

In This Issue

The articles in this issue deal with, in different ways, questions of ritual (Nelson, Haboush, Colombijn), commemoration and memory (Haboush, Cummings, Nelson), and state building (all of the articles). The states with which the articles deal are very different—postwar Japan, seventeenth-century Korea, early modern Sumatra and South Sulawesi, and the contemporary Philippines. The processes that are delineated are also quite different from one another, as are the questions that the authors pose about those processes. Nonetheless, the articles treat a number of common issues, including questions about the role of power, the legitimation of political rule, elite and popular perceptions of state authority, and the means of socializing subjects into accepting shared systems of meaning.

JOHN NELSON's article addresses the ways in which Japanese military war dead are commemorated at Yasukuni Shrine. He explores the political and religious contexts of the shrine that continue to inform Japanese social memory (as well as historical interpretations) about the Pacific War. In particular, Nelson shows how ritual activities at the shrine help to legitimate the agency of the spirits of the military dead as a valuable political resource for contemporary political agendas.

JAHYUN KIM HABOUSH's article looks at dream narratives of seventeenth-century Korea in which an alternative space for commemoration was created. In this subversive space, unburiable dead bodies signify issues left unresolved in the aftermath of the Imjin War and the Manchu invasion which were not and could not be accommodated by the hegemonic cultural order.

WILLIAM CUMMINGS examines several sets of narratives from Makassar (South Sulawesi) which enable him to look at the complicated relationship between orally transmitted and written texts. He suggests that counterplay is perhaps a better metaphor than interplay to look at the relationship among these various texts.

FRECK COLOMBIJN examines critically the notion that states in precolonial Southeast Asia were unstable. His examination of the development of polities located on the coasts of Sumatra during the years from 1600 to 1800 shows how profoundly state formation was influenced by environmental factors.

KENT EATON looks at politics in the contemporary Philippines and explores strategies that traditional elites (*trapos*) have used to retain their power by placing limits on the participation of civil society. His article explores the range of NGO activities in recent decades and suggests both the strength and the limitations of NGOs.

I sent manuscript copies of the articles to all five authors in this issue in order to get their responses to one another's articles as a way of beginning a conversation across disciplinary and geographic boundaries. It is a conversation that I hope you, as readers, will continue.

Both Haboush and Nelson write about coming to terms with the unquiet dead—Haboush through fictionalized narratives in Korea and Nelson by looking at ceremonies at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine. Nelson sees resonances between the two articles in the following terms:

Both Haboush and I are trying to assess one of the salient features of nationalism and cultural identity: the pragmatic utility of military dead. Through literary works in the Korean examples and via rituals and museums in my own work, what is at stake is nothing less than a national consciousness suffused with pride about and indebtedness toward these national heroes. I found Haboush's portrayal of the dream journeys fascinating and subversive and am now curious to investigate how prevalent this same activity may have been in the Japanese case following the Pacific War. Other points of resonance between our articles include how the spirits of the dead are intertwined with contemporary social life, how the military dead become the protective guardians of society, and how the meaning of military deaths is contested, negotiated, and eventually becomes relatively stable but never static. Finally, we both concentrate on the authority of the state to determine the meaning of these deaths and to keep them viable as icons and emblems of sacrifice and indebtedness.

(Nelson, e-mail, 31 January 2003)

Nelson's article recalled to Colombijn work by Peter Nas and Robin Jeffrey, as well as work that Colombijn himself did earlier on the National War Monument in Canberra (see Nas 1993; Jeffrey 1980; Colombijn 1998). Colombijn writes:

The Australian National War Monument is one pole of Canberra's central symbolic axis, with the national parliament building on the other end. The war monument has displays celebrating heroism. It has the structure of a Byzantine church (Colombijn 1998), but the Christian association is never made explicit. In other words, commemorating the deaths is a civil religion (or a nonreligious cult) in Australia.

The Australian example shows that it does not have to be a large number of fallen soldiers that inspires the national identity. At the center of Australian memories is the failed landing at Gallipoli in the First World War. From a military point of view, the bungled landing was not that important, and the number of casualties, although severe, was nothing compared to the Japanese losses. Yet, Gallipoli is at the center of the collective memory because it was the first occasion in which Australian federal troops fought together. . . .

(Colombijn, e-mail, 3 February 2003)

Colombijn contrasts Yasukuni with memorials in Indonesia commemorating the war of independence from the Dutch:

Just as France is littered with small monuments commemorating the First World War, every Indonesian city, town, and moderately sized village has a statue commemorating the war of independence against the Dutch. They all refer to a local event (usually a shooting in which a number of Indonesian soldiers known by name were killed). The paradox is that, precisely because of the specific, local incident to which the statues refer, the monuments could be anywhere in the country. The main function of these statues is not to remember a certain event, but to say that this particular town or village took part in the overall Indonesian struggle. The only monument in Indonesia that does not refer to a specific event and has a general meaning is the national monument in Jakarta. Precisely because of its general meaning, it can be placed in no other city than Jakarta. The same seems to apply to Yasukuni, which is also a general monument because it is in Tokyo (and it is in Tokyo because it is general).

(Colombijn, e-mail, 3 February 2003)

Despite the overt differences in subject matter, Cummings wrote that he found Nelson's article to be most similar to his own. He writes:

Both of us are concerned with how people construct meaning from the past and the political ways in which particular events and interpretations are bracketed as

significant. The turn to religious systems of thought for legitimation of particular discourses/interpretations at the expense of others is also evident in both Makassar and Japan. Philosophically, we both share a distrust of overly neat social science theories and models as well.

