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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State by Anne Haila

Review by: Michael R. Glass

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stories that bring to life people, places, and connections, which may otherwise remain out of focus and out of history. In this regard, *The Pearl Frontier* enriches and brilliantly expands the fields of Asian studies and Southeast Asian history by threading together the lives of Gafoer, Thomas Kato, Ahmat bin Fadal, and The Soen Hin, among other pearly indents, with the stories of Aru, Thursday Island, the White Australian policy, and pearl masters such as Sech Said bin Abdullah Baadilla, Victor John Clark, and Robin Hilliard.

Taken together, both books exemplify how sea and ocean basins can open up new histories and complicate old geographies. Through the lens of mobility, in particular, they each “probe the connections and dynamics” that shaped the processes of expansion, interaction, and enclosure, and examine too the legacies and consequences of these developments.<sup>4</sup> For Matsuda, Asian waters and the cultures, ports, and politics that bound them were integral to the making of Pacific worlds. By locating Southeast Asia in the histories of the Pacific, for example, Matsuda reveals transregional linkages that not only extend deep in the past, but also animate the present. In the age of high colonialism, these connections included the export of Javanese laborers to New Caledonia and Indochinese exiles to French Polynesia.<sup>5</sup> For Martinez and Vickers, their history of the pearl frontier explains not only why people moved around, but also how their movements linked together Indonesia and Australia in a shared history anchored in a connected zone. Indeed, both books offer compelling examples of how to think about bodies of water, and how to work through them for purposes of writing the Asian past from places and processes that exceed the nation, colony, empire, or region. They remind us that history is diasporic.

ANTHONY D. MEDRANO

Harvard University

[anthony\\_medrano@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:anthony_medrano@fas.harvard.edu)

## SINGLE-BOOK ESSAYS

*Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State.* By ANNE HAILA. Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2016. 273 pp. ISBN: 9781118827673 (paper, also available in cloth and as e-book).  
doi:10.1017/S0021911818000396

The city-state of Singapore continues to fascinate urban scholars. Singapore is an independent and highly developed nation that has solved the housing question and scores

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>On New Caledonia, see Alice Dewey, “The Noumea Javanese: An Urban Community in the South Pacific,” *South Pacific Bulletin* 14, no. 4 (1964): 18–23, 26; Craig A. Lockard, “The Javanese as Emigrant: Observations on the Development of Javanese Settlements Overseas,” *Indonesia* 11 (1971): 41–62. On French Polynesia, see Lorraine Patterson, *Exiles from Indochina in the Transcolonial World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

consistently high ratings for business climate, quality of life, and investment potential. The recipe for Singapore's success is sometimes explained as the consequence of luck, a consistent government led by the People's Action Party, and a function of "Asian Values." However, Anne Haila considers the roles of land and land rent to be important yet frequently overlooked features of the Singapore story. The country adheres to an atypical land-society relation, with Singapore's government owning approximately 90 percent of Singapore's land. Haila's significant new book *Urban Land Rent* argues that the country's success is a function of the policies and relationships that let the country operate as a property state, where land markets are used as a key resource for urban economic development.

Haila's book is driven by her long interest in land rent theory—an approach that explains the relations between labor, capital, and land. Whereas land rent was historically used to consider agricultural development, Haila argues that land rent theory is also applicable to understanding urban development and real estate problems in cities like Singapore and Hong Kong. Haila does not presume her readers will be familiar with rent theory, acknowledging that recent scholarship on rent theory is sparse. Therefore, chapter 3 describes concisely the historic evolution of land rent theory, juxtaposing the political economy perspective of critics like David Harvey with the property rights perspective of economists like Ronald Coase. Haila's main point is to outline the different theoretical principles of rent, and the consequences these approaches have for urban policy. In the Singapore case, Haila's contribution is demonstrating how the normative Western perspective on land theories and property ownership do not explain the experience of Asian land systems: Singapore follows a different form of land-society relationship from those in Western-style economies, yet the country's advanced economic development proves there are alternatives to land systems rooted in property rights and individualism.

