

BOOK REVIEWS

Nirmala Srirekam PuruShotam (1998) *Negotiating Language, Constructing Race: Disciplining Difference in Singapore*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 294 pages. ISBN 3-11015-679-2 (hardcover).

This is, in many respects, a brilliantly crafted and well researched book. It is difficult at first glance to articulate the essential problematic that this book aims to deal with, but part of the problem resides in the fact that the phenomenon of language and its social construction, its pragmatic usage and its ramifications for race, state and everyday life in Singapore are so complicated. If language were just the simple fact of speech that is universal to all cultures and natural to all speakers, then it would not be worth the effort to show how language is indeed a problematic phenomenon. Or as PuruShotam states at the outset in a matter of fact tone, “everybody knows what a language is”. Or so it seems. What follows, however, is somewhat mind-boggling, to say the least. To the casual reader, it is not obvious why race is related to language in the book, and this forms a substantial part of the book’s discussion. Yet part of the beauty of the Singaporean paradigm that forms the subject of this study is that ‘what you see is clearly not what you get’, no matter how simple/clear the facts appear to be.

So appearances are deceiving. Moreover, because appearances are constructed, it means that many things that we tend to take for granted as the basic categories of social life are ultimately the objects of power and politicization. This has enormous ramifications for how people in different strata or life-positions in society use language to negotiate their everyday struggles, make decisions about their social desires and future fates, as well as resist and weave their way through these given categories and politicized meanings. The fact that the categories as given (or constructed) are inherently different from the perceptions and priorities that guide people in their strategic practice of everyday life is precisely the crux of the problem. This central discrepancy provides the setting for understanding the various contradictions between the everyday and the political, through which the various meanings of language (and race) are invoked, contested and manipulated. So language is anything but a ‘taken for granted’ fact of race, contrary to what we are taught or led to believe. But if language is not just language and is an object of desire, resistance and manipulation by other things, then it can be said that the study of language (in the way it is defined here) is ultimately not the study of linguistics but rather of sociology, if not political science and race relations. So, linguistic reality is social.

If I have characterized the project of this book accurately, then I cannot do it justice except by replicating case examples and arguments that

the author already presents much more clearly and systematically. In short, language in Singapore can only be understood by laying out the historical background upon which language had been perceived, constructed and became politicized, especially in relation to race. This then becomes the setting upon which diverse readings of language come about, as perceived and crafted by people of different social strata and mobilizing strategies. If, according to postmodern 'theory', we should now celebrate our multiple identities, as though this reflects our experiential realities, then linguistic multiplicity should simply be a refraction of our cultural multiplicity. Of course, all of this is much easier said than done, and the author documents in exacting detail all manner of deviations between principle and practice. There is, on the one hand, a gap between the perception of this reality from the perspective of government policy and actual language use by the people themselves. The situation is different for Chinese, who presumably originate from various dialect groups, and Indians, whose use of dialect overlaps with a widespread use of English as the lingua franca. On the other hand, there are always examples of ethnic groups that speak languages that do not conform to their ethnic 'category', such as Peranakan Chinese and long-settled Indians who speak Malay as their 'native' language, not to mention cases of mixed race marriages, where language choice can be ambivalent. All of this is one dimension of the gap between official policy and actual language use. The other aspect of the discrepancy between ethnic and language 'identity' are the strategic practices that underlie language choice, which is a linguistic pragmatism of a different kind. While the thematic thrust of the book has centred mostly on the failure of the state (through its racial constructionism) to put into practice a language policy that reflects actual language use or choice among ethnic groups, I have found instead the various strategic practices that deliberately challenge the (state) assumed principle of conformity between language and race to be more far more interesting. Aside from the fact of whether language choice *accurately* reflects one's ethnic identification is the principle of whether it is *desirable* to enforce such an association between language and ethnicity. The many examples documented in the book of people choosing a second language regardless of their ethnic origin and more in consideration of political or personal motives raises the basic question of communication in a public sphere, where the sanctity of ethnic purity competes with political achievement and utilitarian efficacy as desired *social values*. In Australia, where schoolchildren are forced to learn a second language, Japanese and Indonesian happen to be the most popular choices. Does it matter, *especially* if the majority of Australians are white Europeans by ethnic origin? Certainly, the same question can be posed in a Singaporean context. Should Singapore be any different from Australia, or vice versa? The theoretical formulation of the book begins as its point

of departure with nationalism rather than language per se, but in posing the critical question it, in the end, fails to follow through on the *politics*. Given that Singapore has fervently embraced modern progress as a national value, its equally fervent determination to make language an ethnic marker, when it is (and has *always* been) a utilitarian tool to achieve economic gain, social mobility and political power, is contradictory.

