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*Border Humanitarians: Gendered Order and Insecurity on the Thai-Burmese Frontier.* By Adam Saltsman. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2022. xiii+288 pp.

Roughly halfway between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, some ten minutes by bicycle from the Myanmar border, lies the town of Mae Sot. For decades, Mae Sot has been a critical node in cross-border trade and the principal entry point for Myanmar migrants/refugees arriving in Thailand. These are individuals seeking not just wages but also protection from violence and persecution back home. In 2015, the Thai government designated the area around Mae Sot a special economic zone, thereby granting regulatory exclusions to several hundred (mostly garment) factories located there. Being in the vicinity of three long-standing refugee camps, the town is also a hub for international (largely Euro-American) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Burmese community-based organizations serving the district's migrant/refugee population.

It was at this site that Adam Saltsman conducted several years of field research for this book, which focuses on the everyday production of social order among Mae Sot's migrant/refugee population. As a staff member of a "Northern" (his term) humanitarian organization, Saltsman held a unique position for researching the intersections of NGO interventions and migrant tactics for resolving conflicts and responding to interpersonal violence in Mae Sot's migrant/refugee community. It is, moreover, due to Saltsman's institutional entry point that the book is able to shed new light on the border's social dynamics. In addition, it is from this institutional positioning that Saltsman was able to advance "a critique of the subtle politics of humanitarian reason" (p. 198).

To be sure, Mae Sot has seen a steady stream of Thai and foreign academics—I confess, in full disclosure, to being one of them—who have sought to understand the site's unique conjuncture of large-scale migration, capital investment, cross-border trade and coercive policing, with recurring armed conflict across the border and mass

displacement from there. Yet most existing studies have tried to grasp the social order of the border by focusing on the interplay between state regulation, capital investment and migrant wage labour. Saltsman, too, takes these forces into account. But his unique contribution is in showing how migrants' everyday conflict-resolution practices, underpinned by gendered norms, serve to reproduce the border's *gendered* social order.

The border is central to the story Saltsman tells. Following the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Thai government facilitated the relocation of industrial production—of garment factories, mostly—from Bangkok to less-regulated border districts like Mae Sot. Meanwhile, armed conflict and dispossession in Myanmar have fuelled a continuous cross-border movement of people into Thailand seeking protection and wages. Crossing the border without documentation has so far been relatively easy. Far more difficult is proceeding undocumented to higher paying regions elsewhere in the country. The result is that several hundred thousand mostly undocumented migrants/refugees now live in factory dormitories, rural labour camps, urban squatter settlements and lower-cost rental units dispersed across Mae Sot and its neighbouring districts. The town is characterized by “a variegated pattern of visible homes and invisible slums”, writes Saltsman (p. 8). Neighbourhoods that house mostly undocumented migrants are “alien and marginal” to Mae Sot's Thai population (p. 4). Yet these settlements serve as low-cost labour reserves that “supply the adjacent Thai households with domestic workers and the factories with wage labourers” (p. 2).

It is in these migrant/refugee spaces that humanitarian organizations have sought to intervene. A major target of their interventions has been gender-based violence. Yet Northern NGOs, observes Saltsman, have largely adopted a “medicalized lens” to make sense of such violence—a focus that “direct[s] attention away from structural forms of violence that might require systematic political solutions” (p. 131). It is a humanitarian “anti-politics”, he notes (p. 6). Consider that the migrants Saltsman and his co-researchers interviewed understood their experiences of violence as being shaped by issues such as low

pay, police extortion and harassment, and the enduring threat of deportation (pp. 85–92). Yet a humanitarian logic led his co-workers to privilege “gender transformative approaches” that were “primarily focused on behavioural change” (p. 131).

Migrants, too, emphasized behavioural change—this despite recognizing that their precarious living and working conditions underpinned their experiences with violence. By offering gendered behavioural prescriptions to avoid or reduce violence—be a dutiful wife, for example—migrants participated in reproducing the gendered social order that shapes their lives. The individuals with whom Saltsman spoke “often seem to frame violence between partners, or how to prevent that violence, in a way that relies on some idea of fixed gender roles” (p. 99). Consequently, “migrants’ discourse[s] on violence ... reinforce the need for gendered orders” (p. 102).

In sum, *Border Humanitarians* goes beyond existing structuralist accounts to illuminate the everyday reproduction of the border’s social order and the significant role of humanitarian actors and migrants themselves in reproducing that order in deeply gendered ways. In so arguing, Saltsman makes an important contribution.

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*In Search of Justice in Thailand’s Deep South: Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist Women’s Narratives*. Edited by John Clifford Holt. Compiled by Soraya Jamjuree and translated by Shintaro Hara. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022. lii+154 pp.

This book utilizes personal narratives to delve into the power of discourse within the armed conflict still simmering in Thailand’s southern provinces. It focuses on the experiences of ordinary individuals, particularly Malay Muslim women, who face state intimidation and militant insurgency. These narratives reveal how the ethno-political conflict has compelled people to rely on their ethno-