

Euroseas Conference Panel: 'Symbolic Capitals: Southeast Asian Museums and Cities as Nation-Building Sites'

Panel Organiser: Dr Claire Sutherland, University of Durham, UK

Claire Sutherland, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University: 'The City as Museum: Hanoi 2010'

Hanoi officially celebrates a thousand years of history in 2010, its genesis traced back to when emperor Ly Thai To saw an auspicious vision of an ascending dragon by a bend in the Red River and founded his capital city on that spot. As the setting for many iconic buildings, such as the centres of colonial rule reappropriated by the communist state, the mausoleum and museum to 'father of the nation' Ho Chi Minh, and the repository for a millennium of dynastic history as the successor to the imperial capital Thang Long, Hanoi represents a microcosm of nation-building in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Nation-building is understood as the 'top-down' ideological construction of the Vietnamese nation. The concept refers to a state-led practice, which also involves the manipulation of popular symbols, sensibilities, traditions and identities as part of a wider discourse designed to foster state legitimacy and loyalty amongst designated members of that nation. The case study of Hanoi will serve to illustrate this practice, universal amongst all states which aspire to be nations, or 'nation-states', through its museums. The paper will begin by looking at the concept of state spatialisation and how it fits into wider debates concerning nation-building, and in particular the evolving link between nationality, citizenship and state legitimacy. The second section will set this series of concepts within the Southeast Asian context, and Vietnam in particular, before going on to look at Hanoi's cityscape by mapping its museums. Hanoi has been chosen as a case study because it represents the 'symbolic capital', to reinterpret Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, of the Vietnamese nation-state. The empirical analysis of cityscapes and museums serves to illustrate how 'nation buildings', taken literally, help cement the dominance of an official national discourse. The paper concludes that some monuments might become sedimented on the landscape over time, but their meaning can shift as official interpretations respond to evolving public attitudes and political culture.

Museums, which are often responsible for interpreting complex themes such as colonialism, are a prime example of this. With their explicitly didactic function, these can convey historical memory or future vision in stone, whilst reinforcing ideological messages through changing exhibitions.

Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut, Ph.D., Department of Art, California State University, San Bernardino: 'Symbolic and Spectacular Capital of Nationalism: The Malacañang in Manila, Philippines from 1965 to 1998'

If print-capitalism in the form of novels and newspapers, according to Benedict Anderson, provided the means for representing the imagined community, Donald Preziosi theorizes that museums made legible the modern nation-state. This paper investigates Malacañang located in Manila, Philippines, as a symbolic and spectacular capital of nationalism. Since its establishment in the late 18th century, Malacañang signified its foreign and local residents' colonial ideology, national history, and cultural heritage. During the Marcos (1965-1986), Aquino (1986-1992), and Ramos years (1992-1998), in particular, Malacañang metamorphosed from an executive headquarters and president's official residence into a fortified palace that showcased indigenous mythologies and personal aesthetic tastes; later, it was converted into a public museum that commodified political critique and celebrated the country's centennial. Through its extensive and radical architectural renovations, expanding and/or collapsing collection of local and foreign objects, and technologies of exhibition and display, Malacañang made legible the nation *and* legitimized state power to its own citizens and the world. Malacañang's narration of the vicissitudes of the modern nation was both discursive *and* performative, articulating competing political agendas and personae: the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, the People Power revolution of Corazon Aquino, and the profitable democracy of Fidel Ramos. Capitalized upon as an official monument of personal and historical memorabilia from the thousand pair of shoes to the presidential portraits, Malacañang became a calculated extension of politics and exhibition of the selves as well. Indeed, no other museum symbolized and spectacularized discrepant nationalisms, power struggles, and high and low culture from

1965 to 1998 than Malacañang, a dominant agent in the ideological narration and representation of the Philippines as a modern nation-state.

Joel Fajardo Ariate Jr., Third World Studies Center, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines: 'Massacres and Mayhem in Mendiola: Commemorating Violent Confrontations with the State'

The street of Mendiola in the city of Manila is the main road that leads directly to the Malacañang Palace, the seat of the Philippine presidency. Since the 1950s, Mendiola has been the foremost site of physical confrontation between social movement actors waging protests and the state. Generations of social movement actors have braved bullets and barricades in the street of Mendiola just to be able to put forward their grievances within shouting distance of the Philippine president.

Lives have been lost on its pavement. In the late 1960s student activists died in Mendiola during violent dispersals of student-led demonstrations. In 1987, a massacre happened on Mendiola. At least thirteen farmers demanding agrarian reform were mowed down by a hail of bullets. In May 2001, supporters of jailed former President Joseph Estrada were fired upon when they tried to force their way into the presidential palace. Mendiola then is a palimpsest on which many stories and deeds of activism, of the Filipinos' untiring quest for justice, have been inscribed—some of which in blood.