My sole disappointment is in the way the book was organized and targeted mostly to a local audience. To its credit, the author painstakingly documents the socio-historical background and the long history of policy formulations that form the basic framework for understanding the social nature of language in a Singaporean context. To a non-native, the sheer complexity of the situation makes a reading of the book challenging. However, as a sociological approach to language, the book's primary impact should have been highest in contrast to the literature in linguistic theory. While not irrelevant, the focus on the state and nationalism is deserved, but its importance is really a function of Singapore's peculiar experiences. The peculiarity of Singapore's construction of language and race is in turn a good reason for arguing that this book be oriented with a more general reader in mind. There is little discussion at the end of the significance of Singapore's experience, comparatively speaking, vis-à-vis other societies, where language, race and other things are construed very differently. If this is sociology, then the cultural differences that are at the core of this analysis become distinctively marked if not most meaningful in contrast to societies that are constituted by different cultural perceptions and political constructions. For example, it would be interesting to see how multilingualism in Singapore contrasts with multi-ethnic societies elsewhere. The concrete experiences may be Singaporean, but the ramifications of pragmatic usage in language are culturally general. The irony of Singapore today is that it is not *truly* multilingual as it was in the past, where people routinely spoke different languages as a way of navigating through a multi-ethnic community. The standard linguistic community of the modern nation-state changed all that. So the author is right about that. Framed within that context, the everyday linguistic practices and strategies of people are constrained by strictures of the state's imagined construction of the community as well as driven by goals or desires that translate into conformity, resistance and adaptation.

The merits of this book are clearly many, one of which is having opened new vistas for study.

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Bernhard Dahm and Vincent J. Houben, eds. (1999) *Vietnamese Villages in Transition. Background and Consequences of Reform Policies in Rural Vietnam*. Passau: Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Passau University. 224 pages. ISBN 3-98054-136-3.

The first two chapters of the book examine scholarly works on the Vietnamese village. In Chapter One, John Kleinen reviews various contributions by Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese scholars. This chapter, followed by a useful bibliography, provides a well-documented overview of the studies of the Vietnamese village, past and present. However the conceptual presentations of the village and state-village relationships in the past are somewhat unbalanced. Recent researches, for instance, tend to indicate that it was the feudal state that made use of village laws to control villagers while the time-honoured approach of considering village laws as assertions of village autonomy has lost its validity. Regrettably, explanations of Vietnamese terms presented in this chapter are often erroneous or, at best, inaccurate, for instance *chau* (rendered as ‘mountain village’), *phuong* (‘native place’) and the notions of *noi tich* as “those who were born inside the village” and *ngoai tich* as “those who were born elsewhere” (p. 11). This may cause misunderstanding among those readers unfamiliar with Vietnamese terminology.

Chapter Two by Nguyen Quang Ngoc discusses the same topic but provides much less information and is almost devoid of critical analysis. The author’s contention that the Vietnamese village already attracted academic concerns as far back as the 17th century starting with the missionary A. Rhodes, and the listing of a number of works almost unrelated to village studies makes the inclusion of this chapter in the book rather awkward.

Chapter Three, contributed by Ben Kerkvliet, is perhaps the most significant piece of work published in this book. Based on a wealth of data collected from various archival sources and extensive fieldwork, the author provides a critical view of how collectivization was implemented in rural northern Vietnam during the late 1950s, together with peasants’ responses to it. The chapter offers fresh insights into the interaction between peasants and the state in Vietnam. It also helps to explain why collectivization did not bring about the expected results and why, three decades later, de-collectivization with emphasis on the production of individual peasant households was introduced, spearheading widespread economic reforms from the mid 1980s onwards.

The next five chapters, contributed by Martin Grossheim, Annette Spitzenpfeil and Kirsten W. Endres, present the findings of their research projects conducted in four villages located in the northern and southern deltas of Vietnam. As a whole, the researchers examine changes in agriculture, handicrafts, education, health care, religious beliefs and women’s

roles at the village level; in the wake of decollectivization and economic reforms known as *Doi Moi*, which was officially sanctioned in 1986.

Chapter Four by Martin Grossheim examines the various aspects of the implementation of economic reforms and their impact on the agricultural sector, with special emphasis on the land issue. While the chapter provides a great deal of fresh data on land distribution in four different villages, it fails to assess how this actually affects the life of local inhabitants. It should be pointed out that the shift from collective production to individual household economy has a strong influence on peasants' attitude to land, inducing them to diversify their economic activities. Meanwhile there emerges in the southern delta an increasing number of landless peasants as a direct consequence of social stratification, through which the gap between the rich and poor has been widening.

Chapter Five analyzes changes in rural industries after renovation policies were implemented at the village level. The question raised by Annette Spitzenfeil is whether the new economic environment has any impact on the development of the handicraft sector at the village level, and what the decisive influencing factors are? The conclusion drawn from her research indicates that the impact of reforms is "not the same on four different craft villages", in which factors such as village location, market facilities and entrepreneurial skills all play an important role. The chapter also points out that the development of 'peasant industries', as she puts it, depends heavily upon the social and political environment while the craft still "remains a side income as it was before".