An interesting aspect of this book is chapter 4, where Haila describes land reform in historic and contemporary settings. Classifying these reform movements as radical, neo-classical, or moralistic types, she draws on examples from China, the United States, and England to show how different societies have calibrated the relationship between state ownership of land and free market systems. Compared to other systems, Singapore's solution is defined as pragmatic, where ideological positions on property are bypassed to focus on three main objectives: economic growth, legitimizing the government, and providing housing for Singapore's citizens.

The empirical heart of Haila's book consists of three chapters focusing on the institutions and policy mechanisms that enable Singapore to function as a property state. These are also perhaps the most significant portions of her book for readers interested in understanding more about Singapore's land system and how it corresponds to international systems, including Hong Kong and China. Chapter 5 examines how Singapore resolved the housing question, and describes the web of authorities and government policies that embedded housing as a cornerstone of economic development policy. She explores how powerful state authorities such as the Housing Development Board (HDB), the Urban Redevelopment Authority, and the Singapore Land Authority interact through complementary missions, and yet are kept separate in order that no one agency can become too powerful. Haila's focus does not provide room for examining the flesh-and-blood actors within these organizations. Throughout these chapters, she remains keenly focused on unpacking how these institutions use land to bolster urban development. Therefore, while she notes that authorities like the HDB are dynamic and prone to adaptation, the guiding roles of bureaucrats and leaders of specific authorities are ignored, and the potential for inter-agency conflict is not addressed.

The roles of individual actors become clearer in chapter 6, when Haila focuses on the influence of property developers and development companies. She uses international



examples to show how private land development and speculation usually work, and then describes Singapore's different approach. What makes Singapore distinct is the state's involvement in the development market through two mechanisms. First, the Singapore government maintains a massive land bank (holding 90 percent of land in Singapore) that provides the state with a large advantage for influencing the land market, as the government controls where and when to offer land for development. Second, Singapore's Government-Linked Companies (GLCs), such as CapitaLand, are instrumental land developers, and yet must bid on even terms with private developers when land is made available by the state. Haila's discussion of the GLCs is particularly useful, making clear how Singapore's system avoids the problem of crony capitalism that affects other Asian economies. Haila returns to the question of how Singapore fosters development without an internal hinterland during chapter 7. Drawing on contemporary theories about the influence of economic globalization, she argues that Singapore's Sovereign Wealth Funds help the country to transcend its borders by creating and exploiting a global hinterland. Real estate investments into and out of Singapore are facilitated by government policies that make the country a reliable investment environment, and that function in concordance with Singapore's lengthy history as a free trading hub.

In Singapore, the state's vast land bank enables land to be used for the public good, yet in a way that also maximizes what Haila terms fiscal rent—that is, revenue that the government collects. The Singapore compromise also enables private developers to grow and prosper, backed by several state authorities that facilitate development and that make policy adjustments when necessary. Haila's analysis demonstrates how a seemingly idiosyncratic case can provide insights for land policy in other cities. In particular, her work emphasizes how the land-society relationship can be changed to meet evolving urban needs. Although the capacity for Singapore's model to be adapted by other systems was not within the scope of this book, Haila's methodical treatment of urban land rent provides a useful reference that future research could follow. *Urban Land Rent* is a necessary text for any scholars who wish to understand how the state and market are blended in Singapore, and for researchers interested in the application of urban rent theory to empirical cases. In addition, her detailed and candid account of the often unanticipated modes of data collection (especially in the preface and afterword) provides helpful information for Western researchers looking to collect business data in Asian settings.

MICHAEL R. GLASS  
University of Pittsburgh  
[glass@pitt.edu](mailto:glass@pitt.edu)

*Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer.* By ALEXANDER LABAN HINTON. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016. 360 pp. ISBN: 9780822362739 (paper, also available in cloth and as e-book).  
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Between February and November 2009, an extraordinary trial took place in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, before a tribunal composed of national and foreign judges. The accused was Kaing Guek Eav, better known by his revolutionary name Duch. He was the former director of an infamous prison under the regime of Pol Pot between 1975 and 1979, during which about 1.7 million Cambodians died of starvation, exhaustion, disease, forced labor, and execution.