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Book Reviews

Stefan Hübner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. 416 pages, €36.99. ISBN 978-981-4722-03-2

In 1913 Governor General William Cameron Forbes officially opened the first Far Eastern Championship Games in Manila. Six nations took part, most notably the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan. The opening of the games by an American clearly hints to their imperialist context and marks the starting point of Stefan Hübner's "tumultuous ride, through six decades of the strenuous lives and organizational activities of many leading sports officials and politicians" (p. 261) of Asia. The last Asian sports mega event covered by Hübner is the Seventh Asian Games hosted by Teheran in 1974, which revolved around the Shah regime's self-representation and the question of reintegrating mainland China into the Asian sports world.

Hübner structures his book around Asian sports events from 1913 to 1974, with each event receiving a chapter. He connects these chapters through the overarching concepts of nation branding, body politics and post-colonial resistance. Thus he is able to show how the American YMCA's early initiative towards launching an Asian sport championship was based on the imperialist perception of Asians as backward and not yet fit enough to compete in the modern world. By and by, Asian sports officials pushed back against the Americans to shape these championships according to their own needs and beliefs. However, these Asian sports officials failed to replace modern Western sports, rituals modelled on those of the Olympics, or the ideology of modern nation-building with any visions of their own. As a result, Asian sports mega events remained entangled in a colonial world order. On the other hand, when countries like Japan and Iran staged the Asian Games in 1958 and 1974, respectively, they impressed the world with their organisational skills and substantiated claims of national progress vis-à-vis the West. Hübner also emphasises that the various Asian sports mega events were a contested arena for negotiating the notion of Asia. Conflicts between communist China and Taiwan as well as rifts between West Asian Arab countries and East Asian ones such as Japan repeatedly led to disputes which were only partly resolved through sports.

In pointing out these diverging interests and aligning them with the performative side of the various Asian games, Hübner follows a recent trend in sport history. Sports mega events have received more and more attention in the last decades as highly significant symbolic political arenas of the 20th cen-

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tury. Kay Schiller and Christopher Young's *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany* (2010) and Eva Maria Gajek's *Imagepolitik im olympischen Wettstreit: Die Spiele von Rom 1960 und München 1972* (2013) are two outstanding examples of this trend. These books prove how symbolic politics are at work in the Olympics and defy the naive belief in apolitical games so dear to IOC officials and organisers of the games.

Hübner, however, is much more ambitious than Schiller / Young or Gajek in covering a whole series of Asian games in one book. He succeeds in including sources in various languages, such as English, French, Japanese and Chinese, thus laying a thorough foundation for his extensive project. In the foreword, Hübner also sets out a very convincing path for integrating his findings into post-colonial studies as well as studies on nation branding. The concept of nation branding, however, is slightly anachronistic as an analytical tool, as it is mostly linked to neoliberal ideologies of turning the state into a market-oriented institution. Relying on classic theories of nationalism might have been more sensitive to the respective historical contexts. Nevertheless, Hübner's theoretical narrative still succeeds in connecting his examples. The strength of moving beyond borders and analysing more than one or two mega events is evident. Hübner is able to avoid the methodological nationalism that is more or less inherent in focusing on isolated sports mega events.

Yet broadening the scope comes at a price. By focusing on only one event per chapter, Hübner loses some of the benefits which might have been gained had he not limited himself to a certain period or country as seen through the lens of one event. He correctly remarks that this way of organising the text caters to readers who are only interested in certain Asian games or countries (p. 13). Indeed, the narrative of each event is dense and self-sufficient. Yet in the end, the reader might have profited from a deeper and more thorough comparison that scrutinised common concepts and the reasons for differences in the staging of Asian sports events over time. Nonetheless, even the harshest critic would still have to concede that the sources used and the descriptions of the various games are both rich and extensive enough to enable readers to draw their own conclusions. Despite its occasional shortcomings, Hübner's approach certainly makes sense and leads to a rich book packed with very valuable information and analysis.

Christian Tagsold

Mechthild Exo, *Das übergangene Wissen: Eine dekoloniale Kritik des liberalen Peacebuilding durch basispolitische Organisationen in Afghanistan*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2017. 448 pages, €29.99. ISBN 978-3-8676-3872-1 (print), 978-3-8394-3872-5 (e-book)

After the valuable contributions already made by postcolonial perspectives in German-language Cultural Studies, History and Sociology in recent years, postcolonialism has finally reached Political Science. The dissertation of Mechthild Exo on the neglected knowledge of Afghan political grassroots organisations aims to go one step further in representing a decolonial critique of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The intervention in Afghanistan since 2001 has been guided by this logic, which prescribes that peacebuilding is best ensured by transplanting Western market democracy. With the peacebuilding project visibly failing in Afghanistan, a broad-based critique of the theoretical premises and practical implementation of liberal peace has emerged and consolidated. The author emphatically rejects both the idea of liberal peace and the criticism against it, because in her view both approaches depoliticise the conflict in Afghanistan.

The monograph is divided into three main parts. Whereas the introduction explains the relevance and aim of the study – to provide a counter-analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan from a political grassroots perspective – the first major section, "Decolonising Scientific Research", dwells on the need to conduct decolonial research and related issues. The main, second part of the book, entitled "Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding", introduces four "democratic, self-managed, feminist, ethnically inclusive, gender-equitable, justice-seeking political grassroots organisations" as producers of alternative knowledge about peacebuilding vis-à-vis the idea of liberal peace. The author provides in-depth narratives that rely on members' voices to enable the reader to comprehend the individual organisations' evolution, missions, activities, styles of work and also practical experiences.

The organisations comprise the (1) Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers, (2) Afghan Solidarity Party, (3) Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and (4) Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation. Their critique and protests focus on various responses to the violence that has decimated the country, including demands for transitional justice, the military intervention as occupation, the illegitimacy of the Bonn agreement and the peace process with Islamists and jihadi extremist groups, such as Hizb-e Islami or the Taliban. They call for investigations into the war crimes of members of the US military in Afghanistan and of former Afghan warlords elevated by the intervention into high government positions, and they decry the hegemonic claim of democracy promotion by a dominant group of foreign and Afghan non-governmental organisations that became estab-

lished or entered Afghanistan as an immediate effect of the military intervention. These four "progressive" grassroots organisations stand aloof from those mainstream civil society groups that they emphatically criticise, because they hold the latter to be implicated in the liberal peace project and its practices. They resist the liberal peace mission through regular protests and education efforts.

