers whether elite or proletariat, even those who have been 'moored' in Bahrain for decades, have ever been inside a Bahraini home. Most proletariat workers are already fragmented by nationality, language and/or ethnicity, are unable to communicate in Arabic and unfamiliar with their (lack of) rights. When housed in peripheral locations, they are limited in their possibilities to access support from compatriots and other agencies to contend with the injustices of the system. Both elite and proletariat workers aim to live in the shadows of the public sphere to avoid the gaze of citizens which brings with it potential for violence. Proletariat workers narrate how they are routinely pelted with stones by Bahrainis as they

make their way to and from their residential camps, and how Bahraini teenagers inflict on them meaningless violence, attacking person and property. Elite workers also confront daily racism on the streets. Elite or proletariat, for Indian migrants encounters with citizens always carry the potential of violence without recourse to legal justice for the noncitizen because courts always rule on the side of citizens.

The book makes visible the myriads of pitfalls, difficulties and ever present threats of racist abuse and physical violence with little recourse to social or legal justice that characterize the lives of Indian migrant workers, both elite and proletariat. Gardner's study provides a valuable contribution to studies of migrant lives. It draws a sharp contrast for example with Walsh's (2007) ethnographic study of young, white British expats in Dubai who view their time in the city as a combination of work and leisure. For these expats Dubai is experienced as a playground for the pursuit of a hedonistic lifestyle to stretch out the time of youth prior to settling down. The contrast between the lives of Indians and Europeans working in the Gulf is a reminder to avoid generalizing migrant experiences.

The scholarly work on Indians in the Gulf foregrounds the importance of the regulatory framework for channelling migrant flows and of the socioeconomic and political structures of the host societies within which they become imbedded in shaping migrant lives. In this way it compliments scholarly studies of South Asians in the West which, post-September 11<sup>th</sup>, now tend to refer to them as migrants irrespective of place of birth, citizenship status or length of time of settlement, highlighting their outsider status in the West. In the Gulf, the control and exploitation of Indian migrants proceeds through sociospatial segregation, the so-called 'parallel lives' producing the urban as 'a stage of segregated multicultural lifeways and identities' (Khalaf, 2006: 259) while in the liberal democracies of Europe 'parallel lives' are viewed as a source of threat to be contained through state social cohesion initiatives in order to govern those constructed as 'unruly' minorities. In Europe, for many scholars, the term 'minority' is frequently taken for granted to stand in for marginality and exclusion (see Werbner, 2004), yet in the Gulf it is the minority that is powerful while the majority population is highly fragmented, hierarchically organized and thoroughly disempowered.

## References

- Khalaf S (2006) The evolution of the Gulf city type, oil and globalization. In Fox JW, Mourtada-Sabbah N, Al-Mutawa M (eds) *Globalization and the Gulf*, 244–65. Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- Gupta A (2006) Blurred boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state. In Sharma A, Gupta A (eds) *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, 211–42. Blackwell, Malden.
- Walsh K (2007) It got very debauched, very Dubai! Heterosexual intimacy amongst single British expatriates. *Social and Cultural Geography* 8 (4), 507–33.
- Werbner P (2004) Theorising complex diasporas: purity and hybridity in the South Asian public sphere in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, 895–911.

Robina Mohammad

*School of Applied Social Sciences, University of Strathclyde*