Chapter Six by Kirsten W. Endres presents interesting observations on the changing roles of rural women after *Doi Moi*. The study examines women's morality, their productive and reproductive roles as well as the position of the Vietnam Women Union in the process of change. The author comes to suggest that economic growth does not necessarily result in lower birth rates but on the contrary, women from well-to-do families tend to prefer having more children. Furthermore, economic change does not necessarily bring about an improvement of women's living conditions while putting a heavier load on their family duties. Such assumptions would be more convincing if they were to be backed up with quantitative data collected from fieldwork.

Chapter Seven by Martin Grossheim and Kirsten W. Endres discusses the recent developments in rural education and health care. Going against general opinion that education and public health care have been facing a severe crisis after the introduction of reform policies, the authors argue that *Doi Moi* helps to improve these two sectors in rural areas. A close scrutiny shows that the authors have used statistics for the school years between 1990 and 1996 without taking account of the fact that the dropout rate had already reached a high level between 1980 and 1990 after the output contract system was applied in the agricultural sector. It should also

be noted that this research was conducted at villages where crafts take a dominant position in economic activities and where the living standards are generally higher than in agricultural villages. A number of recent studies on this topic clearly indicate that after the application of reform policies, poor families in rural areas generally could not afford good education and health care since these services are no longer free and expenses are usually beyond their means.

The last chapter by Kirsten W. Endres examines the restructuring of rituals in the villages under study. Unlike previous studies by others suggesting that the intensification of rituals in rural areas is a result of the relaxation of state control, Endres argues that such a trend reflects, rather, a change in perception and attitude of the country's leadership towards popular beliefs. The analysis presented in this chapter helps strengthen the view that the religious policy conducted by the state is shifting from a prohibition practice to a more flexible approach. Certain religious activities such as the village deity cult (*tho cung thanh hoang*) or ancestral worship are selectively allowed while others considered to be 'superstitious' are still banned.

Going beyond the conventional approach as usually found in the previous village studies in Asia, this book brings out fresh data and interesting insights related to rural Vietnam, where the great majority of Vietnamese still live, from the viewpoint at the grass roots level. For decades, scholarly literature on Vietnam was dominated by the themes of war and revolution. A number of studies attempted to find out why the Vietnamese peasantry always resisted foreign invaders. This book can be seen as a new departure that directs academic interests towards a more diverse and dynamic Vietnam. The well-researched information provided therein makes it a valuable contribution to the still scant knowledge of this country.

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Mobini-Kesheh, Natalie (1999) *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942*. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program (SEAP), Cornell University. 174 pp. Studies on Southeast Asia No. 28.

Natalie Mobini-Kesheh has written an absorbing study on the Hadrami minority in the Dutch East Indies. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hadramis have been the second largest Asian immigrant com-

munity in that colony, although in comparison with the first group, the Chinese, it pales in significance. The Hadramis come originally from Hadramawt, a barren, poor region in the south of Yemen that was plagued by family feuds and tribal wars until its pacification by the British at the end of the nineteenth century. The area has a long tradition of migration, and the number of Hadramis who had settled in the Indies alone increased from less than 5,000 in 1859 to roughly 80,000 in 1942. Until recently, hardly any studies have been devoted to this minority. In 1886, Van den Berg's classic *Le Hadhramout et les colonies arabes dans L'Archipel Indien*, written under government order, was published but for a long time after that almost nothing appeared about these adventurers. Only in the last two decades has interest in the Hadrami community increased; two workshops were held and a small number of articles and dissertations have been written.

Mobini-Kesheh's thorough and elaborate study is a new milestone, more than 100 years after Van den Berg's publication. In her book, Mobini-Kesheh concentrates on the awakening (*nahdah*) of the Hadramis in the Indies in the early decades of the twentieth century. Despite commercial and religious contacts with the outside world, the Hadrami community in the Indies was inward looking until far into the nineteenth century. Just as in Hadramawt society, it was characterized by a caste like, descent-based system of social stratification and a related mental world. Through the rise of a new business elite with members from all strata of the community, these social relationships and traditional beliefs were gradually eroded. Awakening, as understood by Mobini-Kesheh, is participation in developments in the modern world through the acceptance of new ideas and institutions. This pursuit of progress in different fields of society was accompanied by changes in feelings of identity, solidarity, and community. While the Hadramis at the beginning of the nineteenth century presented themselves in their new environment primarily as Muslims, a century later, they emphasized their Arab-ness in particular. The religious identity that at first predominated, fell second to the ethnic identity. According to the author, this shift has also led to a renewed orientation towards and a revived loyalty (*wataniyyah*) to the homeland, Hadramawt. However, during the course of the 1930s, Hadramawt as an object of patriotism was quite easily replaced by Indonesia.

