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Seaways and Gatekeepers: Trade and State in the Eastern Archipelagos of Southeast Asia, c.1600–1906. By Heather Sutherland. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2021. xv+537 pp.

In *Seaways and Gatekeepers*, Heather Sutherland tells the stories of the trading polities of Ternate (central Maluku), Gorontalo (northern Sulawesi), Ceram (central Maluku), Maguindanao and Sulu (southern Mindanao), Lombok (east of Bali), Sumba Island (west of Timor) and many other smaller polities that comprise the eastern archipelagos of Southeast Asia. She argues that if one sets aside the usual approaches of state-building and border formation, and looks at their histories along comparative lines, one could see that these polities played as important a role in the regional trade as Batavia, Manila, Manado, Penang and Bangkok. This ‘relational thinking’ therefore allows us to imagine a broader maritime Southeast Asian expanse, one that—as Sutherland wonderfully shows in one of her maps—is far larger than the more-studied littoral states of the Mediterranean Sea.

The communities of these eastern archipelagos were vital in keeping the flow of spices, marine resources and forest merchandise to places as far as the Bay of Bengal in the west and Guangzhou in the South China Sea. They also facilitated the exchange between the lowlands and the highlands and, like the Bugis, were the most sought-after warriors by rival polities. There are countless analytical gems in this book, but my favourite line from the book remains Sutherland’s portrait of the political dexterity of the Bugis: “They [the Bugis] acknowledged the ‘three tips’ that were basic to statecraft: that of the tongue, for diplomacy; that of the penis, for marriage alliances; and that of the lance, for war” (p. 143). Not bad for a group described as “one of the most dispersed of the archipelago’s peoples” (p. 143).

The appearance of the Dutch, and later the British, altered the terrain and relationships, often with extreme brutality. The establishment of colonial borders—no matter how porous or poorly

policed they were—constricted mobility and reduced the influence of eastern Southeast Asian societies. As print (colonial records to nationalist tracts) took over oral tradition, and the stories of colonial and then national states came to be written only from the perspectives of their capitals, less and less was known of the peoples of Gorontalo, Ceram, Maguindanao and even Ternate. Sutherland's book is a tenacious and admirable effort at bringing back the tales of these "people without history" (p. 2), a phrase she cites from Eric Wolf (1982).

But have the people in these places ceased participating in regional trading in the post-war period? Have they complied with the directives of their respective governments to conduct their business within officially sanctioned borders? I grew up on the northwestern side of Mindanao when the Philippines' second-largest island was still very much a frontier. Connections with what people in Mindanao call 'imperial Manila' and between port cities in Mindanao were limited. The national state had only a minimal presence, and policing was a joke. Many of our household needs came from a Maranao trader who bought her goods from relatives in Sulu, who, in turn, purchased the products and smuggled them from 'nearby' Singapore and Sabah. Everything changed after President Marcos declared martial law in 1972 and went to war against Muslim separatists, but this 'illicit trade' continues today, expanding its trade to even the networks of yore (read: southern China). In Zamboanga City's 'barter trade centre', one can purchase modern versions of the commodities that the small port of eastern Southeast Asia used to trade. But the nature of the commodities has changed. Instead of spices, trepang, bird's nests and gold, on display in the centre's stalls are Indonesian *malong* (or *sarong*), Japanese televisions, 5-in-1 Malaysian coffee and even Chinese knockoffs of Viagra—and with the right discreet contact, a Belgian FN FAL or Chinese AK-47 rifle. But the tempo of the trade, the communities involved and the linkages still very much echo the connections that Sutherland writes about in her book.

This extremely rich and theoretically sophisticated book's impact goes beyond early modern Southeast Asian history. *Seaways and*

Gatekeepers forces us to reconsider how much frontiers shape the history of state formation and nation-building in the region. One cannot think of the breakdown of the Marcos and Suharto dictatorships without considering the impact of the ‘wars of independence’ waged by Mindanao’s Moros and the Timorese people. Likewise, the Thai and Burmese militaries may have their national capitals under their thumbs, but this could not prevent the rise of the Chiang Mai strongman Thaksin Shinawatra nor completely quash the cash-rich opium-producing Shan state.

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Mandalay and the Art of Building Cities in Burma. By François Tainturier. Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. xiii+229 pp.

Mandalay and the Art of Building Cities in Burma is a fascinating book, fluidly written, thoroughly researched and clearly structured around key arguments. The title, however, is slightly misleading as the book is largely focused on the founding protocol of the city of Mandalay over the years 1856–59. Readers interested in ‘profane’ urban studies should therefore not expect to find an extensive analysis of the political, social, ecological and economic processes that shaped urban development in the *longue durée* in Burma. The book is indeed primarily one of religious and cultural history, which will be better appreciated by readers with a background in humanities and notions of Buddhist canonical history and the Pali and Myanmar languages.