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[Book review] **Neoliberal Governance and International Medical Travel in Malaysia** by Meghann Ormond.  
Routledge, London, 2012, pp. xi + 162 (ISBN 978-0-415-50238-2).

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► **To cite this version:**

Audrey Bochaton. [Book review] Neoliberal Governance and International Medical Travel in Malaysia by Meghann Ormond. Routledge, London, 2012, pp. xi + 162 (ISBN 978-0-415-50238-2).. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 2015, pp.134-136. 10.1111/sjtg.12094 . halshs-01755080

**HAL Id: halshs-01755080**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01755080>**

Submitted on 21 Jun 2019

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The authors capture the essence of colloquial Bengali language by innovatively naming these chapters as *Bhitor o Bahir Katha* (inside and outside stories), *Nadir Satho Baash* (to survive with river), *Jiboner Dhon* (livelihood assets), etc. The rest of the book presents an excellent field research on the livelihood of char dwellers, their pathways of migration, their everyday life and struggle to cope with extreme poverty and marginalization, their occupations, insecurity and vulnerability, subjective experiences of migration and various gendered aspects of char lives. Even in their liminal existence, the char dwellers, through their everyday interaction, develop a sense of community in this vulnerable environment.

This book is a path-breaking, scholarly contribution. This is the birth of a discipline (or perhaps a sub-discipline) in a Foucauldian vein. The authors acknowledged their gratitude to Scott (2009) and van Schendel (2002) whose works have inspired them. In his study on highlands of Southeast Asia, James Scott encouraged scholars to use Zomia studies, rather than rigid regional and national studies, as a novel geographical frame. In a similar fashion, Lahiri-Dutt and Samanta in their original piece of work give direction to emerging scholars to undertake what we can call char studies. Thus the authors open up a new vista for an immensely promising interdisciplinary front with unparalleled effortlessness and spontaneity. This book is a must read for environmental historians, cultural geographers and all doctoral students in the related social science disciplines.

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**Neoliberal Governance and International Medical Travel in Malaysia** *Meghann Ormond*. Routledge, London, 2012, pp. xi + 162 (ISBN 978-0-415-50238-2).

*Neoliberal Governance and International Medical Travel in Malaysia* is a well-researched study on the development of international medical travel (IMT) in Malaysia. Relying on Wil Gesler's concept of 'therapeutic landscape', Meghann Ormond analyses how Malaysia has become a place combining physical environments, social conditions and human perceptions conducive to healing and how it has therefore become an IMT destination.

Since the end of the Cold War, many academic works have speculated on the decline of the nation-state and the prospect of a borderless world. With markets opening up, talk was all about people, goods and services flowing freely, unhindered by artificial barriers. Meghann Ormond's work seeks to counterbalance this 'fascination with the supposedly borderless movements and postnational networks comprising globalization' (Sparke, 2005: 55). Indeed, the main argument of the book is that flows emerge, exist and are reconfigured based on specific contexts and unique material and geographical conditions which we need to acknowledge to understand the rise of these movements.

International medical travel has been amply documented in existing literature, mostly focusing on the benefits and challenges posed by traveller flows to these destinations and their health systems. The originality and interest of this book lies in the study of the broader political, social and economic contexts shaping health care and in the promotion of places as healing destinations. Meghann Ormond's interest lies less in the phenomenon of IMT itself than in IMT use, while she explores the shifting postdevelopmental relationships between states, their subjects and their scopes of intervention through the prism of health care. The author perfectly illustrates how the promotion of a country as an IMT destination has become part of a broader development strategy, widely differing from a previously inward-looking 'developmental' focus on containment and national self-sufficiency.

The research output relies on extensive 'media' coverage ranging from interviews with executives and officers of private hospitals, medical travel facilitators and medical professionals, to political speeches and the collection of promotional and information material to illustrate how IMT has been promoted in Malaysia.