(Cummings, e-mail, 12 March 2003)

Nelson saw the similarity between his article and that of Cummings in the following terms:

Cummings's work on history making in South Sulawesi reinforced my feeling that the role of ritual is ubiquitous in creating or reconfiguring new readings of history layered upon earlier ones. We certainly see this in the mid-nineteenth-century creation of the modern Japanese nation-state, with both Buddhist and Shinto ritual practices co-opted and applied to the building of a nation and the recasting of its history to those ends.

(Nelson, e-mail, 31 January 2003)

Cummings also noted that he shares with Colombijn a critical stance vis-à-vis theoretical models, perhaps (although not necessarily) related to the fact that they both write about Indonesia. Cummings writes:

Colombijn, too, takes theoretical models to task for their oversimplifications. State formation and the transition from orality to literacy both run into trouble when confronted with the particulars of local conditions. . . . The volatility and variation in this part of the world make theorizing a dangerous proposition and heuristic models of limited utility.

(Cummings, e-mail, 12 March 2003)

Both Cummings and Haboush, in the words of Cummings, write about "interpreting narratives and the creation of private spheres of memory that live side-by-side with more official, sanctioned interpretations" (Cummings, e-mail, 12 March 2003). Colombijn noted the similarity between Haboush's article and Cummings's in the following terms:

The distinction between written and oral history in Makassar can be generalized as the distinction between officially approved versus unauthorized histories. In Makassar the difference between official and unauthorized histories was the distinction between written and oral history. In Korea it was between government "'correct' texts" (as Haboush writes) and privately written narratives of war.

(Colombijn, e-mail, 3 February 2003)

One of the payoffs of reading across boundaries is that it may confirm a sense of the distinctiveness of one's own particular case. Eaton, for example, found the discussion of state formation in early modern Sumatra, which Colombijn discusses, to underscore the particularity of the Philippine case which he wrote about. Eaton writes that

both Colombijn and I make reference to the personalization of the state in the figure of the ruler in Sumatra. In my article, I document consistent attempts by presidents to perpetuate themselves in power and to concentrate and personalize the making of policy in the executive branch (e.g., Presidents Ferdinand Marcos, Fidel Ramos, and Joseph Estrada). Each of these men tried to arrogate for himself a great deal of authority, and the hegemonic pretensions of each was ultimately checked by civil

society mobilizations. . . . The comparison with Sumatra in particular and earlier state-society patterns in general simply underscores the historical importance of the organization of civil society that occurred under the Marcos era, and that distinguishes the Philippines' transition to democracy from most other Asian cases.

(Eaton, e-mail, 13 February 2003)

Colombijn, on the other hand, finds that there might be aspects of Eaton's analysis which could be productively applied to twentieth-century Indonesia. He writes:

I wondered whether his analysis could be applied to Indonesia, where societal forces brought down President Soeharto but where democratization has not really gotten off the ground. I got the impression that the Philippine elite reacted against democratization by means that James Scott (1985) called "weapons of the weak." Scott's forms of everyday resistance are apparently as effectively applied by the elite as by the lower class. Just like the Malaysian lower class, which provided Scott with the empirical data for his concept of everyday resistance, the Philippine elite is conservative and defends old privileges. The elite tactics are sabotaging procedures, refusing to discuss bills, and "legislative foot dragging" (at this point, Eaton uses the same words as Scott). Like the Malaysian landless peasants, the Philippine elite knows what to do throughout the country without a formal coordination of resistance.

(Colombijn, e-mail, 3 February 2003)

Nelson and Colombijn both highlight the issue of acknowledging the perspective of both our sources and ourselves as scholars. Nelson reminds us of a point (which Colombijn himself makes) about the ways in which the perspective of the observer influences the questions which the observer might ask.

Colombijn's work also referenced the theme of ritual and ceremony in legitimating state interests—such as when ceremonies were held to draw people to an exemplary center. But, he also points out how Orientalist perspectives employed by Western historians may have overemphasized the instability of fledgling states, when there were other, equally compelling reasons for their rapid rise and fall.

(Nelson, e-mail, 31 January 2003)

Colombijn makes a point about oral history that Cummings also stressed in his article:

The paradox of oral history is that, in order to be able to study it, it must be fixed somehow first. This issue becomes even more important when somebody else recorded the story, such the nineteenth-century missionary B. F. Matthes. To what extent did he edit the stories?

Colombijn continues his discussion of Cummings's work by noting the way in which leaders of the Riau independence movement used oral texts to challenge the dominance of a conventional historical narrative:

A nice comparison can be made with the independence movement in Riau (Indonesia), already in decay. The leaders of the movement liked to have poets read out texts on odd occasions, such as the beginning of a court case between one of the leaders against then President Habibie. Oral poetry was used as a way to stress the

Malay identity against Jakarta. Oral poetry was the history of resistance, going against official histories about the relationship between Riau and the Indonesian state.

(Colombijn, e-mail, 3 February 2003)

These articles open up a range of possibilities to think about histories, about narrative, and about the ways in which states are formed and reformed.

List of References

- COLOMBIJN, FREEK. 1998. "Canberra: A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing." *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research* 22:565–81.
- JEFFREY, ROBIN. 1980. "What the Statues Tell: The Politics of Choosing Symbols in Trivandnum." *Pacific Affairs* 53(3):484–502.
- NAS, PETER J. N. 1993. *Urban Symbolism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- SCOTT, JAMES. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.