Today, as barbed wires and antiriot police have become a fixture in Mendiola, the battle over it rages even in the realm of memory and heritage. Relying on narratives of forty social movement activists and other political actors that belong to different generations that marched in Mendiola, this paper uncovers the different and sometimes contending views on what does it mean to be in Mendiola and what should Mendiola stand for. The collection of narratives from the research participants serves as the infrastructure of social memory. This study then is a biography of one of the Philippines' foremost urban site of protest; an attempt to surface history and spatial meaning over a site that is perpetually guarded by the state and valorized by generations of urban activists.

**Prof. Ian Morley, Department of History, Chinese University of Hong Kong:
'Imperialism, Cities and 'Progress': Civic Design in early-1900s Philippines'**

This paper investigates matters involved in the creation of city plans for Manila and Baguio in the Philippines, two of Asia's and the early-twentieth century's most important exercises in city designing and nation-building.

The paper considers how the 1904 city plans for Baguio and Manila, schemes created just two years after the end of the Philippine-American War, strengthened an embryonic sense of national character as defined by US imperial administrators, and how recourse to urban designing by renowned architect Daniel Burnham helped to convey this identity. Furthermore the paper shall examine how the construction of Baguio and redevelopment of Manila spoke to America's yearning to disassociate the Philippines from its past as an 'uncivilised' place in order to create a fresh culture, environment and identity that epitomised new hopes, principles and pride, albeit as just noted within an imperial milieu.

Using well-established research methods to align political transition with the realisation of immediately familiar visions of nationhood in urban form, the paper determines the close alliance between urban design, governance and identity production so that a new grasp of how cultural, political, artistic and environmental forces affected each other during the early-1900s may be put forward.

Siti Keo, Department of History, University of California, Berkeley: 'A Tale of Two Cities: Soth Polin and Phnom Penh During *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*'

From 1955 to 1970, Phnom Penh was a source of national pride for the postcolonial Cambodian state. After Cambodia achieved its independence from France in 1953, Norodom Sihanouk unified competing factions under an umbrella national organization called "*Sangkum Reastr Niyum*" (the People's Socialist Community), which lasted until his fall in March 1970. Under Sihanouk's leadership, *Sangkum* struggled to

fashion a national identity independent of French colonialism and to achieve a living standard on par with that found in the West. Like other newly independent countries at the time, Cambodia faced the dilemma of wanting to become like the West and yet maintaining an identity separate from its former colonial master. To resolve this dilemma, *Sangkum* advocated a modernity more aligned with Cambodian traditions. Phnom Penh became the most concrete example of this Cambodian modernity. State newspapers featured articles and pictures, highlighting Phnom Penh and its changes. The openings of a luxurious hotel, a branch of a multinational business, or an air-conditioned movie theater were seen as yet another sign of how Phnom Penh was “in route to being one of the great cities of Asia.” The newspapers boasted of how some of these new buildings incorporated authentic Khmer architectural details and existed alongside old colonial buildings. Phnom Penh’s growth signified, according to these government newspapers, Cambodia’s ability to progress even as it remained firmly rooted in tradition and in the past. The state used Phnom Penh to build a bridge to its past, instilling a sense of pride in the populace for the new direction of Cambodia. Phnom Penh was therefore a crucial site for the enactment of *Sangkum*’s ideology and for the construction of a modern, independent Cambodian nation.

The same progressive policies enacted during the early years of independence also undermined the state’s campaign to portray Phnom Penh as a modern, cosmopolitan “oasis of peace.” Due to *Sangkum*’s successes, social tensions emerged from the gaps that “opened up in this period between Cambodia’s rich and poor and between the cities and the countryside.” These tensions manifested itself across a variety of mediums, from films to literature. The literary works of Soth Polin, in particular, provided an outlet for these tensions and a means to express the discontent against the government. Throughout the *Sangkum* period, Soth Polin built his reputation as he managed a newspaper, owned a publishing house, and authored several novels. A well-known figure within the intellectual circle at the time, he lived and worked in *Sangkum*’s Phnom Penh, which served as the primary setting for most of his novels. The Phnom Penh that was described in his novels differed radically from the one that littered the pages of the government newspapers. Rather than the Phnom

Penh celebrated for its modernity and its embodiment of the country's progress, Soth Polin depicted it as a site of modern anomie, a place from which to escape. For him, man became a machine in Phnom Penh. By contradicting the state's image of Phnom Penh and by revealing the alienating consequences of urban life, Soth Polin's works challenged *Sangkum's* representation of the city and its claimed progress. The discontent within *Sangkum* Cambodia, exposed through Soth Polin's writings, later translated into political action against Sihanouk in 1970. Thus, either as a site of modernity or a place of alienation, Phnom Penh played a central role in promoting the political agendas of both the state and Soth Polin.