

in contemporary Beirut and is an eloquent and readable experimental ethnography about sexuality, citizenship, and belonging.

Democracy against Development: Lower-Caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India. *Jeffrey Witsoe.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013. 243 pp.

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The most momentous political development of the 20th century was arguably not the rise of communism or the fall of Europe's empires, or even the World Wars, but the advent of democracy as the only acceptable form of government. If in the 19th century theorists debated whether different states were fit for democracy, in the 20th century they had agreed that all states must grow fit through democracy, modernity's all-purpose political elixir.

Jeffrey Witsoe's book chronicles the vagaries of democracy in one of the world's least fit states. Bihar, known popularly as the "armpit" of India, is one of the country's poorest and most overcrowded, illiterate, criminalized, and corrupt states. It is also the site of some of the most extraordinary democratic experiments. In the decades since India's independence, Bihar has seen the dizzying ascent of the underclasses—shepherds, peasants, untouchables—to the political helm. As rich in historical and ethnographic detail as it is politically shrewd, Witsoe's book takes us right inside North India's "silent revolution": the rise of the lower castes who, in the early 1990s, upturned the Congress Party's monopoly of rule, forever changing the landscape of Indian politics. Capturing the full range of political hope and horror in Bihar, Witsoe not only offers a much-needed ethnography of India's democratic boom; his work also tempers our own democratic zeal, asking us to rethink what we too can and cannot expect from democracy.

Bihar's recent political history is truly astonishing. Lalu Prasad Yadav, who was chief minister of Bihar for 15 years between 1990 and 2005, was the son of a landless peasant. He began his career in an urban slum, where he continued to live for several months after becoming chief minister. Propelling himself with his legendary wit and theatrical speeches, Yadav went from the University Student Union to the State Legislative Assembly, India's National Parliament, and, finally, the chief minister's seat. Capitalizing on his humble origins, Yadav mobilized voters not only among his own Yadavs, a shepherd super-caste, but also among dozens of other "backward castes," including Muslims.

The poor loved Yadav. They loved him for speaking in the regional dialect, reserving seats for them in government and universities, dislocating upper-caste rule in the state, and instilling political ambition and dignity in the people who had long been oppressed; they loved him for being "their man." Yadav raised agricultural workers' minimal wages, built schools for shepherds, and encouraged milkmen to build cowsheds in cities. In a fantastic piece of political performance, he shut down the golf club in Patna and turned it into grazing land. He also proved remarkably effective at keeping religious violence at bay, camping in places threatened by communal riots until peace was restored, and succeeding, as one Muslim cleric said, in creating "an era of peace" (p. 59).

Yadav's populist feats did not rely on a well-run bureaucracy or a robust order of law. Far from it. These were personal triumphs realized through his direct appeal to voters and the vast networks of loyalty with little regard for order and law. Yadav ran Bihar like a personal fiefdom of party workers, elected politicians, political brokers, and musclemen. Under him state politics became increasingly criminalized and a miscellany of mafias won political prominence. In this "*goonda raj*" (rule of gangsters), politicians routinely stood for elections or even ran their constituencies from prisons; Yadav himself continued to govern Bihar after being jailed for embezzling billions of rupees, either through his wife as proxy or directly by "cell phone raj."

Public institutions deteriorated so severely that "government salaries were not being paid and development expenditure was completely halted" (p. 71). Witsoe explains that this was not an outcome merely of Yadav's lack of interest in policy, but also of his resolute standoff with the state bureaucracy itself. India's government departments have long been dominated by the more educated upper castes, the sworn enemies of north India's new plebeian politicians. Detailing this conflict between democracy and bureaucracy, Witsoe suggests that it is not just a symptom of class war in Bihar but also a more general feature of Indian democracy where politics and the state are often at war.

This is an arresting insight, and it bears lessons of relevance far beyond Bihar. By showing that in Bihar a fiercely democratic politics has been the state's most formidable foe, it poses a frontal challenge to the widespread conviction that healthy democracies foster healthy states. Even more disconcertingly, Witsoe's story suggests that this need be no bad thing. Under Yadav's successor, Nitish Kumar, who was feted for resurrecting state institutions, poverty only grew. By contrast, under Yadav's "corrupt" government the poor felt they were doing better and supported him steadily, despite recognizing that development and law and order were deteriorating around them (p. 77).

