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Livres / Books

Tony Waters, Ashley South, Chayan Vaddhanaphuti & Luke Corbin, *Moving around Myanmar. Migration in, from, and back to Burma*, Chiang Mai, RCSD, 2021, 288 p.

By Nicolas Salem-Gervais *

Moving around Myanmar, Migration in, from and back to Burma is an edited volume published in the wake of the 3rd *International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies*, co-organized by Chiang Mai University in 2021. This conference was held (partly online) in particularly disturbed times: not only in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also only a month after the military coup of February 2021 in Myanmar.

The nine chapters of this volume come from a selection of contributions dealing with various aspects of migration in relation to Myanmar, and the authors of height of them are from Myanmar or its borderlands, most of them at least partly trained in the universities of Mandalay and Yangon, with several of them holding positions there. In this way, the volume is a strong testimony of the deep changes which occurred in Myanmar and its universities since 2011, and until the 2021 events. The four editors, Tony Waters, Ashley South, Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Luke Corbin, are well-known and dedicated specialists of Myanmar and Thailand, with publications on a wide range of topics and an expertise

on transnational issues related to these countries.

The introduction, by Waters and South, put the nine contributions in perspective: firstly, in terms of the deeply disrupted context for these nine researchers and their chapters, largely based on material collected before and during the pandemic (and before the coup), and secondly by providing some background on the dynamics and stakes underpinning the central theme of this volume. Myanmar is indeed a country where millions have been migrating over the past decades. These migrations are both international (an estimated 4.25 million migrants¹—nearly 1/10th of the labor force according to certain sources²—live abroad, including close to a million refugees, in countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand or Malaysia), but also domestic (with a dynamic of complex and intensifying migrations inside the country during the last decades [Kyaing Kyaing Thet 2014; Forbes 2019; Boutry 2020]). The wide range of push and pull factors underpinning these movements include a multitude of armed conflicts and human rights abuses, land confiscation, multiple hardship for families relying on subsistence agriculture, as well as job prospects for cheap workforce (both abroad and in factories located in the suburbs of the main cities). All this in the more general context of shifting demographics over the last few decades, and a clear trend towards industrialization after 2011.

The volume is easily readable and well-edited, with a presentation of the chapters by the editors as well as abstracts by their authors, biographies, an index, references at the end of each chapter, color pictures and figures, and the very welcome inclusion of Burmese and Thai scripts in the body text. The publisher (RCSD) should also be commended, not only for making their publications freely downloadable, but also for the short time between the conference that led to this volume (March 2021) and its publication (October 2021), a drastic shortening of the usual lengthy process of publication for edited volumes, which is often problematic for research dealing with contemporary and rapidly evolving issues.

Most of the authors have an Anthropology background and their contributions cover a wide range of (unsurprisingly often painful) situations: Repatriation to Myanmar from the refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border; Migrant workers in Bangkok's urban enclaves; Female migrant workers to and from tea-cultivating Palaung community in Shan State; International trafficking of women from Myanmar; Rural-to-urban migrations in Magway Region; Migrations from northern Shan State to Mandalay; Impacts of migrations on socio-economic life in a village near Myingyan; Resistance of Mandalay slum-dwellers against eviction and relocation; and finally Challenges for migrant workers returning in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the first chapter, dealing with repatriation to Myanmar of refugees from the Thai-Myanmar border camps in the post-2011 shifting political context, Aryuwat Raruen depicts the inherently liminal condition and lack of options of the refugees. He describes the difficult choices attached to repatriation, and how some of the returnees found that they lack skills suited for their new living conditions. Of particular interest to this reviewer is the short discussion, also highlighted by the editors, of the formal education provided in the camps which is

unrecognized by the Thailand and Myanmar governments, for reasons that include language-in-education policies and the prioritization of Karen identity in schooling, although this content has been evolving over the years, notably in order to maintain good relationship with several international organizations.³