In the third part, "Controversies and Consequences", the author reflects how the "knowledge" about peace on the part of the activist organisations differs from liberal peace. The discussion focuses on controversies about the form in which democracy is established (via elections vs. "from below"), whether democratic values and experiences already exist among population groups in Afghanistan or have to be installed in a "good enough" fashion by foreign patrons, and how peace can be achieved (via power-sharing vs. based on justice). The section illustrates how academic knowledge production tends to adopt the perspective of liberal Western political actors and thereby reinforces their liberal peace agenda. The book concludes that because liberal peace suppresses the agency, positions and knowledge of those at the receiving end of it, there is no chance for a dialogic interface. By disregarding alternative perspectives, knowledge production about the conflict in Afghanistan follows a colonial logic, exerts epistemic power and implicates itself in destructive peacebuilding practices.

Overall, the author claims to generate not only a new perspective about the conflict and chances for peace but also an epistemic shift that transfers the authority over knowledge production and the interpretation of what and whose knowledge counts from Western scholars and intervention (security-development-peace) practitioners to the subjects of the intervention – represented by the four grassroots organisations.

However, the persuasion of the analysis suffers from several shortcomings: on the one hand, the lack of clarity as to how (scientific) knowledge is defined differently from a decolonial rather than a "mainstream" perspective creates uncertainty about what is being compared and scrutinised at what level of analysis. The tacit knowledge of the Afghan organisations sometimes features as positions and understandings rooted in collective memory, whereas at other times, it seems to comprise actual information, as when it refers, for example, to the awareness of the war crimes of jihadi groups during the Afghan civil war and of which criminals remain in government positions. It is bold to claim that scholars working on Afghanistan do not have the same state of "knowledge". On the other hand, the analysis does not scrutinise exactly how representative the chosen four grassroots organisations, with their positions, actually are. Do they indeed represent the population at large or is the reader subjected to a perspective of subaltern "elites" who are vocal enough to appropriate the political space to speak for all the various victims and suppressed

people in Afghanistan? Do forms of advocacy and political campaigning qualify as an alternative form of scientific knowledge? Lastly, the analysis is impaired by the non-systematic character of its analysis, which is most tangible in its evidence-jumping between different years (e.g. from 2009 to 2012/2013), while scarcely regarding the new political situation since 2014.

Despite these flaws, this work and the decolonial interventions it suggests should be taken seriously: engagement through anti-hegemonic, "modest" dialogue with Afghans at the grassroots. One might share the decoloniality approach or not, but on a practical level the analysis shows very clearly that justice is a precondition for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan. The reader immediately understands why peace negotiations as currently practiced, engaging with war criminals and Islamist groups without any legal retribution, will not generate peace.

Katja Mielke

Nichola Khan (ed.), *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi. Publics and Counterpublics*. London: Hurst, 2017. 224 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-1-84904-726-5

Karachi, the largest city of a country called "the most dangerous place on earth" (p. 164) is a violent place, indeed. Whether it really is one of the least safe cities of the world, as ranked in the Safe City Index, is a matter of criteria and quality of data. The editor of *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi*, Nichola Khan, a social anthropologist and principal lecturer in the School of Applied Social Science at the University of Brighton, describes her aim as a "wish to formalise conversations that occur between academics, journalists, writers and activists in Karachi, but which rarely populate the same pages" (p. ix).

The focus of the book is on politically motivated organised violence. Karachi was a Balochi fishing village when the East India Company invaded Sindh on the way to Kandahar during the First Afghan War. It became a Sindhi town and India's second harbour on the Arabian Sea. At partition, Hindus and Sikhs, more than half of the population, migrated to India and were replaced by a much larger number of Mohajirs, i.e. Muslims from Northern, Central and Western India. The capital of the new country grew rapidly and became the centre of commerce, industry and trade. When the army took over in 1958, they moved the capital to Islamabad, in the far North of the "Western wing", i.e. West Pakistan. The "One Unit" of West Pakistan was dissolved in 1970 and the West Pakistan provinces were re-established. Unlike Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtuns and Balochis, the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs had no province of their

own. When Sindhi was made the official language there, violent riots followed. The Mohajirs had left their homes in order to build up the "Land of the Pure". When their major asset, the national language, was devalued, they felt set back.

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was thrown out of office (and killed) by the army, opposition parties rallied behind the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, however, never joined the MRD whole-heartedly. The Mohajir Qaumi Movement – later renamed the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) – emerged as the most active opposition party. In 1987 two bombs exploded at the Bohri Bazaar, killing 200 people in the worst terrorist attack the country had ever known – an event not mentioned in this book. This was the beginning of the urban violence which has since produced more than a thousand casualties, according to South Asian Terrorist Portal.

"People around You" is the opening contribution, by Asif Farrouki, which locates Karachi in the poetry of Azra Abbas. Poems are reprinted and speak for themselves, such as "Eye Witness" (pp. 29-30, translated by Asif Farrouki): "A man / shot dead // In front of / your eyes, // Then what? // [...] And later // When your wifesistermother // Is serving you dinner, // You tell her / you have something // Eye-witnessed / hot and fresh // For tonight's dinner."

Five contributions provide a social sciences perspective, often including ethnographic fieldwork. In her contribution "1994: Political Madness, Ethics and Story-making in Liaquat District in Karachi" the editor lays out the genesis of political violence in Karachi, reflecting on her fieldwork. The "divine migration" from India was followed by the pursuit of Mohajir rights. What is "really feared is the dissolution of a unity of identity, which is bound to occur with the disappearance of an enemy [...] the real madness in political violence is the sense of safety it ensures" (p. 57).

Zia Ur Rehman asks, "Karachi. A Pashtun City?" People from the Pashtu-speaking areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province) and Balochistan have been joined by refugees from Afghanistan. They already outnumber the Mohajir population in Karachi. Already now Karachi is the largest Pashtun town in the world. A turf war over territory, people, trades and neighbourhoods has been violent for decades; it literally exploded when a Mohajir girl was run over by a bus driven by a member of the Pashtun community. Needless to say, such rivalries were exploited by the military government of the day. Today the Pashtuns are blamed for their Taleban links.

Laurent Gayur, well known for his book *Karachi. Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (2014) introduces in "The Sunday Fighter. Doubts, Fears, and Little Secrets of an Intermittent Community" a part-time "self-restrained" fighter (p. 88), whose "attempt at upward social mobility through party politics remains frustrated" (ibid.).

Nida Kirmani explores life in a “no-go area”: The area along the river Lyari is one of the oldest and most densely populated parts of Karachi and home to more than a million people, characterised by a “history of marginalisation and resistance” (p. 106), a “criminalisation of politics” (p. 109), a siege mentality and gangs which count members by the thousands.

