

## Editorial Foreword

This present issue features research that explores how local categories of identity, status and territory have been constructed over time and space. Though not compiled as a special issue, the six feature articles share a remarkable focus on how notions of community have been epistemologically constructed by both state and non-state actors, providing insight into the different ways and contexts that social groups within the region have articulated their place in the world. All six have a historical bent to them, based on sources such as inscriptions, indigenous chronicles, colonial records and contemporary oral interviews in the vernacular. At the same time, the articles are refreshingly interdisciplinary, drawing from and contributing to theoretical discussions concerning anthropology, linguistics, epigraphy, and geography.

Our lead article, ‘The killing of *Posthouder* Scheerder and *Jifar Folfolun* (The War of the Breasts): Malukan and Dutch narratives of an incident in the waning days of the VOC’ by A. Ross Gordon, Sonny A. Djonler and Hans Hägerdal, examines how a violent incident in Dutch colonial history has been remembered and preserved in the collective memory of the Batuley, a non-literate people located in today’s Aru, Indonesia. Juxtaposed against Dutch colonial sources, the authors investigate how the memory of a murdered colonial officer is preserved in *saab* and *mare*, forms of Arunese song that also represent the Batuley communities that perform them. Importantly, the authors discover there is more than one ‘local’ understanding of the event via the range of songs that speak — or rather sing — to the event, representing the range of memories associated with local tradition. Methodologically, the authors ask us to consider how to deal with a field of study where indigenous language sources are simply lacking.

As in the previous article by Gordon et al., Aurore Candier’s article ‘Mapping ethnicity in nineteenth century Burma: When “categories of people” (*lumyo*) became “nations”’ looks at how local notions of personhood and identity were interpreted and categorised by British and American missionary administrative projects in Myanmar. By focusing on the category of *lumyo* (categories of people) and tracing its historical construction over the span of the nineteenth century, Candier shows how the contingencies of war and annexation were intricately connected to how local communities, peripheries, and foreign-ness were represented. By presenting the semantic evolution of these concepts in the context of conquest, Candier argues that ‘*lumyo*’ was progressively associated with the European concept of ‘nations’, an understanding that would eventually be adopted by nationalist groups and ethnic minorities in the early twentieth century. Just as the Aru and Batuley were shaped out of a narrative of counter-insurgency, so too were early notions of race, nation, and place shaped out of the mechanics of annexation of the Burmese Kingdom in the early 1800s.

Territorial conquest and its effect on social constructions of place is a key theme in the next article by Kisho Tsuchiya. His ‘Representing Timor: Histories, geo-bodies,

and belonging, 1860–2019’ explores how political identity and territory have been constructed by various Timorese communities over time and space. While international understandings of the history of East and West Timor have been largely shaped by the presence of and reaction to Indonesia’s annexation of Portuguese (East) Timor, this research shifts our attention to earlier periods, when a variety of stakeholders — local and foreign — created different ideas of belonging and place to the island and its people. In extending our gaze deeper into Timor’s past and unfolding the ways in which ‘Indonesia’ has been used as the reference to understanding the island, the article re-examines how an understanding of a homogenised image of ‘East Timor’ emerged. By reconstructing a genealogy of how different groups in Timor expressed belonging in Portuguese, English, French, Japanese, Indonesian, and in Timorese languages, Tsuchiya suggests that social constructions of Timor by its various communities influenced and were influenced by political and economic connections to other regional locales and international contexts.

Where Candier and Tsuchiya’s articles explore how colonial states and local stakeholders competed to define spaces and communities, Agus Suwignyo’s ‘*Gotong royong* as social citizenship in Indonesia, 1940s to 1990s’ reconstructs how a notion of ‘collective spirit’ was appropriated and reconstituted by the state to be deployed for nation-building campaigns and the promotion of civic identity in twentieth-century Indonesia. Suwignyo presents a history of Indonesian communal activities and values by exploring the different incarnations of *gotong royong* over the colonial and postcolonial eras. While appropriated by national elites to represent ‘a discourse of citizenship’ that was, at the same time, rooted in traditional Indonesia, Suwignyo traces how the term referred to the mobilisation of labour, communal obligation, and service during the colonial, Japanese, and the long post-War period of Soeharto, then Soekarno and the New Order. Significantly, the article also examines how *gotong royong* was and is practised by the people, not always in congruence with official formulations of the concept, but also in recent years as a broader, negotiated, process of resistance and citizenship-making between state and society.

Eileen and Terry Lustig’s article ‘Losing ground: Decline of Angkor’s middle-level officials’ continues an emphasis on state and society through a close examination of epigraphical evidence from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. The article reconstructs the lives of Angkorian mid-level officials, the *vāp* and *loñ*, via their representation in inscriptions. Their research uncovers significant data that charts the rise and decline of these mid-level officials and their families, their role in relation to the state, and the socioeconomic dynamics surrounding the lives of these non-royal communities who were fixtures within and without the court. Through their focus on non-royal texts, Lustig and Lustig provide a social history of these mid-level officials as well as a window into the economic transactions connecting state to society, asking whether the decline of these texts in the eleventh and twelfth centuries coincided with the decline in the role of the *vāp* and *loñ*. Part of a broader story concerning the centralisation and eventual devolution of the Angkorian state’s tax-base to elites in the twelfth century, this study contributes significantly to the broader history of the classical/charter states in Southeast Asia and the question of their decline.

Shifting our view from twelfth-century Angkor to twentieth-century British Malaya, our final article by Joseph M. Fernando studies the making of the Malayan

independence constitution and the role of the British jurist who led the five-man Commonwealth constitutional commission in 1956 towards that effort. Fernando's 'A playmaker and moderator: Lord Reid and the framing of the Malayan federal constitution' provides an in-depth study of Reid's leadership of the commission and his influence in shaping the draft constitution in 1956. Detailing the internal fissures within the colonial administration, pressures from Whitehall, as well as competing inter-communal demands within British Malaya, Fernando's article highlights the challenges facing both the colonial government and various political stakeholders in securing consensus on issues such as citizenship, language, and education — issues that would remain contested well into the postcolonial era.

Our research articles are followed by Robert Blust's Review Essay of Ritsuko Kikusawa and Lawrence Reid's *Let's talk about trees: Genetic relationships of languages and their phylogenetic representation* and a modest collection of book reviews. We are grateful for the continuing support of those in the field who wrote, refereed, and reviewed the scholarship found in this issue.

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Editor