Witsoe, however, shies away from spelling out his study's broader implications. Instead, he theorizes India as a "postcolonial democracy," whose distinctive feature is the historical domination of state institutions by socially powerful groups. One wonders whether this is not just as true of other democracies, and why we need a term of art to remind us that every democracy has a history. I also wished Witsoe's analysis leaned more on his rich ethnographic research and less on political theorists' trivia. Repeated references to Ernesto Laclau, for example, do the book a disservice. After giving a vivid account of Yadav's energetic populism, Witsoe cites Laclau to conclude that Yadav is an "empty signifier," a kind of "symbol" of unity for the lower castes. Few descriptions of Yadav could be less illuminating, as Witsoe's own ethnography makes plain.

Despite these shortcomings, Witsoe's is the most rigorous ethnographic account to date of what may well be the world's most fervent democracy. Essential reading for anyone interested in the politics of the subcontinent, it shows just how much anthropologists can teach political analysts, if only we pass over their jejune theories and turn instead to the world.

The Hakkas of Sarawak: Sacrificial Gifts in Cold War Era Malaysia. *Kee Howe Yong.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. viii + 242 pp.

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The Cold War still haunts numerous locales, as the burgeoning literature on "memory" shows us. Ethnography has proven itself to be useful in revealing the quotidian ways that the memories of the Cold War still wound, belying triumphalist narratives of "the end of history" and free market capitalism's victory over communism. Kee Howe Yong makes a fascinating and valuable, albeit at times unfocused and perplexing, contribution to this body of literature. In his 1999–2000 fieldwork among Hakka Chinese communities in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, Yong sought out his interlocutors' contemporary relationship to, and articulations of, Cold War-era experiences of stigmatization and forced relocation, on the receiving end of the colonial Malayan and postcolonial Malaysian state's campaign against communist insurgents. He makes the interesting choice of focusing his attention upon Hakka Chinese drivers and conductors working for a local bus company, Sarawak Omnibus Company (SOC), with a history of communist activism and a workforce

consisting largely of current and former residents of the "new villages" to which many Hakka Chinese were forcibly displaced.

In the book's introduction, Yong frames the plight of his informants in terms of the "discursive logic of the gift ... whereby the recipients (postcolonial national elites) were inscribed with a debt and thus the obligation to sacrifice certain victims as some form of payment" (p. 16). The "sacrificial victims" here are the Hakka Chinese in Sarawak who were given the "violent gift" of forced relocation in the "new villages" (p. 17).

Yong sets up the background for his study in chapter 1. Beginning from an overview of the "racialism" historically directed against ethnically Chinese populations in Southeast Asia (often exacerbated by colonial policies and relations), he goes on to show how a homogenization of "Chinese" identity accompanied an increased sense of division between Malays and Chinese in colonial Malaya.

Chapter 2 tells of the targeting of alleged "communists" in Sarawak by the British in the 1950s, and again by the postcolonial Malaysian state in the 1960s. Those accused of being or supporting communist insurgents were disproportionately Hakka Chinese, and hundreds of thousands were forcibly resettled in tightly surveilled "new villages." Although Yong's Hakka interlocutors were generally reluctant to discuss their memories of these times, he is able to skillfully discern hints of attitudes in small details such as the choice of place names (Hakka vs. Malay) used by bus conductors, drivers, and passengers.

In chapter 3, Yong examines his interlocutors' ambivalent response to the Sri Aman Treaty that supposedly ended the "communist threat" in Sarawak in 1974 (and included the surrender of a number of communist guerrillas). He once again highlights the importance of choice of place-names, arguing that the renaming of a local town to Sri Aman (after the treaty) was unacknowledged by locals "as part of their effort to delegitimize the institutional and social conditions that legitimized the name change" (p. 75).

A more detailed history of the SOC bus company is provided in chapter 4, with a particular focus on the past antigovernment leanings and activities of the company management and employees, and chapter 5 finds Yong turning to the ways in which the SOC bus drivers and conductors discussed (or refused to discuss) the past violence of living under surveillance in the "new villages." He finds them ready to discuss the suffering of others (while denying any such experience on their part) and dismissing the importance of their own stories as they urge him to instead consult with politically higher-up "leaders."

Yong explores in chapter 6 one of the ways in which his Hakka interlocutors displayed their "nonchalant