Oskar Verkaaik deals with the MQM, the Dawat-I-Islam and Mohajir religiosity. With the usurpation of power by the military under General Zia ul Haq, the Islamic Republic became “Islamised” as never before. Islamic institutions gained state patronage, especially the *madrassa*s. Members of the Dawat-i-Islami were instructed to encourage their fellow Muslims towards greater piety, even as their version of Islam included “several mystical and magical practices and beliefs” (pp. 122–123). Over the years this developed into an “ethnicisation of popular religion” (p. 128) among the average Mohajirs, an aspect also noticed by the MQM.

The next four contributions are the most touching: Nadeem F. Paracha reflects on the prohibition of alcohol and on political protest. It is an irony of history that Z.A. Bhutto started as a liberal (kind of), openly defending his drinking, but was ousted by the military shortly after he had banned alcohol in a last attempt to save his government. Only a few years later, heroin addicts could be counted by the millions. “The Cost of Free Speech. The Media in the Battlefield of Karachi” by Razeshta Sehra opens with the disturbing news that, of the more than 55,000 Pakistanis killed in terror attacks over last ten years, 70 were journalists. In Karachi the MQM burned down the city’s newspaper offices (p. 157); meanwhile, the press reported on the existence of “MQM torture cells” (p. 158). The ruling military reciprocated in a similar way. She ends quoting Faiz Ahmed Faiz: “Speak, your lips are yet free / Speak, for your tongue is still your own” (p. 171, translated by Yasmin Hosain).

Arif Hasan describes in his chapter the long journey of Karachi from a cosmopolitan colonial port, to the enrichment of the city by “the Mohajir intelligentsia, which had strong left-wing roots, and [...] by the civil service [...] in the style of an old and well-established decadent colonial tradition”, on to the “Islamisation” under Zia. Since then, conflict has taken a new turn, fuelled by the transformation of Karachi society as the lower middle class seeks to raise its standard of living and social status. “Four ‘Ordinary’ Deaths” by Kausar S. Khan is a “tribute to four Karachiites, two women and two men, who died brutal deaths”. Especially frightening is the tendency of militants to target healthcare providers.

Two afterwords by Farzana Shaikh and Kamran Asadar Ali, a selected bibliography and an index conclude the book. In addition to a foreword that introduces the project and the contributions, there is a preface that seems to have been written at the last minute without checking any details (e.g. Ayub Khan ruled until 1969, not 1965; Zia ul Haq took over in 1977, not 1979;

Benazir Bhutto was famously killed in Rawalpindi and not in Karachi). Otherwise this publication is an excellent account and analysis of violence in the megacity Karachi, thought-provoking and recommended reading for all trying to understand violence in a large Asian city.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

Markus Keck, *Navigating Real Markets. The Economic Resilience of Food Wholesale Traders in Dhaka, Bangladesh*. (Megacities and Global Change, 19). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016. 240 pages, €49.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11379-3

The book and PhD thesis *Navigating Real Markets* by Markus Keck is a highly insightful study of Dhaka's food system with a special focus on wholesale traders. The work is based on a modern understanding of markets and institutions and on a sophisticated conceptual framework for studying the resilience of food systems from a spatial perspective. Keck aims at moving beyond the view of megacities as places of human misery and hardship. By focusing on the actors within Dhaka's food system, he wants to understand nothing less than what is at the heart of the robustness and resilience of this megaurban food system against the backdrop of the adverse impact of the institutional environment in which it is embedded.

The book offers three major contributions to the existing literature. First, it adds valuable evidence to a modern geography of food systems from the perspective of a megacity in the Global South. The analysis puts people and the dialectics of structure and agency at the foreground. Second, it advances the sociology of markets by recalling institutional embeddedness in the original sense of Polanyi and by expanding the concept through the dimensions of place and informality. Third, the resilience framework is applied to the economic sphere of markets and the resilience of market actors. The limited resilience of wholesalers in Dhaka is well connected to institutional failures.

The book is organised into seven chapters. The introduction is followed by a conceptual chapter that discusses and integrates the theoretical foundation for the empirical analysis. The debates are combined in a conceptual framework for a sociological approach to studying the geography of markets. The third chapter introduces the methodology of the remaining chapters. The analysis is based on careful between-method triangulation that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The complementary use of a wide variety of methods is highly appropriate for the topic. The methods applied com-

prise, amongst others, GIS techniques, (panel) surveys, observations, interviews and participatory methods.

The three main parts of the book are chapters four to six. In chapter four the food system of Dhaka is presented, with a special focus on rice and fish. Despite its predominantly descriptive nature, it is a critical part of the book because it not only provides the reader with essential background information, but also presents unique facts on productivity, spatial organisation and food security based on own data.

Chapter five dives into the food wholesale market in Dhaka. In this chapter, the reader is at first provided with information on the development of food wholesale markets in Dhaka from a historical perspective. The main part of this chapter consists of an in-depth value chain analysis for rice and fish with a particular focus on traders and stores at the markets. Power relations and value capture along the value chain are carefully carved out.

Chapter six examines the resilience of the food wholesale traders in Dhaka. Conceptually, this is the most ambitious chapter of the book. It adds empirical arguments to the core conceptual concern of understanding markets from a social perspective as practices, networks and arenas. Methodologically, the chapter combines statistical analysis with results from interviews, participatory methods and social networks depicted by Venn diagrams. The final chapter concludes by summarising and discussing the main findings and contributions of the study.

The book is very well written, both brisk and accurate at the same time. In the introduction, Markus Keck immediately catches the attention of the reader by sharing his own initial impressions of Dhaka and providing a personal account of the relevance of his topic. Throughout the book, the argumentation benefits from highly illustrative figures, coloured maps at different scales, and 60 photographs. The book is not only insightful for scholars from human geography, development studies and economics, but also for practitioners in the field of social and economic development and anyone with an interest in area studies of South Asia.

Daniel Schiller

Mandy Sadan (ed.), *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar. The Kachin Ceasefire*, 1994–2011. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016. Xxii, 517 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-189-5

This volume is in some ways the counterpart to the book by Marie Lall reviewed earlier in this journal (see Marie Lall, *Understanding Reform in Myanmar. People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule*. Reviewed by Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam in *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 47(3/4), 2016, pp. 311–313). Both studies voice considerable doubt and criticism about the path Myanmar has taken since 2012, but whereas Lall appears to retain a basic optimism, the contributions by Sadan are much more pessimistic. This certainly derives not least from the different points of departure from which the two texts look at the country: Lall takes a "Burmese-centric" view, whereas the volume under review looks at the situation from the periphery/ies. All contributions in Sadan's volume maintain high academic standards, though some are more persuasive than others.