Closely studied by François Robinne in his chapter, Bangkok's urban enclaves populated by migrant workers started to appear at the turn of 2000's, following agreements between ASEAN countries, prompting exponential migratory flows. Focusing on migrants from Myanmar (including Burmans, Karens, Mons, Pa-O, Chin and Kachin), Robinne tries to conceptualize and characterize these ephemeral and disposable spaces made of rows of corrugated iron barracks, in the heart of the city, and interacting with shifting constructions sites. Following decades of research dealing with ethnicity inside Myanmar, he meticulously describes the forms of sociability and solidarity of the inhabitants of these enclaves—paradoxically described as “territories of desocialization”—seamlessly illustrating his rigorous analytical framework by anecdotal life trajectories, allowing the reader to better understand the dynamics of the precarious situations faced by his interviewees.⁴

Focusing on a Palaung village of Kyaukme Township, Shan State, Lei Shwe Sin and Sandar Aung's contribution deals with two types of female migrations: seasonal labor migrations towards the village, often from central Myanmar, when tea leaves sprouts are picked in March and April, on the one hand, and long term (if not permanent) migrations of Palaung women, towards higher incomes in urban centers, often in China, on the other. The necessity of year-round income to support their family, aspirations towards financial independence and modernity, shortage of workforce at peak season, resurgence of conflict since 2015 and the various economic and cultural

implications of these long-term migrations, for the village and for the migrants themselves, are all part of this extremely interesting case study, which is also the central topic of another RCSD volume by the same authors (Lei Shwe Sin Myint & Sandar Aung 2021).

Geared towards an assessment of the work of the pre-coup government and recommendations for the future, Nita's chapter deals with the trafficking of Myanmar women towards China (and to a lesser extent, Thailand), often for forced marriages, forced labor or sexual exploitation. Being a lawyer and Lecturer in the Department of Law of Dawei University, her approach largely deals with the legal framework, but she also presents useful statistics, dealing with types of trafficking, their provenance and destination, as well as case studies of two young women sold as wives in China. She argues that recent efforts to tackle this tragic issue were insufficient, notably in terms of prevention, cooperation and post-harm assistance to trafficked victims.

In her chapter dealing with Kyaw town (Gangaw township, Magway Region), a region populated by Yaw people (a group speaking a dialectal form of Burmese), Nyunt Nyunt Win describes the evolutions which started in the 1990s, as the military government identified the place for resource extraction projects, industrial development, as well as large-scale infrastructure development (as a hub between central Myanmar and the Indian border, through Chin State). Through an ethnographic approach (data collected in 2007-2012 and 2017), she thoroughly describes the evolving strategies of the inhabitants of the region, their hybrid rural and urban livelihood, and the vulnerability of wage laborers, in a context of development, increased pressure on cultural land and increased mobility.

Sai Phyo Zin Aung analyses the determinants of a specific internal migration through in-depth interviews conducted in 2020 with 20 migrants from six townships of Northern Shan State living in Mahaungmyay

township in Mandalay. The main push factors he describes seem all too familiar: multiple conflicts involving the Myanmar army and several EAOs, which include a wide range of human rights abuses, in addition to low income and a lack of opportunities in terms of education and career. The contrast with Mandalay, perceived as comparatively much safer and well-equipped with higher education institutions, explains the progressive building of social networks and family ties between these two spaces, facilitating further migrations.

In a similar approach with some of the other contributors, Sandy Moe, focusing on a village of Myingyan Township, aims at better understanding the push and pull factors of migration, as well as the profile of the migrants in terms of age and gender. In the context of declining agricultural livelihood, and with governmental support for those wishing to work elsewhere, the village became increasingly dependent on remittances, while losing its working-age population. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as a comparative approach with other migration situations across the world, Sandy Moe describes the multiple, both positive and negative, impacts of migration on socio-economic life, for the migrants and those remaining in the village.

Stephen Zau Zin Myat's chapter deals with a slightly different thematic: the resistance to relocation of Theh Seik slum dwellers in Mandalay. These slum dwellers are largely composed of migrants from various regions in Upper Myanmar arrived between the 1970s and early 1990s to work as sand dredgers on the bank of the Ayeyarwady river. Although the municipality has been trying to evict and relocate them since the 1970s, most slum dwellers can't afford the low-cost housing offered to them and come back to Theh Seik, where they can make a living, interacting with their "formal" neighbours.