The author documents in detail — on the basis of articles in newspapers and magazines, pamphlets, reports, books written by Hadramis in Arabic or Malay, data from Dutch and British archives, relevant literature, and a small number of additional interviews — the process of awakening that was accompanied by numerous tensions and conflicts. It is incredible how many papers, leaflets, and documents circulated in Hadrami circles. Advocates and opponents of certain changes preferred to attack one another with the pen, it seems. Mobini-Kesheh classifies her approach as a textual analysis,

an analysis of her theme based on language and text. It is, however, more appropriate to speak of a perspective in which the emphasis rests on the points of view of those involved. Despite the emphatic attention given to terminology, the study is not a symbolic textual analysis which is, for example, commonly found in present-day cultural anthropology. However, this does not make the study any less valuable.

The book begins by outlining the background of the Hadrami presence in the Dutch East Indies: the hard way of life in Hadramawt, the migration to both sides of the Indian Ocean, and the hierarchical relationships among the *sayyids*, the descendants of Mohammed who originally came from Iraq. This group, as peace negotiators and religious leaders were on top of the social scale. There was also the middle class, which consisted of the indigenous religious elite and tribesmen, and the lower classes, made up of the poor and slaves. The awakening in the Indies is described in the following three chapters, firstly, by relating its characteristics to developments in the colonial society at large and secondly, by examining at length the history of al-Irshad, the most important Hadrami reformist organization. It appears that the Hadrami renaissance was closely linked to reformist and nationalist developments among the Chinese and Indonesian population and that it, in particular, it found expression in the modernization of education, polemics in the press, and activities of voluntary associations. The conversion of a primarily religious identity into a primarily Hadrami identity is the *leitmotif* in this section.

In the last three chapters, the perspective shifts to topics that all pertain to the nature of Hadrami-ness, respectively Indonesian-ness. Mobini-Kesheh makes clear that until the beginning of the 1930s a general loyalty to Hadramawt was not uniformly experienced. In fact, there was serious disagreement between *sayyids* and non-*sayyids* about allegiance. The first saw traditional social stratification as an essential feature of the Hadrami society, and which the second group challenged this with all their might. The controversy revolved in particular around practices and ideas which were disputed by non-*sayyids*. These included such as the hand kiss given to *sayyids*, the ban on marriage between a daughter of a *sayyid* and a man from a lower class, the use of the title *sayyid*, and the original outsiders' position on the descendants of the prophet in Hadrami society. In addition to this discussion of the dissension among the Hadramis in the Indies, the effects of this conflict upon the societal relationships in Hadramawt itself are documented. Both parties had a growing need to impose their reformist opinions upon the inhabitants of the homeland and to put Hadramawt on the map. The involvement with developments in their country of origin accentuated the Hadrami identity even more. The last chapter deals with the erosion of the notion of Hadrami-ness during the 1930s, that is to say, the growing divergence of opinion between the *wulayatis* (pure Hadramis) who continued to identify themselves with Hadramawt, and the *muxwallads*

(Indo-Hadramis) who identified themselves increasingly with the new Indonesia, a topic which has been brought more frequently out into the open.

Mobini-Kesheh deserves full marks for the interesting facts she presents and her interpretation of the events in the studied period. Only a few ideas raise comment or question. She states, to start with my main criticism, that Hadrami patriotism dates from the beginning of the twentieth century. Before that time, newcomers from Hadramawt apparently integrated quite easily into the colonial society. Her only source for this statement is Van den Berg who, however, writes that it usually took three to four generations for them to assimilate. Even this statement is questionable. In my opinion, the Hadramis have always had a strong bond with their region of origin, and during the whole of the nineteenth century, Hadramawt was a more important religious, cultural, and political frame of reference than the Indies. The Hadrami identity was enhanced by the continuous arrival in the colony of *wulayatis* who reminded the 'established' of the significance of the homeland and, as Mobini-Kesheh writes, by the fact that the colonial government forced them to live together in separate quarters and seriously restricted their mobility. Moreover, children (all from mixed marriages as women never left the homeland) were raised to a high degree as in Hadramawt. This included an emphasis on Islamic norms and values and the segregation of men and women in the public sphere. This does not mean that it is unjustified to speak of a revival or intensification of patriotism in the early twentieth century, but the identification with Hadramawt was not a new phenomenon as the author states.

After a period of intense orientation with and involvement in Hadramawt, the quite abrupt exchange of a Hadrami identity for an Indonesian one — of Hadrami-ness for Indonesian-ness — by the greater part of the minority requires further clarification. How could this happen so rapidly within a few years? Were there no developments in the preceding years that paved the way? The turn-about in national identity now seems to come out of the blue. The postulated idea that accepting Indonesia as the new homeland did not, in principle, affect the feeling of *wataniyyah* ("They changed the object of their loyalty, but not the basis on which that loyalty was given") cuts no ice. It cannot account for the transfer of loyalty as such. In this regard, it is a pity that the existing divide between *wulayatis* and *muwallads* is only introduced at this stage. It must have been an underlying factor in the Hadrami community for a much longer period of time. It is well-known that at the beginning of the twentieth century the *wulayatis* had a strong hold on the relationships within the minority. Many Indo-Hadramis were employed by these newcomers who often were highly successful from an economic point of view. However, as the proportion of Indo-Hadramis outweighed that of the newcomers, the power balance between both groups must have shifted in favour of the Hadramis of mixed descent. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand the outcome.

