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Lynn Hollen Lees. *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786-1941.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 374 pp. $120.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-03840-0.

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Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects, by Lynn Hollen Lees, is a masterful exploration of the emergence of a modern plural society in British colonial Malaya. Starting with the British East India Company's involvement in Penang in the late 1780s and continuing until the Japanese invasion in 1941, the book offers a detailed social history of life in the plantations and towns at the heart of British Malaya. The book is tinged with the transnational as well, as Lees attends to the routes of, and motivations for, migration that brought British, Chinese, Arab, Tamil, and local Malay peoples into contact with each other and ultimately together into highly diverse communities. Linking these transnational processes of migration to local and multivalent exercises of social power, Lees explores the emergence of the modern pluralist society of Malay; the character of its day-to-day functioning; and the internal stresses and contradictions that over time battered at the rigid barriers of race, ethnicity, and gender which the British had engineered. With a focus on the processes of cross-cultural exchange that arose in this environment, Lees shows that these exchanges were vital and points to the social interdependencies between seemingly segregated groups for the maintenance of a colonial social order.

The division of colonial society by class and race has long been a topic of interest for scholars. J. S. Furnivall, in the book *Netherlands India* (1944), famously used the idea of a plural economy to describe the social and ethnic organization of the Netherlands East Indies. He claimed a nearly complete ethnic segregation of peoples, arguing that they lived separate lives, meeting mainly in the marketplace. Furnivall's work is, needless to say, a far too static picture of colonial social order even as it did capture some truths about the social character of colonial societies. Lees takes note of Furnivall but relies on more recent and nuanced scholarship, such as Tim Harper's look at code-switching in *The End of Empire and the Making of British Malaya* (1999), to inform her study of cross-cultural engagement. As Lees points out, British Malaya is a particularly valuable site for thinking through this subject, given the extraordinary size of labor migration to the colony, the diversity of its make-up, and the ways that ethnicity and gender differences became bound up in the organization of labor and society more broadly. Arguing its value as a case study in British social engineering, Lees sees British Malaya as "a test case for the ability of empires to foster loyalty among a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic group of subjects in a world dominated by nation-states" (p. 12). Lees uses a multiplicity of sources, including oral histories, plantation archives, legal and other official sources, newspapers, photographs, and more, to piece together his-

tories of ordinary people across a range of social strata, from the elite planters to the most poorly treated laborers. Given the difficulty of uncovering information about marginalized people and those for whom invisibility was an existential necessity, this by itself is a notable achievement.

The first part of the book explores the spread of British plantations and the concomitant growth of towns in the nineteenth century. Lees opens by exploring the sugar estates in Penang, with a particular focus on labor, including a thorough discussion of the paths by which diverse immigrant laborers made their way to the Malay estates, and the day-to-day, often grim life of those laborers as they produced the sugar on which the wealth of planters and British colonial authorities was based. She gives equal attention to the practical work of laborers in sugar production and the rigid hierarchies of ethnicity and gender that structured life and were used by plantation operators, and by extension colonial authorities, to discipline and control laborers. Each chapter takes a theme and explores it across the full time period of the section, allowing her to trace the subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, challenges that over time changed both plantation practices and the lives of laborers. I found the third chapter, "Body Politics in a Plural Society," to be a particularly engrossing discussion of the social organization of life on the plantation, including the ways that diverse people were housed, attention (or lack thereof) to sanitation, and the practices of bodily discipline that planters used to restrain and discipline labor. Lees highlights the contradictions between British laws designed to control laborers in a way just barely better than slavery and the desire to protect them in the interest of ensuring that neither work nor the steady flow of migrants would be interrupted. Exploring surveillance, policing, escape, and legal action, she offers, in some measure, a picture of the "weapons of the weak" at work from the earliest days of British rule. Moreover, she shows how the British acknowledged (albeit reluctantly) and managed the interdependencies of groups divided by ethnicity, class, and gender in colonial society.

In parallel to this, Lees explores the somewhat freer, if still hierarchical, life of towns. Lees shows us how other forms of social control associated with immigration, including debt and the need for social support provided by kinship groups or associations based on place of origin, kept certain forms of racial and ethnic segregation firmly in place even without the regimentation of plantation life. That being said, such boundaries were far less rigid in towns, and cross-cultural exchanges happened in these environments in ways that one did not readily see on the plantation. Paying attention to the rhythms of daily life, the spatial organization of society, the infrastructures of housing, and sanitation, she offers a detailed look at both what these towns were like and how and why they grew the way they did.

