

with respect to schools of Islamic thought said to be dominating the Divine Bureaucracy. For example, Maznah depends to a large extent on a book written by JAKIM official Mohd Aizam Mas'od in spelling out credal features of the Divine Bureaucracy. Yet, Mohd Aizam is notorious among fellow JAKIM officials of the traditionalist Ash'ariyyah-Maturidiyyah school of theology for being an unorthodox, Salafi-Wahhabi figure. The point here is that, in contrast to the monolithic portrayal of the Divine Bureaucracy, the real picture is more complicated, with contestations among functionaries from opposing Islamic orientations even within JAKIM—hub of the Divine Bureaucracy—over such questions as who truly represents the ASWJ position. This minor criticism does not, however, reduce the merits of Maznah's well-grounded assertion that “bureaucratic Islam [is] the definitive Islam in modern life” (p. 26) as far as Malaysia is concerned.

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Projectland: Life in a Lao Social Model Village. By Holly High. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021. xxii+242 pp.

In this recounting of stories of rural transformation, the anthropologist Holly High uses the concept of “Lao socialism” rather than “post-socialism”. High emphasizes that Lao socialism is not purely economic, but social and cultural as well, encompassing the values, beliefs, ideas, aesthetics, moral positions and symbolic meanings that have been commonly institutionalized in many different forms

in the daily lives of the people. *Projectland* also tells the story of modernity in the context of Lao socialism and Lao indigenous culture. The author describes the various modernizing programmes taking place in New Kandon village in southern Laos in the wake of its relocation from the mountains to a plateau following the Lao revolution. These programmes were intended to transform New Kandon from a traditional village to a modern one that is open to cultural tourism. The new face of the village was brought about in line with the country's socialist dream of total social and cultural transformation underpinned by unity and solidarity—all part of the metalanguage of Lao political propaganda.

The images conjured up by High's narrative reminded me of Latour's treatise on modernity presented in *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour 1993). High's *Projectland* draws attention to the kind of modern village that the Lao government conceived based on modern science and built to serve as a development model for other villages around the country. Traditional cultural practices, however, sat uneasily with the socialist ideals promoted by the state, blurring the boundary between traditional and modern lives among the villagers of New Kandon.

High considers the traditional beliefs and occult powers practised by the villagers as ways to consolidate their unity and represent people's selves. Ritual practice is a spectacular and regular part of life in New Kandon. To me, the villagers' traditional cultural practices, such as the "eat buffalo event", also serve as what Scott (1985) calls "everyday forms of resistance" by powerless people against the hegemony of the state. High's book illuminates how the villagers of New Kandon have appropriated, twisted and even challenged the metalanguage of Lao socialism to negotiate with a vanguard project of the elites that justifies and protects the state's ideologies. The local meanings they have assigned to Lao socialism and their traditional cultural practices represent an invisible power that they have constructed.

To High's credit, she has paid attention to gender norms, emotions and desires. She found it challenging to deal with the emotion-laden

material presented by Liliha, whose stories of loss, love, necessity and desire reflect complex human subjectivities. As a reader, I too felt a sense of gloom as I engaged with the emotions and desires of Liliha, embodied in her experiences of Lao socialism and the Lao revolution. Even in production activities such as cloth weaving was embedded her personal sufferings, desires and limited choices as wife and daughter-in-law.

Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage as practised in the village, arranged marriages as a result of debt incurred by their parents, and the polygamy system all serve as forms of oppression faced by women. Divorced women are especially disadvantaged because they find it hard to remarry, unlike their male counterparts. While gender equality should be a mark of the socialist state, in reality, women struggle with the aforementioned inequalities as well as domestic violence.

It is very difficult not to be affected when reading about Liliha's experience of domestic violence and traumatic marriage to a drunken man whom she wished to leave but could not because of the binding relationship and the lack of resources to return the bride-price. While engaging with Liliha's emotions and desires, High is able to let Liliha's voice come through. High has also done a remarkable job of presenting the voices of other women like Liliha who have been oppressed by the social and cultural systems under Lao socialism, especially on sensitive topics like rape and domestic violence.

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