

but increasingly dystopian in the emerging industrial districts and slums that were part of the very same modernity. If the Backbay Reclamation scheme of the 1920s was the effort of a rapacious colonial state seeking to exploit land values, then the well-meaning efforts of Indian planners to create the satellite city of New Bombay in the 1960s were thwarted by the machinations of the city's distinctively indigenous variant of buccaneer, the Bombay Builder. The latter, in conjunction with corrupt politicians and figures from the underworld, have taken advantage of the demise of the city's textile industry to unlock the potential of urban land as real estate, selling a new dream of luxury housing. Prakash assesses some responses of those left out of such fantasies of property through a skillful reading of a Hindi comic strip featuring a masked vigilante avenger, appealing presumably to migrants from north India who increasingly make up the city's underclasses.

Accounts of the city's people and its lands are but two of the heretical histories that *Mumbai Fables* makes possible. Ultimately, the book's contribution lies in the way in which it shows how the city came to be constituted as an object for its people, while at the same time constituting those people. While a valuable and lasting contribution to the study of Mumbai, *Mumbai Fables* advances our appreciation of the lives of cities more generally.

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CAMBODIA'S CURSE: The Modern History of a Troubled Land. By **Joel Brinkley.** *New York: PublicAffairs, 2011. xix, 386 pp. (B&W photos.)* US\$27.99, cloth. ISBN 978-1-58648-787-4.

Joel Brinkley, a Pulitzer Prize-winning former *New York Times* correspondent now teaching at Stanford University, has taken a fresh look at Cambodia, the first of its kind for the general reader in a decade. But this is a disturbing book, both in its content and in its bleak portrayal of the current situation and rather hopeless outlook for the future. Brinkley's previous engagement with Cambodia was in 1979, when he reported on conditions in refugee camps in Thailand after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime. He returned in 2008 and spent two years travelling and engaging in a wide range of interviews: with current and former US ambassadors, government and opposition figures, international organizations, civil society advocates and ordinary Cambodians, among them the most marginalized rural and urban poor. He has evidently concluded that Cambodians fall into two classes: a passive, exploited underclass, denied adequate nutrition, education, health care, political freedom and property rights, and a privileged kleptocracy that subsists

on corruption and impunity, enriching family and friends through land grabs, human trafficking and the exploitation of natural resources. While much of his criticism of the current regime is certainly justified, Brinkley has somehow chosen to place Cambodia's "curse" in the questionable context of a historical submission to autocratic rule going back to the ancient Khmer Empire.

Several careless errors intrude on what is otherwise a well-researched work. For example, Brinkley groups Deputy Prime Minister Sok An with Cambodian People's Party President Chea Sim and Prime Minister Hun Sen in the ruling triumvirate portrayed on the CPP's ubiquitous billboards (the "third man" is, in fact, former Head of State Heng Samrin, now president of the National Assembly). The author also characterizes the intervention of the UN Transitional Authority (UNTAC) in 1991-93 as an "occupation" when it was not even much of an "authority." Most seriously, he has attributed the rise of the deadly Khmer Rouge regime in the early 1970s almost entirely to internal factors, putting aside the effects of a Vietnamese military occupation (and its initial support for the Khmer Rouge) and US cross-border bombing raids on Vietnamese sanctuaries that eventually killed tens of thousands of Cambodian civilians. He dismisses the conclusions of William Shawcross in 1979 (*Sideshow*) and ignores more recent research by Ben Kiernan and Taylor Owen demonstrating the influence of the US bombing on the success of the insurgency. Brinkley acknowledges David Chandler, the pre-eminent historian of Cambodia, as a valuable source, but one need only refer to some of Chandler's recent writings to find a far more persuasive analysis attributing the coup against Prince Sihanouk and the subsequent rise of the Khmer Rouge very largely to Cold War geopolitics.

Fortunately, Brinkley has not succumbed to prevailing myths, still embraced by conservative US politicians, about the origins of the July 1997 "bloody coup" that consolidated Hun Sen's power. The royalist FUNCINPEC party was admittedly the main perpetrator of that 48-hour civil conflict. That said, the royalist "First Prime Minister," Prince Norodom Ranariddh, did play into the hands of Hun Sen, who obviously controlled larger and more effective military forces. Nor does Brinkley waste much sympathy on the articulate current leader of the opposition, Sam Rainsy, an erstwhile royalist who broke with FUNCINPEC in 1995 and rapidly became the darling of influential US lawmakers and the liberal Western media.

Brinkley repeatedly cites research pointing to an alarming incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder among survivors of the Khmer Rouge, although it seems a stretch to attribute Cambodia's current ills to this phenomenon in any major way. He goes on to criticize the work of the courageous Documentary Centre in bringing Khmer Rouge victims to witness the long-delayed prosecution of its senior leaders, because it might exacerbate their PTSD. The Documentary Centre's core doctrine is that

“... a society cannot know itself if it does not have an accurate memory of its own history.”

As to the role of the international community in post-conflict Cambodia, Brinkley highlights the less-than-effective efforts of major donor countries and the UN to encourage effective anti-corruption measures. Western donors, in spite of generous annual pledges of aid, have been less than persuasive in recent years mainly because the biggest providers of development assistance are now China and South Korea, which have little interest in institutional reform. Measures of the kind heretofore championed by Australia, the UK and the US are thus less likely to be pursued with vigour. Brinkley justifiably criticizes numerous members of the international aid community in Cambodia for being less than interested in working themselves out of lucrative jobs. As more qualified Cambodians step up to replace foreign “technical advisers,” however, one expects that this phenomenon may be on the wane.

The most serious weakness of this book is that it barely acknowledges, and then only in its concluding paragraphs, the role of a growing, literate middle class in Cambodia that is deeply involved in a growing economy, albeit one in which wealth is unevenly distributed. There is no acknowledgment at all of the many expatriate Cambodians who have returned to invest in the country and create jobs. Cambodia has one of the most vibrant and effective networks of indigenous civil society organizations in Southeast Asia, a fairly feisty print media (although television and radio are almost entirely sympathetic to Hun Sen), and a political opposition that continues, naturally at some risk, to dog the government on a variety of issues, including corruption. The title of the book is a clear indication of where Brinkley is taking us on this harrowing journey, but to compare Cambodia, as the author does, to Haiti, and to characterize its people as facing “... a toxic mix of abuse unmatched anywhere in the world,” is somewhat wide of the mark.

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MODERN BUDDHIST CONJUNCTURES IN MYANMAR: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society. *By Juliane Schober.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011. xi, 207 pp. (B&W photos., map, illus.) US\$49.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-8248-3382-4.

This carefully researched book covers the complex and fascinating role of Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar's political history from the Toungoo dynasty (1531-1752) to the present. The author identifies certain key “conjunctures” when religion and politics have had an especially crucial relationship. She argues that an understanding of these features