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Building on Borrowed Time: Rising Seas and Failing Infrastructure in Semarang. By Lukas Ley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021. 238 pp.

At the time of this book's publication in 2021, its author, Lukas Ley, was an associate of the prestigious Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and a lecturer at the Center for Asian Transcultural Studies at the famed Heidelberg University. *Building on Borrowed Time* is based on the doctoral dissertation that Ley submitted to the Anthropology Department of the respected University of Toronto, where he worked with two renowned anthropologists of Indonesia, Joshua Barker and Tania Li. Their intellectual imprint on Ley's informed ethnography of a waterlogged community of coastal Semarang—Indonesia's ninth-largest city and seventh on Java—is readily recognizable. Borrowing from Li's toolkit, Ley adopts a critical perspective on development, taking technical approaches to task for overlooking larger questions of power, politics and impact on the everyday lives of Indonesians. Drawing from Barker, Ley writes with an awareness of the violence, suppression and coercion through which Soeharto's New Order (1966–98) ruled Indonesia for over thirty years.

Ley's poignant ethnography of a marginalized urban community won the Social Science Book Prize from the European Association for Southeast Asia Studies. Why it did is as easy to see as the influence of Ley's supervisors on his research. Consider the sagacious decision Ley makes to theorize the contested terrain of time rather than space, which would have been a facile alternative through which to consider the persistent flooding that this neighbourhood has suffered. Ley contemplates on the interrelatedness of meaning between the quotidian, physical environment and residents' existence in a steady state of "presentness, a state of being reproduced by the environmental fluctuations of the intertidal zone in which they live and entrenched by the systematic infrastructural neglect and desynchronization of the city's North" (p. 9).

To get beyond a typical retelling of a tragic Third World environmental crisis, Ley steers his complex narrative in a number of measured, studied directions. One is historical. Through archival research, he temporalizes power tussles in Semarang, beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with attempts by the Dutch—expert water managers themselves—to address drainage issues along Semarang's northern coast, which was already a visible problem. To the surprise of a few, the colonials, in the end, spent their scant resources on their own swiftly modernizing, manicured neighbourhoods. Ley could have easily painted the resource neglect this flooded area experienced under the New Order as a continuation of colonial practice. But he rightly recognizes that this simplistic rendition would have disregarded what actually transpired—that the regime threw resources at the persistent flooding but did so in a top-down, ad hoc manner that, unsurprisingly, left the core of the problem unresolved.

From this critical take on New Order governance, Ley turns to sociology, noting that irregular resource flows through the neighbourhood not only provided material goods, such as the odd local job, but also that the incessant yet collective repairs of homes and haphazard maintenance of the decaying drainage system have helped to build what social scientists call social capital—networks of trust among neighbours that over time even gave rise to a sense of pride in their blighted surroundings that might surprise a casual observer.

Then something peculiar happened once Soeharto's regime fell. Indonesia underwent democratization, a multifaceted process that included the devolving of significant administrative, financial and political resources from the central government to local counterparts. Despite delays and evident frustrations, a new water drainage system was built with the technical help of Dutch engineers, and lo and behold, it worked. Upon his return to Semarang after his primary fieldwork had concluded, Ley reports on the substantially lowered water levels of the local river and, as a result, on the drier conditions of the residents' houses. To be sure, his close interlocutors expressed

some disappointment that the system was not implemented with as much bottom-up, citizen participation as was hoped or as promised. Interestingly, Ley also detects budding nostalgia for the distressful waterlogged days of yesteryears; residents identify those past years as a time of struggle (*perjuangan*)—an idiom that resonates deeply with revolutionary, nationalist valour in Indonesia and that provides ordinary citizens with profound meaning. Ultimately, we must consider what the occasional development success under more democratic conditions teaches us about evolving state-society relations in twenty-first century Indonesia, that is, until the rising seas eventually reclaim not just this section of northern Semarang—which the experts believe is certain—but innumerable coastlines across Indonesia and elsewhere.

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Upland Geopolitics: Postwar Laos and the Global Land Rush. By Michael B. Dwyer. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022. xv+230 pp.

In *Upland Geopolitics*, Dwyer renders the definitive account of land concessions in Laos. Reporting on his fourteen-year investigation into Chinese-backed rubber plantations in the northwest of Laos, Dwyer links on-the-ground observations to global debates about the causes and consequences of what some call the global “land grab” but which Dwyer more moderately suggests is a “land rush”, because the outcomes are varied and rarely predictable from the outset.

Dwyer has done a great service to Lao studies by rendering such a lively treatment to a topic that was in danger—after all these years and all this attention—of growing dull. Much of the book is taken up with Dwyer’s recurring and candid attempts to read maps.