In the introduction the editor discusses the breakdown of the ceasefire in Kachin State and the possible reasons for this beyond the alleged "bloody-mindedness" of the Kachin, who allegedly obstructed the transition in Myanmar when it had just got into its stride. Sadan argues that the renewed fighting occurred after a long period of disappointed and unfulfilled expectations, in which the Myitsone dam and the government's demand to join the Border Guard Forces were only the last straws.

The first chapter, by Mandy Sadan and Robert Anderson, expands on this and discusses what they call the First Kachin Ceasefire (1944–1961), which was characterised by high expectations and bitter disappointments after the end of WWII and independence. These disappointments, they argue, eventually led to a loss of trust that was and will be extremely difficult to rebuild.

Martin Smith draws a similarly bleak picture continuing the discussion into the ceasefire from 1994 to 2011. He also describes the high hopes for peace and autonomy, which again were shattered by Burmese military intransigence. A ceasefire was not enough to secure a durable peace; what the Kachin wanted was what in another context the Sri Lankan Tamils had demanded: peace with justice. Especially remarkable in Smith's account is his emphasis on the role of the Kachin in setting up Civil Society Organisations after the ceasefire, which made them relative trailblazers in this regard. He argues that they were able to do so due to their designation as faith-based groups doing "religious" work. It might be worthwhile investigating why similar Buddhist networks were not tolerated by the government. Also worth noting is the much more equivocal view of Khin Nyunt and his attitudes towards the minority concerns taken by Smith and other authors in the volume, compared to Lall who criticises Khin Nyunt severely.

The articles by Lee Jones and Kevin Woods discuss some of the ceasefire's economic consequences. As Karin Dean has also argued, they point out that the ceasefire has not brought any benefits for the ethnic groups beyond the silencing of arms. Economic development, on the contrary, has become a means for the army and the government to extend their control and relocate the local population in such a way as to lessen any future resistance. "Ceasefire capitalism" robbed the minority armies and populations of means of income they could rely on before, so that "development" became a hated word (p. 121). Jones argues that the current wide-spread support for the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) among the population may be attributed in some measure to this ceasefire capitalism. Wood puts the point even more starkly by defining development, particularly material development, as counterinsurgency. He illustrates this with the cases of timber logging and agribusiness: once concessions have been granted – typically to Chinese businesspeople – they are privately secured and guarded and the local population banned from access to their own resources. Local elites may be co-opted in order to keep them quiet. Even though state control in these areas might not yet be total, the "privatisation of counterinsurgency" lessens the pressure on the military and even brings economic profits. The methods to secure the area bear a striking resemblance to those employed in Northern Sri Lanka.

Laur Kiik looks at Kachin perceptions of the ceasefire, discrimination and suffering, and at their assumptions about Burmese intentions. He emphasises that these perceptions, whether or not they are based on facts, contribute to a breakdown of trust. He voices some doubts about a perceived "Burman conspiracy" to deprive the Kachin of their economic resources. Intentions, he states, might be honourable or based on profit-oriented stupidity, but are not necessarily driven by malice against the Kachin. While the adage that one should not attribute to malice what might be simple stupidity is always worth considering, the evidence adduced by the other contributors and the fact that very similar processes are observable elsewhere (e.g. in Sri Lanka) make one question this assessment. The measures look too much like a continuation of "four cuts", "strategic hamlets" and "new village" to be coincidental.

Myanmar's relations with China, and their impact on Kachin State and people-to-people relations in the border region, are discussed by Enze Han and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, respectively. Han presents changing Chinese approaches to the issues in the border region due to shifting priorities and policy approaches in Burma itself. One clear sign for a changed approach that he sees is China's engagement in the peace discussions in the Kachin conflict. Ho illustrates the developing relations between Kachin in Myanmar and Jingpo (Kachin) in China with the example of the *manau* ceremonies and festivals conducted in very different ways in both countries, but nonetheless leading to a perception of belonging in both cases.

Extending the conversation beyond Myanmar's borders as well are Reshmi Bannerjee, and Joy L. K. Pachuau together with Mandy Sadan with their discussion of ethnic conflict from the Northeast Indian side. Both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have a small Singhpo (Kachin) community, but whereas in Arunachal Pradesh they have the status of a Scheduled Tribe (ST), they do not in Assam, which has led to problems there. Bannerjee shows how the ST status carries both privileges and disadvantages, leading to segregation and exclusion. Land, she says, is a source of conflict in the area, because land rights are often customary and not fixed, presenting an opportunity for "outsiders" like low-landers and Muslims to enter the region and grab land and resources. Northeastern "tribes", she argues, are often considered not "truly Indian" and real devolution of powers has been neglected in favour of a particularly brutal military solution.

Helen Mears extends the discussion further to the international environment, showing how, through the distribution of illustrated calendars throughout the world, both an "imagined community" and a message of resistance and a counter-narrative to the dominant Burmese one is conveyed to the Kachin community in Burma and beyond.

Two chapters relay the experiences of other ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Patrick Meehan and Mikael Gravers present the experiences of ceasefires and betrayed hopes among the Palaung and the Karen. Though their initial situation and the course of the war are quite different, the basic similarities both in the shaping of the ceasefire and the process of ceasefire capitalism are striking and contradict Kiik's assumption of unintentionality. Joy L. K. Pachuau and Sadan describe the Mizo culture of memory of the time of *buai* (calamity). The Mizo were treated particularly harshly before a ceasefire and a political solution eventually bound them as stakeholders to the Indian polity. Significant here is the ambivalence of memory, because the Mizo were attacked not only by the army, but also by hostile Mizo groups. How to deal with these memories and live together with the perpetrators is a problem not easily dealt with, and often only by silence. Teresa Colomba-Beck has described comparable developments in Angola and Mozambique.

Jenny Hedström relates how the conflict affected women. Their role in the struggle was long a limited and seldom acknowledged one, though they often bore the brunt of the suffering. Eventually women got involved in the fight beyond messenger and nursing services, leading to new perceptions of their role. Some of the processes here again resemble those of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), such as the interdiction against marrying, all-women regiments, or the KIA demand for "one child from every family". Hedström paints a rather gloomy picture of the status and power of women, which is in some ways contradicted by the facts: women are very prominent nowadays as

teachers, headmasters, directors of NGOs and even, like Seng Raw, as secretaries to the leaders of the movement.

