

the issue of why Buli should be a witchcraft hotspot. True, there are other places where people attribute to witches powers similar to those that Bulinese attribute to *gua*, such as Bati in eastern Seram. Yet, five hundred miles due south of Buli, among Nuaulu people in central Seram, who have largely resisted religious conversion and have seen their population triple over a fifty-year period, sorcery is certainly part of everyday life, but when it comes to making sense of misfortune, ancestral spirits rather than cannibal witches are the suspects.

Measuring the significance of witchcraft — as Bubandt’s attempts to gather a statistically meaningful corpus of case material suggest — is hardly an exact science. And given that *gua* have the capacity constantly to reinvent themselves in successive conditions of modernity, under what conditions might they eventually disappear? This may not be a question that can be answered within a Bulinese ontological framework, but it is a matter of historical record that witchcraft and sorcery have diminished and been transformed to the point of extinction in some parts of the world. And it would be interesting to know what prospect there is for this development in Buli.

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Embodied Nation: Sport, Masculinity, and the Making of Modern Laos. By Simon Creak. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015. xiv+327 pp.

A well-known salutation in the Lao language reads “*khaeng haeng di bo?*”, equivalent to the English “How are you?”, though — with the words *khaeng* and *haeng* having connotations such as strength, power and energy — literally asking if one is in strong health. This explicit reference to physicality in everyday language might come as a surprise to those familiar with the colonial stereotype of the idle Lao, which contrasted them with the allegedly more “industrious”

Vietnamese. One might also not expect a book on sports and physical culture focused on a country with such a poor record of international success — no Olympic medal so far — as Laos.

However, as Simon Creak's recent history of sports in Laos illustrates, notions of bodily strength have their place in language for a reason. From divergent perspectives such as Buddhist cosmology, colonial and post-colonial nationalism, and socialism, the author explores contested meanings of physical culture in Lao society. He considers in particular how different political regimes defined and used physical practice for their respective subject-building projects, and how this shaped national consciousness by locating physical practice in everyday experience. The book is an original, highly readable and analytically innovative contribution to the history of Laos.

Creak takes sports and physical activities as vantage points for the study of Lao nationalism since they "are among the most important strategies of substantialization through which abstractions such as the nation are materialized in everyday action" (p. 9). The book's eight concise chapters demonstrate how ideologies relate to and are shaped by notions of physicality. Theoretically grounded in Michel Foucault's idea of the body politic and related works on the interplay among the state, human bodies and ideology, the book illuminates the linkages of physicality and discourse, analyses cultural and linguistic representations of the body and gives particular attention to notions of masculinity.

Chapter One introduces the *tikhi* game, a kind of hockey nowadays played on the occasion of the annual That Luang festival, the most important religious festivity in Laos. Tracing the history and shifting meanings of this "national game" back to the nineteenth century, Creak investigates how pre-colonial cosmologies translate into (post-) colonial systems of knowledge. French colonial attempts to create genuine Lao "traditions" to counter Thai cultural hegemony produced new interpretations and transformations of ritual elements. These included playing the *tikhi* game in the shadow of the famous stupa of the That Luang in Vientiane. Today, a match between representatives of the state and ordinary people, the yearly performance of *tikhi* remains more a political ritual than a sporting event as such.

The following two chapters examine the evolution of physical culture under conditions of colonialism and emergent nationalism. Creak provides a fascinating account of how Marshal Philippe Pétain's Nazi-collaborationist regime (1940–44) shaped physical culture in Laos and other colonies, indeed anticipating later Lao nationalist and socialist ideas of subject formation. While the colonial regime largely aimed at the “racial amelioration” (p. 80) of colonial subjects, the increasing militarization and masculinization of Lao society had important implications for an emerging national self-consciousness that finally questioned colonial authority. Interestingly, state discourses of strong and disciplined subjects corresponded with Lao-Buddhist conceptions of physicality, discipline and perfection (*sombun*).

Chapters Four and Five deal with large sports events such as the Lao National Games of 1961 and 1964 and the SEAP (South East Asia Peninsular) Games, the precursor of the present Southeast Asian Games. Against the backdrop of the Lao civil war — as part of the larger Second Indochina War — the author analyses the use of such events in a context of contesting ideologies and power struggles. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's concept of the theatrics of power, Creak takes the example of the rightist strongman Phoumi Nosavan, who used the national games as an arena for demonstrating power and generating prestige. Located in newly erected “modern” stadiums, performances and displays of strong, healthy bodies metaphorically alluded to national progress.

In the so-called “liberated zone” before 1975, and the whole of Laos since then, an alternative socialist vision of the Lao nation emerged. However, as Creak convincingly points out in Chapter Six, ideas of physical culture ironically hearkened back to Vichy-era nation- and “race”-building with its emphasis on work and austerity. Revolutionary rhetoric informed by “physical idiom and metaphor” (p. 170) had a lasting impact on Lao society in spite of the many failures of socialist transformation. Besides this emphasis on the physical education of “the masses”, another aspect of the socialist vision, treated in Chapter Seven, was the development of spectator sports as a means of participating in the international community of socialist states, and as a façade of permanent revolutionary

mobilization in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in spite of general political inertia.

The concluding chapter completes the analysis with a discussion of the 2009 Southeast Asian Games, where arguably all previous aspects of sports culture came full circle, here particularly illustrating how sport carries “the objective of constituting, performing, and reinforcing state power” (p. 240). As was the case in the ceremonies of the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Vientiane the following year, national performativity through mass ceremonies was aimed at visualizing both socio-economic developmentalism and national and cultural heritage protection.

Approaching the topic of nationalism in Laos through the lens of sports provides fresh insights into modern Lao history. Creak sheds light on some less-known episodes and actors in Lao history, in particular by filling some lacunae in the Royal Lao Government's history. The communist-controlled “liberated zone” before 1975 receives less attention, as does the related case of the Democratic and then Socialist Republic of Vietnam — whose well-known ideological and political influence in the Lao PDR was significant for shaping physical education and practice in the country.

Simon Creak's book is a rewarding read not only for regional specialists, but also for any historian and anthropologist interested in the social and political dimensions of sports.

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Reworlding Art History: Encounters with Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990. By Michelle Antoinette. Amsterdam: Brill, 2014. iv+592 pp.

An unfortunate conundrum is presented at the beginning of this vast and thorough study of contemporary artists from Southeast Asia: can an artist be contemporary and Southeast Asian at once