The proces of awakening is primarily described on the basis of the rise of al-Irshad. Initially, the author intended to restrict herself to the history of this association, but because its vicissitudes cannot be dissociated from developments within the wider Hadrami community and beyond she broadened her focus to awakening in general, with al-Irshad as the most succesful example of a reformist movement. Although Mobini-Kesheh succeeds in giving a faithful account of the Hadrami renaissance, it is regrettable that she overlooks the development and the followers of Hadrami organizations such as Jammiyah Khayr, Al Rabitah al'Alawiyah, and al-Khayriyah. These organizations are mainly portrayed as opponents of al-Irshad, whereas they have also made valuable contributions to the reform process.

Although the author gives ample attention to the interrelationship between developments within and outside the colony, she fails to explore the affinity between al-Irshad and Muhammadiyah, the Indonesian modernist Muslim movement. It would also have been instructive if she had, no matter how superficially, compared the situation of the Hadramis in the Indies with those in neighbouring countries like British Malaya.

The findings of Mobini-Kesheh are not in all cases completely new, but never before have they been so thoroughly underpinned and substantiated. Her study is a must for those interested in the history of the Hadramis' diaspora and in the history of foreign Asian communities in Southeast Asia. It is well written, contains a wealth of interesting facts, and is an indisputable source of inspiration for further research.

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Norani Othman and Sumit K. Mandal, eds. (2000) *Malaysia Menangani Globalisasi: Peserta atau Mangsa?* Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. 282 pages. ISBN 9-67942-466-9 (paperback).

This collection of eleven essays addresses the impact of globalization on a wide range of aspects of Malaysian society, including academia, the economy, politics, class, language and education. It is designed, according to Norani Othman's introduction, to extend the Malay language sources on the concepts of globalization and its effects on Malaysia that are available to students and others interested in debates about globalization. The paucity of Malay language materials on globalization is emphasised by the structure of this volume, in which the editors rely on multiple contributions by

a number of authors, and the quality of the essays varies considerably.

In the first of Abdul Rahman Embong's three contributions, he identifies the limited nature of academic discussions of globalization in the late 1990s in Malaysia and criticizes Malaysians' simplistic, technologically-deterministic popular understanding of the 'global village'. Embong begins with a brief overview of the evolution of the term 'globalization' before moving onto a description of various international understandings and theories of globalization. In the 'Malaysian' section of the chapter, he explores Prime Minister Mahathir's contribution to the political discourse of globalization, which focuses on the twin (seemingly conflicting) goals of attracting foreign investment and expertise and strengthening nationalism. By failing to contemplate the possibilities of globalization 'from below', Embong argues, Mahathir effectively limits the development of alternative discourses of globalization in Malaysia.

In Chapter Four, Embong shifts his attention to the nation-state in an era of globalization. Inevitably, there is considerable overlap with the earlier chapter, as he rehashes (albeit more briefly) the history of the concept of globalization before moving on to a polemical discussion of the impact of globalization on Malaysian culture. Consumerism and the international education of the children of the rich are used as examples of the homogenizing forces globalization has imposed on Malaysia, while the divisive influences of globalization on class, ethnicity and religion are also canvassed. Having criticized Mahathir's position in Chapter Two, Embong now appears to adopt it, arguing that nationalism and globalization can co-exist if the essential 'Malaysia' is protected, by maintaining the national language and the national ideology — both of which would seem to be part of the strategy of 'resistance from above' denounced in his earlier chapter.

Embong's third contribution (Chapter Six) promises to enlighten readers about globalization, the state and class formation in Malaysia. However, most of this chapter is taken up by a now-familiar introduction, an overview of the effects of colonization on Malaysia's class structure and a discussion of the effects of the NEP. A short two-and-a-half pages on pre-crisis changes in the class structure, including mention of the growing capitalist and middle classes and the 'new phenomena' of foreign workers follows — which, given the emphasis on history in the chapter, is somewhat perplexing. Embong then moves onto the events of 1997–1998 where, having promised a discussion of the class differentiated effects of the crisis, he devotes most of his energy to its effects on foreign ownership.

Fortunately, Ishak Shari's three chapters are more substantial and better differentiated. Shari's first chapter deals with the realities of economic globalization for developing countries. He begins by giving a solid introduction to what he sees as the genuine changes wrought to the global economy in recent decades, before moving on to a less comprehensive discussion of

the costs of globalization for developing countries. This theme is pursued further in Chapter 11, where Shari traces changes in Malaysia's social indicators from the 1960s to the late 1990s in an attempt to show that the social policy challenges faced by the Malaysian government have been exacerbated by globalization. Shari brings this later chapter to a close by arguing that the Malaysian state must intervene to mitigate the impacts of globalization on the poor and the working class in order to increase Malaysia's ultimate competitiveness in the global marketplace.