These theoretical chapters are enriched by three field cases of individual Kachin directly affected by fighting and suffering and/or actively involved in the fight. Nhkum Bu Lu, the wife of a Kachin lawyer and politician, describes her family life from childhood to becoming wife and mother. Particularly poignant is her sober description of the struggle to hold her family together after her husband's arrest and jailing and to provide her children a measure of education and security in the midst of daily danger.

Nhkum Bu Lu's husband Duwa Mahkaw Hkun relates his political activity in setting up an overseas and diaspora network of Kachin activists in Southeast Asia and beyond. He takes pains to emphasise that the existence of different organisations and views should not be construed as disunity. Differences of opinion and discussions do not indicate splits, even if the government would like to portray them as such.

Hkanhpa Tu Sadan narrates his experiences as a Kachin student at Yangon University in the 1990s. Striking here is the Burman students' near complete ignorance of the ethnic groups at the periphery of the country as well as the gradual drifting together of ethnic cliques because of state supervision and suppression. Similarly intriguing is the perception of the Kachin students of having more room to manoeuvre due to feeling secure in their language and church community, which is not as easily penetrated by spies.

Finally, Matthew Walton's conclusion draws together the many topics that surface and resurface in the articles and highlights what I have once called "risks and side-effects of ceasefires". Ceasefires might stop actual physical violence, but they are no substitute for peace. This requires the building of trust as well as mutual respect. Especially the latter often seems to be lacking on the side of the Burmans.

This volume draws together multiple aspects and facets of the ethnic issues on the borders of Myanmar. It highlights the difficulties of both defining war and peace and finding solutions to armed conflict. At the same time it illustrates the connections and repercussions these conflicts have in neighbouring countries with related ethnic groups. For anyone wanting to get a thorough overview of the problems in Myanmar's borderlands, this volume is mandatory.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam

Michal Makocki / Nicu Popescu, *China and Russia: An Eastern Partnership in the Making?* (Chaillot Paper, 140). Paris: EU Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016. 51 pages, €3.59 (Print on demand). ISBN 978-92-9198-608-8 (print), ISBN 978-92-9198-609-5 (PDF)

As part of its regular series on security challenges facing the EU, known as the Chaillot Papers, the European Union's security policy think tank EUISS has published an interesting study on the emerging, yet very unequal, partnership between China and Russia, united more in their common dislike of Western political aspirations than by mutual trust and interests.

After President Obama announced the US "pivot to Asia" without much consequence one decade ago, President Putin – following his illegal annexation of the Crimea and his hybrid border war against the Ukraine and consequent Western sanctions – did the same in 2014. This study explores the practical implications and long-term prospects of Russia-China connections.

For Putin the rationale of his rapprochement to China was to demonstrate an alternative to the West, which had been Russia's main trading partner and source of investments, and to offset the sanctions regimes of the US and EU. For China the ensuing diplomatic honeymoon with Russia was a welcome power game to demonstrate the validity of its desired "multipolar world". On Russia's part, teaming up with a much stronger partner required some pro-active diplomacy to engage with other Asian powers as well, in order to avoid over-dependence and the status of being a junior partner with dramatically reduced bargaining power. Both see the world in terms of geopolitics and view the US as a disliked waning superpower. Both claim the status of a great power and project a feeling of encirclement. Yet "whereas Russia seeks to exploit global instability to boost its own power and status, China prefers global politics to remain reasonably stable" (p. 9), in order to continue its economic development in the undisturbed globalised world economy which has served its purposes so well. While Russia resorts to noisy and disruptive megaphone diplomacy, China prefers a more low-key approach, according to the authors.

China and Russia established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001 to drive the US politically, militarily and economically out of Central Asia (as well as to combat regional Islamists and local unrest). Once this was achieved Russia also wished to curtail Chinese economic influence in Russia's "backyard", pushed for the enlargement of the SCO to include the two arch-enemies India and Pakistan and rendered the organisation predictably dysfunctional. Similarly, both Russia and China tried to organise the BRICS as an instrument against Washington organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Yet once the commodity prices for Russia, Brazil and South Africa burst – and along with them, the BRICS hype – little was left in terms of real investments and finance from these alter-

native sources. On their respective hybrid aggressions – Russia against Ukraine and China in the South China Sea – both sides stick to "passive neutrality" with regard to the other's activities. Yet this neutrality does not prevent Russia from supplying arms to Vietnam and engaging in joint oil exploration with Vietnam in the waters claimed by China. At the same time China sticks to its doctrine of territorial integrity (due to its interests in Taiwan, Tibet and Turkestan/Xinjiang) with regard to the war in the Donbass, while purchasing massive quantities of foodstuffs and military technology from Ukraine, even as Russia blocks all land transit between the two.

Yet official dialogues and rhetoric remain friendly. In fact the only territory that Putin ever returned was the disputed Ussuri river islands, over which a border war was fought in 1969. In return China, ever aggrieved over alleged Western and Japanese colonial misdeeds, sweeps Russian participation in the defeat of the Boxer uprising in 1900, its colonial ventures into Manchuria, its occupation and protection of Outer Mongolia (Sovietised in 1923), and the Sino-Soviet breakup of 1960 under the carpet. As China is reticent as ever to be tied down in any alliance, it calls its relations with Russia "more than a partnership" based on "mutual respect and equality" (p. 17) between the world's second largest and 11th ranked economy (with Russia's economy equivalent to that of Spain or South Korea).

Given the demographic problems of Siberia – its poverty, depopulation and aging population – and China's hunger for raw materials and energy, Russian attitudes towards China are understandably ambivalent. Reactions to the lease of fallow agricultural land and to the presence of Chinese workers on Siberian soil are outright hostile. Yet Russia needs Chinese investment and trade opportunities to revitalise its vast eastern provinces, even as it resents the fact that it is the weaker partner. Minority stakes of the state-owned Russian oil giant Rosneft went to Qatar and not to China (which was also interested). The sale of Russian arms, such as the S 400 air defence missiles, to China, Vietnam and also India simultaneously ultimately leaves all three recipients suspicious of Russian intentions. To Japan, which has been willing for decades to contribute to Siberian development, Putin continues to refuse to return the small Southern Kuril Islands which Stalin annexed in the aftermath of WWII without any legal basis. In the end, for Russia, Japan is too allied with the West, ASEAN too far away and India's resources too limited. By default all Russian roads end in Beijing (p. 25). Yet in the view of the Chinese, Russia's focus remains on its confrontation with the West. Asia for Moscow seems to be only an afterthought.

