

and courts, and it inspires exciting empirical questions about these issues and more.

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Blood, Dreams and Gold: The Changing Face of Burma. By Richard Cockett. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. xvii+263 pp.

Blood, Dreams and Gold sets out the historical, political and cultural foundations of some of the problems that confronted Myanmar during the democratic reform process of 2011–15. The book is organized thematically. Chapter 1 traces a number of the distinctive physical and demographic features of the three cities, Yangon (formerly Rangoon), Mawlamyine (Moulmein) and Sittwe (Akyab), back to colonial immigration policies, which resulted in an influx of — mostly Indian and Chinese — foreign residents. Chapter 2 focuses on the growing feeling of marginalization among members of the majority Bamar population as a result of these colonial policies. This feeling provided the basis both for the rise of the Bamar nationalist movement and for the deteriorating and disastrous inter-ethnic relations of the late colonial period and the Second World War. Independent Burma's military regime took hostile measures against the descendants of immigrants on a large scale in the 1960s. It nationalized property and businesses owned by foreign immigrants, particularly Chinese and Indians, and adopted a variety of official discriminatory policies aimed at them.

Chapter 3, the longest in the book, takes up two themes. It first explores the historical foundations and deadly consequences of the hostile and discriminatory actions against minority ethnic groups and Muslims — particularly Rohingyas of northern Rakhine state — on the part of the Myanmar military. It also focuses on the methods

used by the military, in relation both to the general population and to anti-government activists, to strengthen the economic and political foundations of its rule ever since it took power in 1962.

Chapters 4 and 5 shed light on the grievances of minority ethnic nationalities, with a particular focus on Kachin, Karen and Shan. The author discusses the autonomy enjoyed by Kachin and Shan in the pre-colonial period; the British divide-and-rule policy towards Burma's diverse populations; and the Christian missionary work, particularly among Kachin and Karen, that helped create unique identities among ethnic minority groups and fostered a sense of nationalism — of unity and common bonds — that differentiated them from the Bamar majority during the colonial period. Ethnic minorities ultimately resorted to armed resistance in their quest for greater autonomy from the Bamar-dominated government in the post-independence era. Cockett shows minority peoples suffered not only during the protracted civil war that resulted but also in the context of official policies that destroyed and undermined their cultures and of the extraction of natural resources in the areas occupied by minority populations. The pattern of this exploitation meant that it benefited the Bamar ruling elite and their cronies. Chapter 5 also focuses on the scourge of illegal drugs and on the severe impact of the drug trade on the lives and aspirations of members of all of the ethnic groups living along Burma's eastern border.

In chapters 6 to 9, the author explores the pressures on the country's military rulers for reform after the major crackdown on nationwide anti-government protests in 1988. Cockett explains the generals' decision to initiate far-reaching reform by examining the parlous state of the Myanmar economy, the large-scale political repression, and the role played by opposition movements and the "third force". This latter comprised individuals "who explored an alternative to the unrelenting oppression of the military on the one hand, and the stubbornness of the NLD on the other" (p. 199). He then focuses on the challenges that Myanmar faced during the transition to democracy between 2011 and 2015, a period characterized by a relatively open and vibrant political environment and a shift in

Myanmar's geopolitical strategy. In chapter 10, he shows how the process of democratization and modernization is at risk of being derailed by eruptions of ethnic and religious violence, "the ghosts of Burma's past" (p. 231).

The fundamental aim of Cockett's work is to "give an accessible account of modern Burma in a single volume, blending interviews and reporting with historical and political analysis" (p. xii). The author succeeds in achieving this goal by making the book interesting, lively and accessible to general readers through the use of jargon-free language, and by placing Myanmar in its regional and comparative context through vivid descriptions of cities, buildings, places, streets, commercial centres, and artistic and cultural practices. He has utilized a wide variety of research methods, ranging from an impressive list of interviews and the presentation of brief biographies of various actors to personal observations, content analysis of school textbooks, and secondary sources. Readers travel along with the author to catch a glimpse of the "ghost town of Hpa-an" (p. 137), "lazy Moulmein" (p. 28), "captive Myitkyina" (p. 110), and impoverished Chin State. Cockett collected these rich and colourful vignettes while serving as Southeast Asia correspondent for *The Economist* between 2010 and 2014. The book is also unique in its interdisciplinary approach to the issues facing Myanmar through the intersection of politics, history, architecture, the arts, sociology and culture.

Cockett often places his discussions of particular subjects in comparative and regional perspective so as to offer a better understanding of Myanmar's situation. He compares Rangoon and other thriving regional centres during the colonial period. He examines the Myanmar government's policies towards ethnic and religious minority groups and the descendants of foreign immigrants, on the one hand, and those espoused by other former British colonies, such as Uganda, Malaysia, and Singapore, on the other. The author also sheds light on the relatively peaceful coexistence in Myanmar, even today, between Jews and Muslims and between the minority Shia and the majority Sunni Muslim communities (pp. 58–63). He considers the many geopolitical challenges confronted by Myanmar

in comparison with those of North Korea — which, he notes, has fewer borders.

Despite its many positive features, because the book is intended for a general audience it makes some broad generalizations in relation to complex issues. For instance, while the author captures the diversity among Karen nicely, he fails to depict intra-ethnic tensions among Kachin or the hostility between Shan and other ethnic groups in Shan State. These tensions and this hostility have important implications for national reconciliation. Cockett focuses on only a handful of minority ethnic groups. He also neglects some important episodes, such as the ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Organization and the government that lasted for almost seventeen years between 1994 and 2011. Statements such as, “as elsewhere, the Shan were no longer allowed to use their own language in schools and in official business” (p. 144) are incorrect. Others, such as, “the 1990 vote was not a general election in the normal sense of the term; it was for a parliament to draft a new constitution, so the NLD was not denied an explicit mandate to govern the country” (p. 179), are too controversial to be presented as straightforward fact or reduced to a simple assertion unsupported by references.

The book’s thematic organization will make it potentially confusing for general readers. That organization means that it presents many events out of chronological order, especially in the second part of the book. For instance, chapter 6 opens with an account of events in mid-October 2012, while chapter 7 begins in 1988. The lengths of individual chapters are uneven, ranging from forty-four pages in chapter 3 to fifteen pages in chapter 6.

In spite of the overly broad generalizations and inconsistencies noted here, the book is recommended for readers seeking an accessible and informative account — with a multidisciplinary perspective — of some of the challenges confronting the Myanmar government in 2017.

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