Finally, Thin Thin Aye's chapter deals with migrant workers forced to return home during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on Lashio region and aiming at informing policymakers for present and future crisis. Although much less numerous than in Thailand, tens of thousands of migrants work in factories, workshops, restaurants, and other businesses in China, often illegally despite the numerous dangers these situations entail. These migrants are thus extremely vulnerable, notably in times of crisis. In conclusion of her chapter, based on a survey conducted in August 2020, Thin Thin Aye calls for a greater cooperation between the governments and international organizations to address the multiple challenges related to migrant workers.

Overall, *Moving Around Myanmar* is a very welcome addition to the scholarship on migration in relation with Myanmar.⁵ Through nine different perspectives, the volume highlights the realities, often difficult and at times tragic, of migrations away from conflict, poverty, and lack of perspectives, towards what may or may not be genuine opportunities to financially support one's relatives through remittances and/or to live a better life. Sadly, in addition to the impact of the pandemic on the more vulnerable populations, the 2021 coup is having multiple and disastrous consequences, including resurgence of conflict, abrupt economic recession and the loss of millions of jobs (including through the closure of a large number of Myanmar-based factories).⁶ Remittances, mostly through informal channels, were already a tremendously significant chunk of Myanmar's GDP before the coup—possibly as high as 13%—and families now find themselves even more reliant on them (Artistingstoll 2022). As migrants are under an increasing pressure to support their relatives and candidates for departure multiply, massive migrations, including the ones under the most perilous and precarious conditions, are more than

likely to be an enduring reality for Myanmar and its citizen.

Notes

1. Khin Thazin & Campbell (2022).
2. URL: www.iom.int, URL: www.ilo.org.
3. On related language-in-education policy issues, see South & Lall (2016), Jolliffe & Speers Mears (2016) Salem-Gervais (2018) and Salem-Gervais & Raynaud (2020).
4. See also Robinne (2021, in French) for a more detailed account on the same topic.
5. Other useful references include Griffiths and Ito (2016), Habib, Jubb, Ahmad, Rahman, & Pallard (2018), and Boutry (2020).
6. See Khin Thazin & Campbell (2022).

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Stephen Campbell, *Along the Integral Margin. Uneven Development in a Myanmar Squatter Settlement*, 2022, Cornell University Press: x + 190p.

Par François Robinne *

« Contradictions », c'est le maître mot du premier chapitre entièrement consacré par Stephen Campbell au fossé entre le dis-

cours des élites et les revendications des classes populaires de Birmanie. Cette histoire « profonde », « A Deeper History of Myanmar's Political Transformation » par laquelle s'ouvre l'ouvrage, est une réflexion théorique sur les stratégies de la classe politique mises en place sans discontinuer depuis l'époque coloniale jusqu'à nos jours dans le seul but de capter à son profit les mouvements sociaux. Y sont opposés, d'un côté, les acteurs des mouvements de grève et, de l'autre, quelques grandes figures opportunistes ayant en commun de s'approprier les mouvements contestataires au profit de projets politiques élitistes. Parmi ceux-ci, le leader Thakin Po Hla Gyi: habituellement présenté comme le penseur des grèves de 1938 liées à l'exploitation de gisements pétroliers à l'intérieur du pays, il est dans les faits décrit « [comme] le produit de mouvements anticoloniaux ». Et S. Campbell d'enfoncer le clou en affirmant que l'intégration de héros anticoloniaux dans les mythes de fondation des gouvernements de l'époque post-coloniale « peuvent donc être interprétés comme des tentatives cyniques de s'assurer une légitimité populaire » (« *can thus be read as cynical attempts at securing popular legitimacy* », p. 19).

Un mode opératoire qui formate également, selon l'auteur, l'époque post-coloniale: aussi bien sous le régime libéral de U-Nu engagé dans une lutte fratricide contre le tout-puissant Parti communiste Birman d'alors, à travers notamment une réforme foncière profitant aux grands propriétaires terriens (p. 24-25), que du temps de la « Voie Birmane Vers le socialisme » mise en place par le dictateur Ne Win de 1962 à 1988 durant laquelle le pays se ferma au reste du monde, intensifia les conflits ethniques, et accéléra la paupérisation du pays et de ses habitants. Derrière le label « socialiste », l'un des modes opératoires consista, selon S. Campbell, en l'instrumentalisation de tribunaux industriels régionaux, les *Workers' Councils*, assujettis sous cette forme juridique au pouvoir central (p. 25). En