There is no shortage of memoranda of understanding (MoU) signed between the two on gas pipeline construction. Yet actual implementation progresses only slowly due to unending disputes over prices and control. When China invests, it wants to construct and to control the source – which is pre-

cisely what the Kremlin does not want to concede, neither to the West nor to China. As a result, Chinese investment in Russia, focused only on resource economics and infrastructure and reaching merely 5.6 per cent of total FDI (2014), has been marginal compared to the share of European investment, which has also gone into manufacturing and services. Moreover, Chinese credit conditions for loans are tougher than Western ones, and usually imply the use of Chinese contractors and ultimate Chinese control of the project. Hence they are usually not acceptable to the Russian side. Russia's bilateral trade with China – such as with the EU – fell dramatically during the 2014 implosion of raw material prices and the erosion of Russian purchasing power. The two economies are not complementary. Their economic centres – European Russia and coastal China – are very distant, and neither is able or willing to offer the technologies that the other side needs for modernisation. Russian import substitution policies do not favour Chinese imports, notably affecting Chinese as well as EU exports of machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs. Nor is Russia's unwillingness to offer Chinese investors attractive deals helpful. The business climate in Russia is poor for Chinese and Westerners alike. The presidential honeymoon has not trickled down to regional and local levels, where Chinese investors and workers are distrusted. In the absence of the rule of law, arbitrary administrative decisions abound.

In turn mercantilist China since 2014 has used Russia's international isolation to drive down Siberian gas prices and to increase financing costs for construction projects, with credits usually linked to Chinese procurement and subcontractors. Unlike in Europe, where Russia can play various national clients against each other, in Asia it fears a Chinese monopsony and a strategic dependency for its pipeline-based exports. As a result pipeline constructions agreed years ago, with great fanfare, drag on endlessly (pp. 32ff.).

In Central Asia – as in Eastern Europe – Russia maintains its geopolitical interests as if it is an exclusive sphere of interest. This is challenged by the Chinese "Silk Road" Belt and Road Initiative, which aims at transport corridors (roads, railways, pipelines, fibre-optic cables) which in the name of "connectivity" should allow better Chinese access to the region's resources and markets. As a lender and investor China clearly outcompetes Russia. In order to safeguard its neo-imperial interests, Russia has set up the "Eurasian Economic Union" which, as a customs union with tougher external border controls, has managed to curb Chinese imports into Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Yet China prefers to ignore the EEU and, as in the case of ASEAN, prefers bilateral approaches where its bargaining leverage is stronger. At the same time it respects Russian "red lines" – for the time being at least. Central Asian governments are not passive bystanders in this power game. Since the waning of US interest in the region since the days of Obama, they skilfully attempt to play the two hegemons against each other. In general they prefer China as a

commercial partner and an investor and Russia for military protection against largely internal threats.

In conclusion this is a fascinating, well-researched and documented, yet succinct study on the interactions between two challengers to the Western democratic capitalist order. For China the road to great power status is through continued economic development, with geopolitical interests taking a back seat. For Russia, geopolitical and military posturing comes first, with economic development a distant second. Yet precisely its self-inflicted poor relations with the West have weakened Russia's bargaining power in Beijing. In spite of shared fantasies about a common encirclement by the US and its missile defence deployments, both are unwilling to turn their uneasy partnership into a formal alliance.

Albrecht Rothacher

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Mao Zedong. Es wird Kampf geben. Eine Biographie.* Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017. 465 pages, 23 maps, €30.00. ISBN 978-3-95757-365-0

The last two decades have seen a noticeable number of Mao biographies in the German language, such as Charlotte Kerner's *Rote Sonne, Roter Tiger. Rebell und Tyrann* (2015), Alexander L. Pantsov's and Stephen Levine's *Mao. Die Biographie* (2014), Felix Wemheuer's *Mao Zedong* (2010), Wolfram Adolphi's *Mao – Eine Chronik* (2009) and Sabine Dabringhaus's *Mao Zedong* (2008), to mention just a few examples. The most popular among recent publications is certainly Jung Chang's and Jon Halliday's biography *Mao. Das Leben eines Mannes, das Schicksal eines Volkes* (2005). While the sheer number of postmillennial publications on Mao's life begs the question as to why yet another book on Mao is needed, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer's volume takes an interesting counter-stance to frequent narratives of the former leader's inherently "evil" character – a narrative taken up not only in popular writings such as that of Chang and Halliday but also, more broadly, in China's political cultural discourses. This book specifically counterpoints the volume written by Chang and Halliday, which – in short – argues that already as a child Mao showed the traits of a bad and scheming individual.

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer contends that Mao was a man of many faces, a point underscored by the renowned China historian John K. Fairbank, who saw Mao as an ambivalent character inhabiting the role of both a revolutionary leader (according to his self-perception) and that of an emperor (in terms of power). Schmidt-Glintzer illuminates Mao's trajectory within the context

of China's modern history and the history of ideas, within China's modernisation discourses since the second half of the 19th century and within the endeavour of China's elites to bring about development and modernisation. In the end he classifies Mao as a key pioneer of the Chinese developmental state, thus rightfully, and rather refreshingly, contrasting with existing Mao biographies.

However, Schmidt-Glintzer's standpoint has provoked considerable criticism among some scholars and journalists. Critics contend that this book has sought to rehabilitate Mao and has whitewashed his misdeeds, perhaps most tangibly felt in the author's rejection of the term "dictator" to describe Mao. In turn, Schmidt-Glintzer argues that rather than seeing Mao as the main culprit causing the "suffering of millions", what needs to be emphasised instead is the "conscious involvement" or joint action "of many individuals". Accordingly, Schmidt-Glintzer's analysis examines Mao in a highly differentiated way by embedding him in the context of China's modern history.

Three overarching sections recognise Mao firstly as a teacher (according to Edgar Snow this was the classification Mao cherished most), secondly as a strategist and thirdly as a visionary. The first part focuses on Mao's adolescence, his maturation and his commitment during the May Fourth Movement (1919), his initial revolutionary steps with regard to the peasant movement in his home province of Hunan and his organising of the peasantry. Part two addresses Mao's strategic acting in the "liberated areas" under control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), his path to power within the CCP and his actions during the civil war against the Guomindang until the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The final part encompasses the dispute with the Soviet Union, the major mass campaigns (Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, etc.) and the new realpolitik in the context of Nixon's visit to China, as well as Mao's final years.

In his final chapter Schmidt-Glintzer makes some broader assessments with regard to his findings: Mao's positive role in creating a unitary state; his establishment of a regime of (dis)order based on legalist concepts; and his creation of the preconditions for a successful process of opening-up and modernisation, as the pillars of the current developmental state.