In Chapter Five — the third of his contributions — Shari turns his attention to Malaysia's experience of the Asian crisis. In another strongly empirical piece, Shari follows through the chronology of the Asian monetary crisis before turning his attention to the process through which Malaysia's experience of monetary crisis precipitated a more far-reaching economic crisis. Shari concludes this chapter by arguing that the crisis discredited the Asian model of development and that the developing countries of Asia should take precautions to avoid a repeat of the events of 1997/1998. As in his other chapters, Shari's economic background and strong empirical bent once again lend weight to his arguments.

In a welcome diversion from the economic, Rustam A. Sani in Chapter Six asks the question that is so obviously missing from Shari's Chapter Five, namely, whether or not the economic crisis gave birth to a political crisis in Malaysia. While the political effects of the crisis pale in significance when compared to the upheaval experienced in neighbouring Indonesia, Sani's exploration of the political dimensions of the economic crisis of the late 1990s is a necessary addition to the volume. After a detailed description of the Anwar case and its implications, Sani turns his attention to the reform movement, concluding that Mahathir has underestimated the transformation in Malaysian political culture and the resurgence in civil society precipitated by the crisis.

Kessler — the volume's only foreign contributor — continues the civil society theme with a chapter that ranges from an overview of the work of Hannah Arendt, to Islamic and neo-Confucian concepts of civil society, to the legacies of colonialism, to consumerism in post-colonial Southeast Asia. Kessler concludes that active citizenship must come from citizens themselves — not from the state or from social and political theorists — if there is to be an effective global civil society.

Sumit K. Mandal's chapter on Malaysian English, which traces the politics of English in the post-colonial period before turning to the reflections of three contemporary Malaysian English language writers on their use of English, presents a different perspective on the politics of resistance. Through his exploration of Malaysian authors' 'hijacking' of the language of the global village, Mandal argues that the processes of globalization bring with them unexpected side effects that demonstrate the resilience of the 'objects' of globalization.

In a chapter entitled ‘Globalization, Education and Modernity in Malaysia’ — the first of two chapters in this volume by Norani Othman in addition to her introduction — Othman picks up some of the themes of cultural globalism presented by Mandal. Othman’s discussion focuses on the tensions between the need to internationalize education as a means of developing Malaysia’s human resources and the importance of nation-building and the maintenance of local values through the education system. Most of the chapter is devoted to a critique of the commodification of education in Malaysia’s institutions of higher learning, where Othman argues that the utilitarian approach to the acquisition of saleable skills is not enough because while Malaysia needs modernity, modernity is more than just technical expertise. In something of a shopping list, she then moves on to religious education, then to the role of the state in funding and determining the shape of higher education, in an attempt to demonstrate that Malaysians need to sit down and think about what values they want to keep and what can be sacrificed at the altar of internationalization, before concluding that there is no ‘easy recipe’ for the development of human resources.

Othman’s final chapter, from which the title of the book is taken, is far more clearly structured and theoretically orientated. In a tightly written twenty-six page essay, she focuses on a number of the themes of the book, including the discourse and reality of globalization, the effects of globalization and the impact of ‘global’ culture. In the penultimate section of the chapter, she then argues that it is time to move beyond one-sided analyses of globalization rooted in the system of social knowledge produced by the global core and towards an understanding of globalizing processes that leaves room for diverse trajectories within and between nation-states. This is a noble aim, which, while barely touched upon in the essays in this volume, should provide a useful framework for future Malay language collections on globalization.

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N. Ganesan (1999) *Bilateral Tensions in Post-Cold War ASEAN*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 81 pages. ISBN 981-230-060-0 (paperback).

Tension is a feature in international relations. It refers to a dangerous situation in the relationship among countries that, if not managed and handled well, could lead to a war. Since it involves countries and their relationships

with one other, it is sometimes normal to see tensions in any relations. This is the focus of the monograph entitled “Bilateral Tensions in Post-Cold War ASEAN”, written in 1999 by N. Ganesan, a Southeast Asian specialist at the National University of Singapore (NUS). This monograph consists of 81 pages — 61 pages of text and the rest consisting of appendices on the historic ASEAN Declaration of 1967 and the famous 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). This monograph has 11 chapters with five chapters focusing on the bilateral relations involving Malaysia and its neighbours and another chapter concentrating on Thailand and its neighbour, Myanmar.

