

Book Reviews

DOI: 10.1355/sj38-1d

Safe Migration and the Politics of Brokered Safety in Southeast Asia. By Sverre Molland. New York: Routledge, 2021. viii+214 pp.

Safe migration has become the new buzzword among both government and non-governmental organizations concerned with cross-border labour migration, including in Southeast Asia. Sverre Molland's monograph is the first book-length, critical academic treatment of the subject for the Southeast Asian region. He defines safe migration as "migrant assistance that comprises pre-emptive and protective measures to enhance labour migrants' work conditions and well-being—which has become an emergent aid modality in the Mekong region and elsewhere" (p. 3). The book undoubtedly provides much-needed critical insights into the emergence of safe migration as discourse, policy and practice. Building on his previous book titled *The Perfect Business: Anti-trafficking and the Sex Trade along the Mekong* (2012), which critiques the anti-trafficking infrastructures in Southeast Asia, Molland's new book discerns a marked shift in the responses to international labour migration in Southeast Asia from concerns with anti-trafficking to advocacy for safe migration.

Drawing on a wide range of interviews with key stakeholders from both the government and non-government sectors, Molland convincingly supports his central contention in the book that the shift to safe migration responses by institutions governing population mobility in the region is a direct consequence of growing cynicism towards the perceived failure of anti-trafficking responses. For Molland's interlocutors, safe migration represents a way of moving forward from the protectionist aims of anti-trafficking, through a focus on facilitating and guiding mobility projects at each stage of the migrants' journey. As Molland argues through well-integrated evidence from anti-trafficking/aid/migration stakeholders in the

region, the shift from anti-trafficking to safe migration can therefore be contextualized within a wider discursive shift advancing the overwhelming disillusionment with anti-trafficking responses.

The book is divided into three parts, each contributing a distinct element to Molland's overall argument. Part 1, "Situating Safety in Migration", explains the emergence of safe migration within mainland Southeast Asia as an outcome of the failure of anti-trafficking and the comparative attractiveness of safe migration as an alternative mode of migration governance. Part 2, "Modalities of Intervention", digs into the scale of projects and programmes to manage migration, detailing three key aspects of safe migration interventions in the region: pre-departure practices, biometric governance through documentation, and safety nets *in situ* at the migrant destination. Part 3 examines other factors involved in safe migration beyond state and non-state actors charged with implementing safe migration policy, including humanitarian organizations, brokers and information networks, and other forms of informal assistance.

Arguably, part 2 of the book provides the most novel contribution to critical scholarship on the complex and interrelated subjects of human trafficking and labour migration, as it foregrounds the key role of technology as an integral modality of migration governance and management. Here, Molland links his conceptual framework—which he previously discusses in the introduction—with empirical data on the practices of governance.

Besides academics, Molland's book is highly accessible to policymakers, those working in non-governmental organizations and students. The book does seem very similar to his first monograph on anti-human trafficking in terms of methodology, style and argument so those familiar with his work will see little that is new here. In addition, one may be disappointed if one is seeking comprehensive region-wide coverage of the politics and limits of safe migration. As with Molland's first book, this book, too, limits itself geographically to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The remainder of Southeast Asia is either entirely missing from the analysis or treated in a cursory manner. In particular, I wonder what a similar study of 'maritime

Southeast Asia' would yield in terms of understanding the limits and benefits of safe migration vis-à-vis Molland's Thai-Laos-Cambodia study.

Methodologically, Molland's volume leaves me in two minds. It is refreshing (and rare) to see an ethnographic and highly detailed study of safe migration that encompasses state and non-state institutions and their practices. Nonetheless, the majority of Molland's analyses and discussion in the book centre on quotes from interviews and vignettes from observations made during visits to various safe migration and migrant rights organizations. The text would have been ethnographically richer and offered more insights if it could delve into more extensive deep descriptions of the field and its practices.

Overall, the key arguments of Molland's book are well taken: that safe migration programmes can actually lead to unsafe migration, and that it is important to examine—theoretically and empirically—the role of technology and biopolitics in any critical discussion of brokered mobility, whether in Southeast Asia or beyond.

Sallie Yea

Tracey Banivanua Mar Fellow, La Trobe University, Wodonga, Victoria, Australia 3086; email: S.Yea@latrobe.edu.au.

DOI: 10.1355/sj38-1e

The City and the Wilderness: Indo-Persian Encounters in Southeast Asia. By Arash Khazeni. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020. xviii+244 pp.

This book explores the Indian Ocean World through the eyes of Persian, Mughal and British travellers during the transition from Mughal rule to British colonial rule. Based largely on neglected Persian language sources, it illuminates the eighteenth-century borderland sociopolitics of South and Southeast Asia, particularly with regards to what is now Myanmar, Bangladesh and South India. Persian was a key language of diplomacy and commerce