The book covers six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter 2, 'Shifting subjects and territories of health care', offers interesting insight into how the promotion of Malaysia as an IMT destination is embedded in its domestic context. Describing the genealogy of health care in Malaysia, this chapter shows that health care was effectively privatized in this country more than a decade before IMT came up on the agenda, allowing IMT to rely on 'existing domestic facilities', contrary to the current view of IMT as an external invasion. While there is little doubt that IMT exacerbates already existing inequalities in domestic health care systems and undermines the public health system, the author argues that it is essential to put its impact into perspective.

Chapter 3 looks at how Malaysia has been 'put on the map' (p. 45) via the acquisition and display of high-tech medical facilities, equipment and skills to qualify as a 'world-class' destination. 'World-class' recognition was achieved after various steps were taken: standardized structures for medical facilities based on efforts to gain internationally recognized accreditation, partnerships with world-famous medical facilities, and deployment of medical professionals' credentials earned in prestigious Western educational and training centres.

Chapter 4 focuses on the role of cultural competence in customer-focused care that has become central to the success of IMT. It emphasizes the strategic efforts deployed by IMT destinations to 'pull' or attract specific types of international patient-consumers, promising them not only to save time and money but also to meet their specific cultural requirements. While health care has increasingly been turned into a mere commodity, tailored care initiatives such as these have become a key element in the health care destinations' ability to attract specific patient-consumers. Malaysia's modern, progressive 'Islamic credentials' are therefore proclaimed and carefully groomed in efforts to appeal to a vast transnational Muslim market.

The final chapter displaces the debate from a global perspective to a cross-border level analysis with two case studies (Indonesia and Singapore) illustrating the significance of regional cross-border health care in local, national and super-national development agendas. Indeed cross-border and regional medical travel involves a vast majority of foreign patients being treated in Malaysia, and Meghann Ormond does not overlook this phenomenon, unlike most research on IMT that emphasizes Western patient-consumers travelling long distances to get medical treatment in developing countries.

Each chapter presents a well-articulated argument substantiated by multi-layered case studies, making the book an up-to-date and perfect contribution to the definition

of IMT. In conclusion, the book's meticulous research and robust conceptual framework, along with its discussion on methodology, make it a useful guide on how issues in the IMT need to be further analysed and tackled at various geographical levels, i.e. from regional to global.

## Reference

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**The Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles** *Farhana Sultana and Alex Loftus (eds)*. Earthscan, Oxon, 2012, pp. xvii + 262 (ISBN 978-1-84971-359-7).

Since the early 1990s, water struggles have been gaining attention in political agenda and debates. Unequal access to water, increased competition and environmental degradation have pushed local and global movements to demand institutional changes for addressing these issues at different scales. Despite consensus that there is a global water crisis, institutions have conflicting approaches to the guiding principles and changes that should be adopted. Generally this tension has been framed under the binary categories of a pro-market model aiming to reach economic efficiency versus a universal human right to water aiming to reach social equity.

The supporters of the pro-market model have promoted this model as a phenomenon that, existing by itself, has an inevitable essence, follows universal rules, and is isolated from broader political debates. The adversaries to this model counter that developing and promoting it is extremely harmful for water debates, so long as water problems and struggles are presented as simple technical issues. When the pro-market imaginary becomes hegemonic, political debates regarding how water should be managed are replaced by standard and apolitical formulas that appearing as neutral, naturalize power relations and unequal access.

However, the 'human right to water framework' is not immune to the previous critique at all. Insofar as it is rooted in the liberal political philosophy tradition that presents human rights as universal, the right to water discourse can be easily framed by narratives that justify it as preceding any political debate, making the right to water appear to lack any political content. This perspective opens a window for justifying its materialization through technical and abstract legal schemes structured under liberal axioms, designed by technocrats to make the human right to water completely compatible with pro-market instruments. Here, the right to water could be instrumentally used as a moral veil for covering the power asymmetries reproduced by the commodification of water. The co-editors of the book invite readers to push the right to water framework down an opposite path: toward its radical politicization.

The goal of politicizing the right to water is achieved through the 14 chapters of the book. Rather than answering the question of what the right to water means in universal terms, these chapters offer conceptual and empirical discussions oriented toward exploring the theoretical paradoxes and the concrete struggles for understanding the right to