Ganesan starts by stating briefly that the Cold War was a significant factor that had caused the region to be divided into two factions hostile to each other: the pro-West ASEAN versus the pro-communist Vietnam. This was followed by an account of the emergence of ASEAN in 1967, detailing several important events as the background, including the infamous Indonesia confrontation against Malaysia. Ganesan also highlights two important concepts in order to help in understanding the region, namely, the Malay Archipelago Complex (mainly maritime nations) and the Indochina Security Complex (with actors such as Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia). Then, Ganesan continues by looking at the collapse of the Indochina Security Complex following the demise of communism in the late 1980s. Clearly, this demise brings to an end the conflict in Indochina, which hitherto had been a permanent feature of the region since the end of World War II. Rather significantly, the end of the conflict had also neutralized Vietnam’s hegemonic ambition, which has been the cause of the conflict in Cambodia. Another important subsequent development was that China began downgrading its support for insurgencies in the region. Finally, chapters on bilateral relations followed.

Indeed, it appears that Malaysia was involved in almost every set of relationships discussed in Ganesan’s work. According to Ganesan, ‘this is entirely incidental since peninsular Malaysia lies at the heart of maritime Southeast Asia and shares land borders with almost every country. . . .’, except Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. I think it would be rather appropriate if Ganesan had included at least one chapter on Vietnam since it is an important actor in the region. Furthermore, Vietnam was once a communist state but later on, during the post-cold war era, joined ASEAN. This can be considered a significant event for ASEAN and would be of particular interest for us in gauging how Vietnam interacts with its former enemies in the association. Hence, Ganesan’s reason for omitting Vietnam because Hanoi was a late entrant can, perhaps, be questioned.

Judging from the title, one could sense that the factors that contributed to the tensions are new factors. However, those highlighted in this monograph are not new ones because most of the issues that caused tensions

among the countries involved are really old issues: For instance, the Philippines' claim on Sabah in the context of Malaysia-Philippines relations; Malaysia's support of the Muslim separatist group in the context of Malaysia-Thailand relations; or the Horsburg Lighthouse claim involving Malaysia and Singapore. Nonetheless, Ganesan has highlighted new issues such as the Custom, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) issue, the Central Limit Order Book (CLOB) issue and the airspace issue, all of which involve both Malaysia and Singapore. Ganesan has also touched on the issue of Estrada's statement on Anwar, which certainly left an impact on Malaysia-Philippines relations at that time.

In discussing bilateral relations, one could also look at the head of state's visit as an indicator to gauge the extent or depth of a relationship. However, Ganesan seems to have ignored this factor in his monograph. On the other hand, by including the visits by a head of state, one could figure out the importance placed by the country in its relations with its neighbours. Furthermore, such high-level visits would provide an avenue for thrashing out problems between two countries. This is especially obvious when one studies Malaysia-Philippines relations. Interstate visits between leaders of these two countries are rather rare. This could be due to the uneasy relationships between the two countries as the Philippine's claim on Sabah is still an issue that has not been resolved. In this connection, one could indeed ask how Ganesan could state that the two countries have a cordial relationship with each other (page 45).

Reading this monograph reminds me of a monograph written by Harald David entitled "Malaysia and its Neighbour", published in 1996 by the University of Hull, except that David's monograph is more detailed in its coverage of issues when compared to Ganesan's. Nevertheless, Ganesan's monograph has an advantage over the earlier work as it includes events up to the year 1999, thus, covering the Asian financial crisis as well. Although brief, Ganesan's effort is commendable and should be a necessary reference for those who study ASEAN.

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Azzedine Haddour (2000) *Colonial Myths-History and Narrative*, UK, Manchester: Manchester University Press. 197 pages. ISBN 7190-5992-5 (paperback).

In a section devoted to the French imperial experience in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said asserts:

There remains today a readily decipherable (and persistent) Eurocentric tradition of interpretatively blocking off what Camus (and Mitterand) blocked off about Algeria, what he and his fictional characters blocked off. (*Culture and Imperialism*, 178)

In his examination of Albert Camus's works, Said resituates *L'Étranger* in the geopolitical context from which the narrative emerges in order to interpret it as a form of historical experience. He indicates that Camus's much praised unadorned style does indeed conceal complexities that critics have attempted to resolve by reading his texts as a parable of the human condition. What Said had initiated as a project to re-examine colonial myths and narratives about North Africa, Azzedine Haddour takes on with more precision both in terms of methodology and content. In his book *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative*, Azzedine Haddour examines the themes of assimilation, colonial mythology and history in the Algerian context through a variety of textual and theoretical analyses. Covering the period between 1945 up to the Algerian war, the corpus of material studied includes the works of canonical writers like Camus, writings of Francophone writers like Mohammed Dib, Feraoun and Mammeri and a range of theoretical material by Barthes, Fanon, Memmi, Kristeva and Derrida. Azzedine Haddour's thesis is based on his claim that in colonial Algeria, the disjunction between past and present led not only to the political alienation of the natives, but also resulted in the eclipse of the society of the *pièdes noirs* (French settlers) in Algeria.

