

Culture



**Alan SMART, *Making Room: Squatter Clearance in Hong Kong*,
Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies
Occasional Papers and Monographs, No. 102, 1992; 228 pages,
HK\$130**

Peter Lomas

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A major contribution of this work is to put together (in English, between two covers) an anthropological commentary on a Nordic culture which introduces the reader to a line of study and a literature (in Norwegian, or else quite scattered) properly ethnographic — not essentially historical, not sector-analytical, not problem-applied, not grand-theoretical. Along with her holism, Gullestad favours grounded theory which doesn't try to fly, diffident, not self-enamoured deconstruction, and what she calls "commuting" between fact (the field) and interpretation of either the Clifford Geertz or the David Schneider sort (the armchair). That we get no hard sells is owing in part to her keeping to her "commuter" role: the premiss, refreshing in our time, is that our kind of knowledge rests better on thoughtful observation of everyday life than it can rest on hard, soft, or sense *data* (a Latin plural meaning "givens").

How far might this line of study continue? Nothing in the book sheds much light on currents in Norwegian society; on ways people of working or bourgeois status, failing to opt out of danger, drop out; or on favoured ways of engaging in conflict. Little Norway probably produces more cogent social research aimed at self-assessment than all of continental Europe or North America. Most is not available to linguistic outsiders but very little is privatized, as research here is, by professional and academic coteries unwilling even to cross departmental lines. The possibilities for thoughtful "crosswise" anthropology, leaning on published work but resting on firmer ground, look better there.

Alan SMART, *Making Room: Squatter Clearance in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies Occasional Papers and Monographs, No. 102, 1992; 228 pages, HK\$130.

By Peter Lomas

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The author's proclaimed objective in this study of a squatter settlement in a densely populated urban area in Kowloon, Hong Kong, is an examination of the processes of squatter clearance, taking into account the importance of the wider economic system and state policies. He persuasively argues that state policies prompt the emergence and removal of

squatter settlements and that policies in turn are influenced by responses to clearance. The core of the publication is an account of the concerns and strategies of residents of a few areas of the Diamond Hill district facing actual or potential clearance during the mid 1980s, but this is viewed against the backdrop of economic forces and the colonial administration's housing policies.

The author provides some historical background on land use in the New Kowloon area from the assumption of British control in 1898 to the late 1980s, referring to official records, memoirs of former bureaucrats, unpublished reports and items from the local English language press. This is presented in the context of a general discussion of major demographic and economic changes in Hong Kong as a whole. His consideration of the history of Diamond Hill and the social groupings that have played a major part in structuring the social fabric of this area is an interesting contribution, but readers keen to understand the dynamics of the process of clearance and resettlement might wish that his examination of the actual circumstances surrounding the clearance of one area could be expanded.

Readers hoping for an ethnography of the Diamond Hill area, or part of it, will find short sections on community groupings, limited discussion of the power structures within the settlement and intriguing but perhaps necessarily undeveloped commentary on the role of Triads in community decision making and the management of housing stock, but no comprehensive description or analysis of the social structure of this large and important squatter community. Although some useful case studies are presented to illustrate the range of positions adopted by residents towards clearance, it is regrettable that the author, who notes that he lived in the area for several months, does not provide more detail on the lives and strategies of his neighbours. He does offer very interesting statistical data from a survey of his own and those of others but presents disappointingly little ethnographic material. The classification of dialect groups (Fukien, Chui Chau) as ethnic groups raises some questions, and the author skips over an opportunity to examine relations between squatters from different dialect groups.

The author deals with theoretical concerns in urban studies, critiquing extant positions in the first chapter and returning to these considerations periodically in later chapters, paying particular attention to the way in which the state, in this case the Hong

Kong government through its various departments, has influenced the emergence of squatter settlements. Although there is examination of the role of the Housing Department, it might be suggested that expanded coverage could be given to the way in which staff of Squatter Control units work, as they are the representatives of the state with whom squatters interact most frequently.

It is not clear to which readership this monograph is addressed. The rich detail on some issues, which might be confusing for people unfamiliar with the Hong Kong scene, could suggest that this publication is primarily for local consumption there. This is further borne out by the fact that the general background provided on conditions in Hong Kong, although useful, could certainly be fleshed out more if the publication were to be of wider interest. On the other hand there are hints that Alan Smart may have been aiming at non-Hong Kong readers. Why else would he find it necessary to tell us that *mah jeuk* (mah jong) is "a gambling game with tiles" (p.103, 209) or that an *amah* is a servant (p.157)?

Stylistically, readers unfamiliar with Hong Kong might also be confused by inconsistency in presenting place names. The author usually follows conventional usage by indicating place names usually by three words, each capitalized, but on occasion, the three words form one (e.g. Shek Kip Mei, p.48, or Shekkipmei, p.33, 40). It might also be asked why it is necessary to use romanized Cantonese terms for such words as "fierce" (*ok*, translated as "tough and powerful", p.76), or "bustling and festive" (*yit l/naau*, p.105, 210). Other uses of Cantonese terms referring to social relationships (neighbour[hood], adoptive relationships, people from the same village or district) could be further explicated to justify their use by indicating the cultural significance attached to them, and the occasional term which appears in the text but not in the glossary should be added there or dropped (e.g., p.57).

The publication would be greatly enhanced by more and better maps, the presentation of more of the statistical detail in charts or tables, and most of all, by an index. This monograph contains much useful material and will be a valuable record of a particular period in a society that is changing so fast that very soon mid-1980s data will be primarily of historical interest.

Alrick CAMBRIDGE and Stephan FEUCHT-WANG, *Where You Belong*, Avebury: Aldershot, 1992.

By Caroline Knowles

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This book is the second instalment in a two volume series. It follows *Anti-Racist Strategies* (1990) which is a critique (prompted by the lack of analytical rigour in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982, *The Empire Strikes Back*) of Marxist and sociological constructions of race in Britain. It offers a series of impressively well argued accounts of racism as the denial of "civil capacity" to racially defined categories of the population, and is a timely and significant intervention in the British scene.

The key theme is identity and its articulation in organising claims to belonging, themes which are creatively explored in its various contributions. Feuchtwang uses biography to explore senses of national belonging arising from rival claims to peoplehood. Looking at identities offered by refugees, by "Britishness", by what he refers to as the "internal refugee" (whose sense of belonging is marginalised by social conditions like unemployment) and by the outcast without an ancestral biography (as in the case of the children transported to Canada) Feuchtwang shows how all claims to belonging of national territories are ambiguous, fragmented, negotiated, and constructed in relation to a sense of personal identity.

Eade's account of British Bengali identity is richly textured by negotiations in local political struggles over language, political alliances, and religious provision in East London. It is well complemented by Clarke's discussion of the ways in which a national boundary, which has become a mechanism for the maintenance of a white British identity, operates a system of "legislative racism" through immigration controls.

Cambridge's contributions tackle the politics of black subjectivity and counter assertion to racism as expressions of identity and belonging. He challenges Paul Gilroy's assertion that black music is a cultural discourse in which are embedded forms of representation of blackness encased in political agendas of revolt, by arguing that music (but not musical cultures which are organised presentations to be decon-