These benefits are contrasted with the costs of these processes: huge human and material costs and human suffering, although Schmidt-Glintzer does not blame Mao individually but rather shifts focus to the institutions of the party-state and the networks implementing and enforcing these policies. The author is right in arguing that Mao is just one figure in the context of China's Confucian "super-fathers" in the 20th century – super-fathers accepted by a majority of the people and in the alleged interest of national stability and unity. In the end, Schmidt-Glintzer characterises Mao as a "product of modern Chinese history" and not as an inherent "dictator".

However, the volume displays certain weaknesses. By embedding Mao solely in China's historical context, the analysis of his ideas and objectives lacks complexity. In fact, Mao's thinking is the outcome of a synthesis: from Kang Youwei he adopted the utopian imaginations (the "visionary"), from Liang Qichao he borrowed the idea of an authoritarian developmental state, from Sun Yatsen he employed the concepts of national independence, land reform and the necessity of an "educational dictatorship". Mao added three further components which turned out in the end to be disastrous: the mobilisation of and the transformation of the minds of the "masses" by means of campaigns, the idea of class struggle as the driving force of history and the militarisation of society. Mao's principle objective was the creation of a "Chinese" model as a counter-model towards "Western" models (this is, by the way, a very topical subject: see e.g. Xi Jinping's "Thought on *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* for a New Era", enshrined into the Party Constitution at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017), the creation of a new man, national self-reliance and mass campaigns as a substitute for technology imports. Mao aspired to industrialisation without modernisation. It is precisely these factors that are underexposed in this book. However, as Schmidt-Glintzer correctly argues, his successors were able to learn from Mao's failed attempts and mistakes.

In addition, the book contains a number of under-elaborated ideas. To give just a few examples: as when the author tells us that Mao's wife Jiang Qing specifically utilised Mao's female partner Zhang Yufeng without specifying what is meant by this (p. 384). Or when he informs us that Deng Xiaoping had initiated a military reform with the outcome that the armed forces withdrew its support of him (p. 394), without mentioning the contents of this reform and the reason for this withdrawal. On the same page he speaks of the violent repression of a conflict in Muslim villages, again without further explanation. Moreover, at the beginning of the book Schmidt-Glintzer speaks of new and comprehensive Chinese texts and documents on Mao without quoting these new documents or providing any new sources. Finally, it is not very clear why Stalin should be classified as a "dictator" but Mao not.

To sum up, this book is intended for readers interested in a well-written and readable book providing basic information on Mao within the historical background of his time. In addition, it provides ideas with regard to a farther-reaching and differentiated perspective on Mao's personality and his basic intentions. In this way it is highly recommendable.

Thomas Heberer

Rüdiger Frank, *Nordkorea: Innenansichten eines totalen Staates*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2014. 428 pages, €19.99. ISBN 978-3-421-04641-3

"Terra incognita" is a very restrained euphemism for a country that, since its founding as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) on 9 September 1948, has made the so-called Western nations at best uneasy. Following the death of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung, in the summer of 1994, numerous think tanks in Western capitals, and even high-ranking officials in the CIA (including the director, John M. Deutch) were convinced that an implosion in the country was imminent – comparable to the developments in the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.

What kind of a state is this, then, whose political leadership has thus far consistently refused to open the door even a crack to Western capital and ideas, and instead aspires to join the ranks of the nuclear powers? How can it be that the West notoriously deplores the isolation and reclusiveness of the People's Republic, whereas Pyongyang has long maintained intensive contacts with numerous countries that have become independent since the 1960s, in the so-called Tricontinental Movement?

Rüdiger Frank, who currently holds a professorship at the University of Vienna, where he heads the Institute for East Asian Studies, approaches the country, its leadership and its people in nine chapters. The Leipzig-born author, an economist and Koreanist by education, had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the DPRK as an exchange student a year after the end of East Germany, and to expand upon those experiences repeatedly, at expert conferences and as a member of economic and political delegations visiting the country. Frank's book evinces a high level of competence, resulting in a pleasantly objective tone. Most books on North Korea reveal more about the author's personal longing to confirm preconceived opinions than about the country itself.

In the first chapter, "Tradition and Origin", the reader is confronted directly with Korea's distinctive situation and dilemma: namely its geostrategic location between "Big Brother" China and the country of Japan, with the latter's ambitions for supremacy over the peninsula. After two victorious campaigns against China and Russia, Japan turned Korea into a protectorate and finally into a colony in 1910. With far-reaching consequences: at the end of World War II, it was the victorious powers, the USSR and USA, who divided the country along the 38th parallel into spheres of influence in the North and South, respectively – with the "protective powers" politically supporting anti-Japanese partisan groups in the North and more collaborational elements in the South. Kim Il-sung was at that time only one of many partisans, but he understood how to use his tactical skills and charisma in the years that fol-

lowed, under the aegis of the Soviets, to build up his leadership position, which he had consolidated by the mid-1950s at the latest.

The more international the confrontation between the Eastern and Western Blocs became and the more the Cold War escalated, the deeper Korea became drawn into the maelstrom of a competition between two systems: the capitalist postulate of freedom and the socialist expectation of salvation. In their own different ways, both Seoul and Pyongyang viewed themselves as respective political bastions. The first hot conflict in the Cold War, the Korean War (1950–1953), which saw extremely high losses especially among the civilian population, began as a bitter civil war and ended as an international conflict with a ceasefire that has still not been transformed into a peace treaty, even today.

In the four chapters that follow, Frank focuses on the ideology, politics, economy and reform capability of a regime that – uniquely in the world until now – is run in the form an expanded Kim family business. One of the main reasons for its continued survival is that the structure of government, the state apparatuses and the mechanisms of power remained finely balanced. There is a kind of tri-partite governing system: old war comrades of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung, from the time of the partisan struggle against the Japanese, became an integral part of the government, party and military leadership, much as the specialists and autochthonous cadres in the formerly socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc. In more recent years it is the graduates of the elite Kim Il-Sung University who join the regime.

The emergence of the ideology *chuch`e* ("master of one's own body", "subject" or "creating with one's own power") also served, in particular, to preserve self-determination in all matters and a foreign policy equidistance between Beijing and Moscow, the two rivals for hegemony in the communist and international labour movement. "*Chuch`e* is one of the most important justifications for the Great Leader principle and a source of legitimation for Kim Il-sung and all those who invoke him. In this function, *chuch`e* remains relevant and powerful today. Because of its flexibility, the ideology also offers scope for economic and political reforms, at least theoretically. Perhaps the most important function of *chuch`e*, however, is the – for many Koreans – seemingly indissoluble bond linking socialism, leader and nationalism" (p. 101).

