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Rights Refused: Grassroots Activism and State Violence in Myanmar. By Elliott Prasse-Freeman. Stanford University Press, 2023. xxix+329 pp.

Rights Refused aims to make sense of political actors in Myanmar who oscillate between absence and presence. It also illuminates the struggles of the populace in refusing the state's yoke and drawing the state into revealing its repressive intent, while attempting to evade its harsh reprisals. To demonstrate these tactics, the book brings Myanmar's grassroots activism and experiences of rights-stripped individuals to life, one air-filled cake package at a time.

Prasse-Freeman guides the reader through his arguments in three sections. Section I elaborates on the nature of governance of the Myanmar state as blunt biopolitics. Offering a departure from the conventional understanding of the state as an actor that aspires to make its subjects legible, Prasse-Freeman argues that the Myanmar state neither knows well the populace that it governs, nor does it wish to protect them. At the same time, it intermittently unleashes violence to kill those who must be "made to die" and distinguish them from those who were "let to die" owing to neglect by the disinterested state (p. 70).

Section II then examines the contentious politics repertoire and tactics of activists operating beneath blunt biopolitics. The chapters of this section zone in on activism in Myanmar, highlighting the methods the population employs to challenge the state, which remains purposefully illegible. Cursing ceremonies provoke the state to react, prompting it to suppress the disgruntled populace, thereby admitting self-awareness of its behaviour to the audience. Farmers till their lands earmarked for large-scale development in purposeful ignorance of the state's wish to shake off those indigenous to the land. Activists act as catalysts of action to empower protesters, but at the same time moderate their behaviour, walking a tightrope between irrelevance and acute annoyance to a state that is ready to unleash violence.

Section III brings the reader to a discussion of how the concept of rights is operationalized in Myanmar. Prasse-Freeman argues that how rights are conceptualized on the ground in Myanmar resembles more of a commodity that can be stripped away rather than a universally guaranteed feature of life. He substantiates this reality by showing how those from the Rohingya community, subjects of alienating ethnic politics and mass violence, navigate the attainment of their rights as members of Myanmar society. Prasse-Freeman also makes his case by illuminating how the rights of the Rohingya communities are denied as they are pushed out of Myanmar and “made to die” (p. 70) by the state and society.

The highlight of the book is the rich empirical data generated through extensive fieldwork that spans the period of the quasi-civilian regime to the 2021 military coup. Prasse-Freeman’s insights are grounded in careful reflection on his identity in the research site and its implications, his observations through a critical eye, and the contributions of his knowledge co-producers. Through its narrative, the book brings to life in vivid detail the scenes of resistance, the actors behind refusal, and the reactions of those who seek to clamp down on these resistances and refusals. It also illuminates the deeper meanings and hidden scripts in cartoons and illustrative online displays that are inaccessible to outsiders. It is impressive that much of this is analysed from the perspectives of research participants, such as their discussion of using their bodies as vehicles of power (pp. 185–87).

At the same time, the book could benefit from easing readers more smoothly into its theory and offering greater clarity in identifying connections between theory and data. For example, I struggle to grasp the meaning of “refusers articulate absolute repudiations even as they maneuver because of them in the penumbra that those repudiations create” (p. 10). I also found the concept of blunt biopolitics to be fuzzy in sections II and III despite its relevance in those sections. For instance, the local conception of rights as something that can be taken away or hoarded is generated by blunt biopolitics and refusal between the governing and the governed (p. 262). Yet the discussion of rights and the elaboration of the experiences of the Rohingyas in

section III do not seem to go far enough to spell out these linkages fully. While blunt biopolitics can be overlooked without losing sight of the main argument of the book (p. 38), the concept could have benefited from greater elaboration given its frequent mentions.

Overall, *Rights Refused* is an important book that illuminates state-society dynamics in Myanmar in rich empirical detail. The book's discussion of blunt biopolitics and its deep dive into the concept of refusal make a significant contribution to the study of the state and contentious politics. It will be essential to readers who wish to better understand the workings of state and society, and those who aim to alter those dynamics, in Myanmar.

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The Drama of Dictatorship: Martial Law and the Communist Parties of the Philippines. By Joseph Scalice. Cornell University Press, 2023. xvi+366 pp.

The Drama of Dictatorship weaves together an original account of the events leading to the imposition of dictatorial rule by Ferdinand Marcos Sr. on 23 September 1972 and a scathing critique of the role of the Philippine communist movement in this tragedy. Reworking parts of his dissertation (2017) into a five-part narrative modelled after the drama genre, Scalice offers not only an empirically rich exploration of historical events but also one that is incisive and gripping. The first act, "A Storm on the Horizon", introduces the leading actors from elite factions, including the dictator Marcos and oppositionist Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., as well as the older Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, Philippine Communist Party) and its breakaway group, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The chapter covers the impacts of the Cold War and the Sino-Soviet split in shaping the unrest that laid the ground for