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*Land Politics and Livelihoods on the Margins of Hanoi,
1920–2010* by Danielle Labbé (review)

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the reader a glimpse into both the physical and mythical environs in which the Khmer Krom live.

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Land Politics and Livelihoods on the Margins of Hanoi, 1920–2010.
By Danielle Labbé. Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press, 2014. 228 pp.

This slim yet insightful volume offers an empirically convincing, theoretically provocative, and well-researched study of urbanization in the peri-urban village of Hòa Mực, located six kilometres from the centre of Hanoi. Building on extensive research into the everyday lives of residents, the book offers a welcome contribution to the study of urban land politics, the history of Hanoi, peri-urban livelihoods, and the way that we understand urban development and state-society relations in Vietnam. While the author is a professor of urban planning, the book's interdisciplinary research methods borrow successfully from a wide range of fields — including cultural geography, history, political science and planning — to give a wide-ranging and convincing account of the social-spatial transformation of this village, which was once part of an outer-city district (*huyện ngoại thành*), but which was incorporated into the inner-city district (*huyện nội thành*) of Cầu Giấy in 1997.

Labbé offers a clearly written and useful historical narrative of a process that scholars of urbanism call “in situ urbanization” (p. 69), which has produced Hanoi's urban mosaic of villages in the middle of the city — what locals call *làng giữa phố*. By situating this process in a longer history, Labbé convincingly shows that residents are active agents in urbanization, and that a “periurban character” (p. 42) is not simply a result of recent state reform policies. Instead, it can be traced back as far as the 1920s, when Hòa Mực villagers began to supplement agricultural with non-agricultural activities (p. 41). These side occupations (*nghề phụ*)

not only included modest early activities, such as cutting wood and catching crabs for sale in the city, but they also grew to include textile production during the colonial era, brick production during the hardest years of the subsidy economy and other creative uses of household land in the post-reform era, like building dormitories for rural migrants and students. The author's thoughtful attention to the role of these productive activities in the urbanization process shows how a pre-existing peri-urban character was not undermined but was in fact even further expanded during the socialist period, when the application of the socialist revolution was less complete than often assumed.

The chapter on "Uneven Socialist Revolutions (1940–1965)" is particularly interesting for the way in which it describes flexibly applied state policies in peri-urban Hanoi, where the hybrid mix of rural and urban pursuits that had already developed proved important for the functioning of the capital. Interviews with older Hòa Mực residents reveal fascinating details about how land was understood in everyday practice during high socialism. While all land may have been officially nationalized, "residential land" was treated "either explicitly or implicitly" as "pseudo-private property" because households retained most of the control over this land (p. 53). However, agricultural land — because it was fully seized by the collectives — completely lost this sense of private ownership. For this reason, household land became a space of private activities which later subverted the command economy. This is one reason that there is such an important distinction between residential and agricultural land in Vietnamese cities, a distinction that is so important to understanding recent land conflicts in the country.

The book's compelling narrative adds much-needed depth to our understanding of the urbanization process in Hanoi. While urbanization may have increased in intensity over the last several decades, Labbé traces its roots further back in time. The peri-urban impulses of the colonial period and the way that collectivization heightened the importance of residential land, all contributed to the way that peri-urbanization proceeded during and after market

reforms. For example, in the early reform era, when the state became increasingly unable to feed its citizens, the fact that it allowed people to use their residential land for private purposes was “a deliberate strategy on the part of a central state that was on the verge of a major crisis of legitimacy” (p. 70). Later on, when the land fever of the 1990s intensified real estate speculation, local peoples were already well along in the process of commodifying their land and using it for non-agricultural pursuits. In showing this, the book makes a powerful and important claim that challenges standard narratives in Vietnam studies, which often attribute too much to the effects of the official renovation policies known as *Đổi Mới*.

Using empirical evidence from Hòa Mục, the book also shows that state planners, so often the easy scapegoat, are not all-powerful but “operate in uneasy, unstable interrelationships with other actors and sources of societal power” (pp. 15–16). Linking history with contemporary land speculation, protests and peri-urban sprawl, this book offers a valuable contribution to the study of Hanoi, of urban Vietnam and of peri-urban development in Asia more generally.

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It's a Living: Work and Life in Vietnam Today. Edited by Gerard Sasges. Singapore: NUS Press, 2013. xviii+313 pp.

It's a Living contains a selection of sixty-seven out of 150 interviews conducted over 2010–13 as part of *Project Kiểm ăn*, which sought to “develop a better understanding of the reality of working in Vietnam” and “living in a period of incredible change” (pp. xiv–xv). Led by Gerard Sasges, the project involved collaboration between students in the University of California’s Education Abroad Programme in Vietnam and Hanoi University’s Faculties of Management and International Studies.