In the introductory chapters, Haddour traces three different literary movements, *Algerianisme*, *École d'Alger* and *Littérature de combat*, and analyzes how they responded to the French government's assimilationist rhetoric and how the ideology inherent within the three competing myths formed the literary discourses in colonial Algeria. In actual fact, two discourses determined the colonizer-colonized relations. The dialogue between liberal metropolitan politicians and the colonized elite was defined by associationist policies, and the other discourse was represented by settlers for whom the doctrine of assimilation aimed to support the harmonization of racial and cultural conflicts meant only assimilation of land. The *Algerianiste* school of literary imperialism saw themselves as settlers with a mission to construct an Algerian consciousness. In response to *Algerianisme*, the *École d'Alger* in the late 1930s expressed the existentialist problem of the settlers

by seeking refuge in a kind of Mediterranean utopia and universalizing colonial specificities. However, this school did not succeed in establishing itself and the *Littérature de combat* that developed after 1945 sought to impose a liberationist agenda.

Algerianisme was inspired by L. Bertrand's idea of a Latin Africa that propagated the myth of the colonizer's Latin rights to consolidate France's hegemonic authority. Rejecting the myth of Latinty, Audisio and Camus of the *École d'Alger* used the myth of the eternal Mediterranean in their writings. Haddour examines the use of this myth in Camus' works. In his reading of *Noces à Tipasa*, he claims that Camus's hedonism, his cult of the body and nuptials with the Mediterranean dissimulate the history of a divided and sclerosed society. In his reading of Amrouche's "L'éternel Jugurtha", which proposes a mythic hero who rebels against Roman domination, he observes that while Amrouche rejected the discourse of the *Algerianistes*, he did not dismiss colonialism. Haddour sees the split in Amrouche's discourse in Fanonian terms of fracture between blackness and whiteness. In a separate chapter devoted to Camus's *L'Étranger*, Haddour unpacks the metaphor of 'point zero'. Barthes, he says, had failed to see the political function of this mythical narrative. In his reading of the novel, Haddour refutes Sartre's reading of Mersault as a hero of the Absurd and claims that the Arabs in the novel are placed outside of history and that the silence is a void that suppresses the colonial text. In a careful analysis of the theme of the Outsider in the novel, Haddour recuperates the metaphor of the outsider from the French man Mersault in order to render justice to the Arab victim. In another section, he provides a critical reading of Kristeva's interpretation of *L'Étranger*. He claims that Kristeva overlooks the historical specificities when dealing with the alienation of the Western man: she ignores the existence and cultural difference of the colonized Arab. In another chapter devoted to Camus's *La Chute*, Haddour argues that while the novel criticizes political Europe, it does not deal with the problem of Algeria. His analysis shows how Camus's use of irony sets up a context of dissimulation and doubleness. The author concludes that in Camus's work, irony as a post-structuralist signifier deconstructs nothing and succeeds merely in producing mystification. In the following chapter, Haddour looks at other Camusian narratives. In his Fanonian examination of "L'Hôte", Haddour states that Camus fails to draw the link between colonial laws and the famine that eventually leads to murder and revolt in the narrative. He argues that the narrative offers a stereotypic view similar to the one held by the Algerian school of psychiatry that claimed that Algerians are born criminals. In his analysis of "La Femme adultère", the author deconstructs Camus's stylized portrait of the desert as a space beyond conquest and history by exploring the sexualized nature of colonial discourse. In a separate chapter devoted for the most part to examining Mohammed

Dib's trilogy, Haddour compares Dib's works with Camus' writings. He argues that while Camus narrativizes the impoverishment of the colonized and famine as natural calamities, Dib in his trilogy stresses that it was indeed colonized politics that manufactured it. In an interesting comparison of Camus's *L'Étranger*, Roblès' *Les hauteurs de la ville*, Mammeri's *Le sommeil du juste* and Feraoun's *La Terre le sang*, Haddour establishes the 'putting on trial of the subject' status of the colonized as one of the points at which the four narratives intersect. Haddour elaborates upon the logic of scapegoating and in his analyses, he discusses how the native is confined into a circle of guilt and how he is made to carry it like a curse.

In another chapter centred on the reading of Derridean texts, he contends that by ontologizing History, Derrida ignores its seeds of violence. He critiques Derridean notions of supplement and writing as bereavement. Refuting the apolitical nature of the Derridean hymen, Haddour focuses on the political function of the hymen as a veil hiding the specificities of colonial history. This chapter precedes the concluding one that discusses the novels of Pélégri and Clot, representatives of the *Ecole d'Alger*, as sites of bereavement representing a view of the processes that blocked the diachronic progress of history as a force of change. In his study of the novels in terms of historian Nora's concept of 'historical closure' he argues that these novels, now forgotten, provide a metaphorical memory of a society lost to history.

In *Colonial Myths-History and Narrative*, Camus's works form the pivot of the analyses around which other authors of the *Ecole d'Alger*, those of the *Littérature de combat* school and theoreticians like Derrida are reassessed. In this sense, the analyses may appear incomplete, but on the whole, Azzedine Haddour's project of a reassessment of colonial myths in the light of colonial politics and history is a useful and insightful contribution to post-colonial studies and to the Algerian question in particular.

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