In the sixth chapter, "Special Economic Zone: Cash Cow and Risk Factor", the author very clearly describes the trade and economic relations which have existed between North Korea and its neighbours China and Russia for years, particularly in the border region. The crown jewel of these special economic zones was without doubt the industrial zone of Kaesŏng, which was a direct result of the first inter-Korean summit in the summer of 2000. At that time, during a truly historic meeting in Pyongyang, the heads of state of both Koreas agreed to develop Kaesŏng's industrial zone as a prototype of direct bilat-

eral cooperation. What was initially so euphorically celebrated came to an abrupt end in February 2016. In protest against North Korea's continuing nuclear and missile tests, Seoul argued for the closure of the Kaesŏng indusa trial zone. Pyongyang immediately hit back, expelling the South Korean personnel from the country and shutting down the complex. If and when it will ever be put back into operation remains one of many unknowns on the peninsula.

Frank dedicates the final three chapters to the government policies of Kim Jongun, the future prospects for the People's Republic and the image that it seeks to project, both internally and to the outside world. Mindful of historical experiences with foreign countries (recently, several US-enforced regime changes in the Middle East) and for reasons of the inherent survival logic of the system, North Korea's nomenclature has clearly adopted the following fundamental approach: if we cannot be respected internationally as a friend, then we can at least be respected as a worthy enemy. At least, so the thinking goes, until we have joined the phalanx of nuclear powers – a strategic consideration that Kim Jongun affirmed in his New Year's address of 2017. At the same time, however, this goal – certainly a balancing act – should be achieved in line with economic development, a policy that is known today as *pyŏngjin* and means "to accomplish two things at once".

North Korea – quo vadis? Past efforts to gaze into the crystal ball have proven utterly misplaced. The author thus wisely and for understandable reasons prefers to avoid any prognosis. "Despite repeatedly urging caution about any predictions," writes Frank on page 380, I am firmly convinced that North and South Korea will one day reunite, even if this currently seems improbable. There are many reasons for this."

Frank's well-researched and commendable study should be read primarily by all those who strive for a deep and serious understanding of the DPRK and who can play a decisive political role in dismantling the enemy stereotypes on both sides and promoting a long overdue culture of dialogue. Three criticisms can be made, which do not in the least diminish the contents of the opus. The choice of the book's title, *North Korea: Internal Views of a Totalitarian State*, is unfortunate, and some passages in the foreword are a bit self-promoting – a state has no views, and an author's seriousness is not measured by the frequency with which he meets with experts or elder statesmen. Last, but not least: occasionally the author seems to want to "work off" his East German past against the foil of a completely different type of real socialist system. This comes across as artificial, especially as he himself rightly warns against false analogies.

Rainer Werning

Yvonne Spielmann, *Indonesian Contemporary Arts: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors*. (NIAS Monographs, 138). Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017. 240 pages, £40.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-230-4

Many Indonesian artists have made a name in the Asian contemporary art world, with record-breaking prices at auction houses in Hong Kong and Singapore. However, even though Indonesian art has achieved a prominent position in the Asian market, it remains relatively unknown to the global arts world.

This book is a refreshing introduction to Indonesian artists, art spaces and collectors. Yvonne Spielmann provides original and stimulating views which seek to free the appraisal of Indonesian arts from a solely Eurocentric perspective. Wary of the privileging self-referential system of Western art production, Spielmann contends that the Western generalising standards of modern and contemporary arts are incommensurable with the evaluation of Indonesian art.

Spielmann writes with a rare insight about the arts in Indonesia. The key to the originality of this book is that the writer's knowledge of Indonesian art results from extended in-depth research conducted in several countries in Asia, sometimes with non-English sources previously inaccessible to a global audience. As might be expected, the author is well informed about Indonesian art history and its socio-political context in the broader Southeast Asian region. She offers an approach that values Indonesian artistic expressions of identity and the "self-confidence syncretism of style" (p. 56). Indonesian artists, in her view, are well versed in a syncretic language of art rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. They employ plural juxtapositions of several influences of local ethnic traditions (such as those of Java, Bali and West Sumatra) and Western influences, especially the former Dutch colonial and Western pop culture.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the emphasis on subversive political motives in Indonesia art. Spielmann highlights the recurrent condemnations of colonialism and the draconian New Order regime, and the resistance against Islamism, patriarchy and racist ideologies, as well as criticism towards Universalism in art production and standards. Spielmann asserts that "politics and aesthetics are closely tied in issues of the production of art" (p. 51) in Indonesia. This does not mean that more abstract and apolitical artworks do not exist in Indonesia. Indonesian artworks are quite diverse, as illustrated by the high-quality photographs found in the book.

Indonesian artists' contributions to the art exhibitions in Asia and Europe mark the "internationalisation" of Indonesian arts since the 1980s. This book tries to problematise why Indonesia is considered a major player in the Asian art world, showcased disproportionately in major art galleries in Asia. The art world is bound to the market economy, yet the success of Indonesian art in the

Asian market has not transferred to international recognition. As Spielmann rightly suggests, there is an imbalance between production, on the one hand, and presentation and distribution, on the other. Indonesian art is generally created from non-governmental initiatives with minimum state support – and in fact many galleries and art spaces in Indonesia are owned by artists proud of their independence from the state, with the exhibition and distribution of art mostly undertaken by private art institutions. Even as these institutions increasingly cater to the growing global market and to collectors, there is the risk that the access of the Indonesian public to the arts may well become limited if not severely diminished if the presentation and distribution of art is increasingly privatised.

This important book presents an evocative exposition of notable contemporary artists such as FX Harsono, Agus Suwage, Heri Dono, Nasirun and many others. Special mention is given to women artists such as Christine Ay Tjoe, Mella Jaarsma, Arahmaini, Melati Suryodarmo, Tintin Wulia and others. Overall, this book is a good starting point for a deeper acquaintance with the most important figures in Indonesia, both contemporary and past artists and their works. The book provides one of the most complete descriptions of Indonesian contemporary art, despite some repetitive ideas in several paragraphs. In her effort to stay true to the non-native speakers and sources, Spielmann suggests that any effort to improve the non-standard grammar and style of the quoted non-native-English sources would not have been acceptable. This decision should be admired even though it requires extra effort from readers to clearly understand the meanings intended by the non-native speakers.

In the light of the opening of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN), Indonesia's first contemporary and modern art museum in Jakarta, as well as the Jakarta Biennale and Biennale Jogja exhibitions – all of which took place in November 2017 – the publication of the English version of *Indonesian Contemporary Arts* comes just at the right time.

Sita Hidayah