described this Vietnam as ‘an academic democracy’ (p. 205). Scott shows how Westernisation eroded freedom in Asia through the replacement of traditional systems of land use by a modern tenure system based on the cadastral survey and the priority of freehold title. Pre-modern Asian systems were very flexible, being readily adaptable to changing social needs and environmental conditions, with decisions being made by village communities on the basis of a detailed knowledge of their local surroundings. Modern tenure imposed uniform standards that were heedless of local conditions, whittling away usufruct rights and access to common lands.

Vera Mackie and Bill Jenner focus on the repressive nature of the states of Meiji Japan and mainland China respectively. Mackie shows that the early Meiji leadership tried to model the new state on the traditional patriarchal family, with political elites being figured as parents, and the common people as children. Liberals, socialists and feminists adopted Western ideas of freedom and moulded them into a persuasive critique of the new state and its ideology, arguing the inappropriateness of using a repressive private institution as a model for the state. This debate was part of the contestation of the definitions of state and society that gave Meiji era politics its significance and dynamism. Jenner argues that the Chinese state’s unparalleled power until the nineteenth century was a great achievement of sovereign freedom, whose cost was the poverty of civic and personal freedoms, which were only permitted in the realm of commerce. With his greater emphasis on modern Chinese history, and using a broader concept of freedom, David Kelly reveals a far more variegated texture, including libertarian trends in literature, Confucianism, Taoism and, of course, politics.

Whether in the United States, Vietnam or Hong Kong, the language of freedom was always ideologically loaded, a social and linguistic construction that was also a reconstruction with political significance and purposes. The authors in this volume collectively demonstrate that ‘in culture, cross-fertilisation is all’ (p. 8), which can be taken to mean that on questions of freedom it is just possible that we can learn something from Asian experiences. In short, ‘if Asia is the Antarctica of freedom it is thought to be, like the real Antarctica it turns out to be teeming with life under the forbidding coat of ice’ (p. 114). Exploring these depths is fascinating for those willing to take the plunge.

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Paul E. J. Hammer’s *Earl of Essex* is not just a vindication of Robert Devereux, the second earl of Essex, but a sweeping re-interpretation of the traditional evidence on late Elizabethan politics in light of the manuscript sources available. Hammer focuses his study on how the political polarisation of the Elizabethan court occurred, not how it operated once established. This is not the traditional view of Essex, but as Hammer points out in his introduction: ‘If his character were as fickle and shallow as many writers claimed, it seems hard to understand how Essex could have held such undoubted importance for his contemporaries’ (p. 5). Essex acts as a guide through the tangled labyrinth of court politics in the last decade of Elizabeth I’s reign. His conduct serves as a focus for evaluating the different views Englishmen had of the role their country was to play as the leading Protestant nation.

Hammer spends the first three chapters detailing how Essex’s environment and experiences in his early years at court formed his conception of himself, his proper role at the court and his special vision for England’s role in European politics. Essex’s self-identity was constructed by contemporary ideas about religion, lineage, and above all, honour. At court he felt destined to be the martial defender of Protestantism in politics as well as maintaining his role as the Queen’s favourite. Hammer emphasises that Essex took his self-appointed role seriously enough that he felt his only true opportunity for greatness was on the continent fighting Spain for the glory of England and his Queen, even when she disagreed with him.

The next six chapters illuminate how this unshakeable vision guided Essex’s decisions in all his roles at court. He consciously transformed himself from the Queen’s favourite into a statesman based on his ideas of honour and martial purpose. His extensive continental intelligence network provided him with the tools to operate as a politician of ‘Christendom’ rather than simply of England. His carefully constructed public image as England’s first and foremost Protestant soldier made his martial services indispensable to the crown. The character of Essex’s vast patronage network largely dictated and reinforced his priorities at court, even to the point of his own near financial ruin. Furthermore his deep personal involvement at court and with the ageing Queen taxed his physical and emotional resources almost to the breaking point. All this leads to the explanation of the eventual polarisation of the English court after 1597, characterised by the split between Essex’s faction and the Cecilians. Rather than a clash of personalities, it was a clash of political ideologies and state priorities. Hammer strives to show that polarisation was inevitable, not due to Essex’s failings but to his strengths. Essex represented a certain political agenda aimed at making England the martial spearhead on the continent against Spanish Counter-Reformation aggression. His methods were calculated, forward thinking and consistently aimed at implementing a distinct and cohesive plan.
While Hammer clearly does not write for those uninitiated in Elizabethan politics, his book gives an interpretation of the court political scene which takes into account the values and ideologies of political players as well as the personal practicalities and limitations imposed on their power. Hammer aims at a wider audience than the political court historian and hits his mark.

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The opposing metaphors in the title and subtitle of this book point to its central message. The instability of notions of ‘foundation’ in the histories of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand; the ‘unsettlement caused by settlement;’ and the uncertainty of national identity are the themes which recur through the twelve essays in this collection, essays which are otherwise quite diverse. The metaphor is reiterated by Greg Dening who, in the poetic ‘prologue’ which introduces the book, writes ‘When the sands of time run freely, when even the firmest looking surface turns to water, foundational histories need to float – bound together’ (p. xi). The editors of Quicksands have taken this on, collecting works from scholars in a variety of disciplines, works which display multiple approaches to the broad topic and which suggest the fluidity of it, and binding them together in the same volume. It is an endeavour which is on the whole successful.

The book is divided into four parts. The first of these, Memories of Pasts to Come, is the most impressive. It opens with Deborah Bird Rose’s ‘Hardtimes: An Australian Study’. Rose takes as her starting point a hunting trip she experienced with Aborigines on the Victoria River, and from there ranges through ideas about the different temporal and spatial concepts employed by Aborigines and white colonisers; the nature of ‘frontier’ as experienced by both groups; the violence of conquest; and the incidents of co-existence, in such a way that collapses the distinctions between the past and the ‘now’. Stephen Turner’s piece, ‘Settlement as Forgetting’, suffers from being cut down from a longer work – there are too many strands within it that do not get adequately explored – but it, too, emphasises how the past is part of the present, living on with strong political implications. These concerns are also evident in Ross Gibson’s essay on colonial narratives of North Queensland, and Paul Carter’s study of the establishment of the Museum of Sydney on the site of the first Government house.