

society nexus, it challenges us to incorporate greater complexity and nonlinearity into our understanding of how broader societal forces interact to deter or cascade crime, war, and peace. Ultimately, this book goes a long way to building an evidence base that can inform those who do value peacebuilding to do it better, and perhaps persuade those who are critical of the peacebuilding agenda to concede its potential. How the authors refine the cascade propositions over the following decade will be readily anticipated.

References

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The Politics of Love in Myanmar: LGBT Mobilization and Human Rights as a Way of Life. By Lynette Chua. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

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Human rights violations in Myanmar, formerly Burma, have been globally scrutinized, including imprisonment of state political opponents, systemic rape of ethnic minorities, unlawful capture and killing, and forced labor and relocation (253). With a history entrenched in violence and suppression, even speaking of human rights was unlawful until the political reformation of 2011 relaxed some social control (237). Additionally, religious beliefs paint lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people as immoral and eternally damned (Christianity) or embodying punishment for bad karma in past lives (seen in Burmese Buddhism) (280). Discrimination is upheld in legal institutions (e.g., the criminalization of same-sex sexual relations), by employers and educators, and cultural norms and behaviors such as frequent bullying and sexual assault (280). This social disgust has been internalized to produced self-hatred, fear, and shame; the LGBT human rights movement was tasked with

addressing and transforming these emotions to instill self-love and empowerment, social belonging, and legal reform to protect the Burmese LGBT community (280, 393).

These factors led Chua to ask, how do LGBT activists in the movement understand, situate, and practice human rights and with what implications? To answer these, she conducted a qualitative research study of the LGBT movement among migrants and those exiled in Thailand from the mid-2000s through the early years of Myanmar's political transition. Field research was completed between 2012 and 2017 with observations of workshops and other events, interviews with activists and organizers, and examination of posters, pamphlets, CDs, and other "totems" or symbols of the collective group and movement (698, citing Turner and Stets [2005] in referencing Durkheim [1965]). Chua also allowed interviewees to infuse discourse with personal understandings, ambitions, and claims, making possible both the empirical study of queer Burmese perceptions of human rights and comparisons between local, national, and international definitions and meanings of LGBT parlance (734).

As this book details, LGBT human rights practices as a way of life begins with self-transformation of the individual; perceptions shift from believing they deserve violence to love and acceptance of oneself as a human being worthy of the same rights afforded to dominant groups (302). When undertaken by a collective, a new emotion culture is created, comprised of new ways of feeling and forming connections with other queer Burmese. Bonds between individuals and the collective are thus strengthened and can be leveraged to lobby for sociolegal and other political changes (302). Importantly, social ties trigger three types of emotions: loyalties, suffering, and recruitment (588). These are critical to the movement's success. Drawing upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, queer Burmese identified three essential meanings of human rights: dignity, social belonging, and the responsibility of the rights bearer to act and empower others (734). Human rights are thereby portrayed as providing collective good through collectively achieved practices (746).

Three sets of related and repeating processes provide the theoretical backbone for Chua's research. Formation processes create a collective to help establish a movement representing LGBT rights, allowed for navigation around risks surrounding the political transformation of Myanmar and paved the way for grievance transformation and community building (324). Grievance transformation processes describe the redefining process of queer Burmese's sense of self and suffering by making human rights applicable to them, shifting their perceptions of discrimination as violations of human rights, and served as a motivator for joining the movement albeit at great personal risk (324). Community

building processes establish new language and forms of communication to develop a newfound collective of LGBT activists and a united political force. Through these methods, new claims (human rights for LGBT citizens) and claimant (LGBT community) were born (393) and created unprecedented space for conversation and reform in the sociopolitical sphere through collective identity and power. Yet, the LGBT movement contains and counters limiting aspects or “faults and fault lines” that prevent its overall success (970). For example, more powerful and unrelenting forces still dominate legal structures and obstruct LGBT rights, while in-group fighting can divide activists’ attention and efforts (1964).

Chua identifies three distinct themes that advance the sociological study of human rights and research investigating relationships between human rights and social movements. First, human rights practice as a way of life outlines three social processes that intertwine, repeat, and influence one another—formation, grievance transformation, and community building—which are shown to create a bridge for human rights and collective action (393). Next, these processes are impacted by and mold emotions and interpersonal relationships as the foundation for analysis of human rights practice (393). Finally, the processes produce three outcomes: the self-transformation of queer Burmese (right-bearers), the creation of a distinct emotion culture, and the introduction of original claims by novel claimants in Burmese politics. Moreover, this study highlights personal and grassroots dimensions of change as interconnected, with the potential to amass power enough to influence institutional economic, legal, and social outcomes in their goals to elicit self-love, social belonging, and equality under the law (393). Human rights practices can be described as both the ends and means: a sociolegal goal to obtain and to describe the ways in which to achieve them (721).

Although activist leaders hosted workshops educating members on terminology, they did not impose identities or police the use of language, and the collective created a new language to replace derogatory slangs (often dealing with sexual and other body parts) to aid in the transformation of queer Burmese self-perceptions (770). These terms did not necessarily match with the Western definitions and uses, introducing an alternative to the binary narrative of the powerful global against the fledgling local sphere (393). Another viewpoint this study helps to dispel is that of cognition and emotion as distinct entities; Chua finds them to inform and influence one another (504). In fact, emotions and the interpersonal relationships that stem from them are inherent to all modes of human rights practices including meaning creation, dissemination, implementation, and impacts, formerly described distinctly as cognitive processes (491).

Chua brings to life theory of social movements and the transformative effects that embodied human rights practices can have

on individuals and communities, both local and global, through compelling interwoven accounts of LGBT activists in Myanmar and the risks taken to legitimize human rights for queer Burmese. Chua writes in love about love to illustrate how emotions are pivotal to movements and how self-transformation can lead to the creation of a collective that can influence social and state institutions.

References

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