Within towns as much as on plantations, she uses the concept of "layered sovereignty" to explore the real functioning of power relations within society. She looks at the ways that power was distributed across ethnic lines, from the formal exercise of the British or the Malay rulers, to the less formal, but no less vital, role played by ethnic associations or well-connected private individuals. The idea that British power alone could not and did not stabilize the colony is, needless to say, not a new idea. Yet this close and vividly detailed look at the emergence of complex power relationships, including those of cooperation and exchange across different levels of Malayan society, gives the reader a powerful understanding of how racial and ethnic divisions were deployed, managed, or violated in the process of producing social order. She puts real meat on the bones of the notion of "indirect rule," showing how complex and differentiated these delegations (and relinquishments) of power were in practice.

In part 2, Lees moves into the twentieth century, maintaining the narrative structure of the previous section by again exploring first plantation

life and then towns. Rubber planting took pride of place in the Malayan economy, and towns became larger and more politically central to Malayan life in the twentieth century. By the twentieth century, the tense interdependencies between owners and laborers continued, but she explores the changing legal contexts, as more laborers were asserting rights in court and demanding (if not always getting) fairer treatment. Both the sections on the town and the plantation attend to the growing, cosmopolitan middle classes, their changing sociality, and their ability to command more power within colonial society. She concludes the book in 1941, when the Japanese invaded and occupied Malaya, albeit with a brief postscript that points to some of the questions that her study raises for understanding postwar life in the region.

Readers of H-Sci-Med-Tech will want to know what this book offers to studies of science, technology, or medicine in the colonial world. Needless to say, both plantations and towns were centers of technological, medical, and scientific work, including, of course, the technoscientific work of producing rubber and sugar for international markets, the spread of craft knowledge in towns, and ongoing efforts to address problems of sanitation and public health. Because of her focus on social history and day-to-day encounters and exchanges that made up colonial life, the practical working of plantations, and the places and the material infrastructures that supported life, both on plantations and in towns, all make an appearance. She pays attention in particular to the quality (or lack thereof) of worker housing, for example, and how and why this changed over time, as well as inclusion and exclusion in sanitation projects. Yet science, technology, and medicine per se are arguably not really her focus, and thus these areas tend to serve more as descriptive background to and context for her explorations of cross-cultural exchange. For example, in part 2 she mentions the ways that the rise of entertainment like radio and movies affected the sociality of people living in towns. But she mainly skims the surface of the technologies themselves and does not engage in the kind of deeper analysis that one might find in a media studies approach to the question. This is not a criticism of the book: no book can or should try to do everything.

That being said, for those interested in the history of science, technology, and medicine on plantations or urbanization in the colonial world, there is much to be gained from this book. Her close attention to labor, including the lives at work and living conditions is vividly portrayed, as is the journey laborers made to get to British Malaya in the first place. Indeed, she brings these historical spaces to life in ways that few histories manage to do. Furthermore, her nuanced look at the exercise of social and political power in these diverse societies strikes me as centrally important for understanding the emergence and transformation of material life, and the centers of scientific, medical, and technological production in British Malaya. For those interested in probing further into the technological or scientific histories of Malaya, understanding this social and political environment is vital, and it is far from easy to dig out of the sources. Lees work's is therefore well worth reading for scholars interested in science, technology, and society in British Malaya, even though attention to science, technology, and medicine is limited.

The great strength and relevance of this book is the beautifully detailed look it offers at the emergence and historical development of a cosmopolitan colony. Although Lees frames it as a view of British practices of social engineering, the attention to the ways that diverse groups interact, exercise power, and make lives for themselves suggests that it is also a book about the ways that a plural society engineered itself. Given current global challenges with migration, with racial and ethnic conflict on a broad scale, and with the contradictory political impulses to raise and lower barriers to human movement, Lees offers us a history to think with. Especially for historians of Malaya and those more broadly interested in the workings of

plantations and urbanization in nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism, it is a book well worth reading.