Jennifer Rigby, *The Other Ladies of Myanmar*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing—Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018, xx +127 pp. ISBN: 9789814818254, price: SGD 19.90 (soft cover).

The Other Ladies of Myanmar is a remarkable journalistic report by Jennifer Rigby. With the title inspired by “The Lady” Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her sacrifice, courage, and commitment to peaceful protest for democracy in the country—an award that has recently received much controversy over her silence on the Rohingya massacre—the author profiles twelve Myanmar women: an activist, a nun, a survivor, an entrepreneur, an artist, a nurse, an environmentalist, a human right champion, a farmer, a pop star, a politician, and an archer. They come from different professions and different geographical, social, and cultural backgrounds.

The activist Cheery Zahau, from the Chin ethnic group, fights against discrimination faced by her community in accessing medical and educational public services. The frequently maligned Chin community had hoped that their situation would improve when the military junta handed over power to the military-backed civilian government in 2011, when Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won the elections.

Discrimination does not only affect women from minority groups, but also those operating in religious institutions. The Buddhist nun Ketu Mala, living in Yangon, is an example. She is a critic of gender inequality in the religious practices of Buddhist-majority Myanmar, identifying particular deep-rooted social structures rather than Buddhism as its causes. To her, Myanmar’s “patriarchal society” (p. 15) has influenced its religious practices, leading to a male-dominated religious sector in which women are at times dismissed as non-existent. Despite these challenges, this Buddhist nun is unstoppable in spreading her non-patriarchal Buddhist principles through Dhamma Schools and widely attended religious lectures.

A range of other issues faced by female activists are described. The story of the acid survivor Mi Mi, presented in chapter three, exemplifies processes of injustice and legal uncertainty for women. Mi Mi was attacked by a man splattering acid on her face. She has been seeking justice for years, while attempting to recover from her physical and mental damage without any compensation from her attacker. Female victims of physical violence such as Mi Mi, as well as victims of sexual abuse (described in chapters seven and eight), remain excluded from justice on the basis of their gender and ethnicity.

The oppression faced by this book’s activists for fighting for equality and human rights has not diminished their idealism. Their struggles for improvements take different shapes. Some activists change their strategy in order to achieve their goals. Yin Myo Su, for instance, has commenced a business that

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employs predominantly women. Others indefatigably fight for environmental sustainability. This is the case with Devi Thant Cin, a princess and environmental campaigner. Her campaign takes issue with massive development projects, the exploitation of natural resources, and their devastating impact on environmental sustainability. As Myanmar is opening its gates to new innovations and developments, people like Devi Thant Cin are crucial to preventing further environmental exploitation and avoiding more severe natural disasters in the future.

Positive change is also being pursued by prominent women in particular disciplines. Efforts to improve the situation of members of society, communities, or families have been initiated through performing arts, photographic and painting exhibitions, or prestigious sports achievements. Ma Ei, an artist with a “vibrant modern scene”, as described in Chapter 6, attempts to influence people through her work, translating and articulating what she sees in society into art. Aung Ngeain is an archer with great achievements, representing her country in international sport events. Her medals inspire other women to change society. As described in Chapter 12, she frequently experiences frustration due to the lack of appreciation, yet incessantly demonstrates her commitment to her country, community, and fellow women athletes.

Chapter 9 focuses on the farmer Mar Mar Swe, who struggles to provide for her family after the death of her husband. She is an example of the immense responsibility of women to support their entire family. The pop star Ah Moon, described in Chapter 10, has struggled to achieve as much fame and equal recognition as her male colleagues. As a protagonist of equal salaries for men and women, she advocates for equality and fairness for people and women in particular through her music. In addition to such struggles in everyday life, gender equality must also take place in the political realm. Not all decisions made by the government sufficiently take into account the roles and positions of women in Myanmar society. The politician Htin Htin Htay, highlighted in Chapter 11, exemplifies how women in politics are expected to represent all women's voices in the government. As she narrates, men do not fully understand women's matters, so that this burden befalls women politicians.

Over the past five years, I have regularly visited and worked in rural areas and a number of large townships in Myanmar to assist earth scientists of the Earth Observatory of Singapore in their research on seismicity. My own observations resonate with those of the women described in the book: women contribute a lot to their country, especially in the agricultural sector and public services, yet predominantly do so from inferior positions. They participate in building roads, cultivating rice, and growing vegetables. While a considerable number of government officials are women, who are crucial to running the country, their

positions remain blatantly unequal to those of men. Most dire, however, are the injustices and inhumane treatment faced by women with whom I have not personally interacted: Rohingya refugees, as described in Chapters 7 and 8. Here, too, women suffer the most from the violation of their rights by men who hold power and authority. These struggles are ongoing and unlikely to stop anytime soon.

The Other Ladies of Myanmar present an important report from the field, benefitting journalists, feminists, and activists. It contains a historical timeline providing a brief historical overview, yet it unfortunately does not recommend further readings. Another weakness relates to language. Perhaps some ladies (to stick with the book's parlance) selected for this book speak English fluently. Some have gained higher education or lived abroad. Others are less proficient, forcing the author to employ translators to assist her understanding of their stories. As a result, the author's interpretation on essential information, feelings, expressions, and gestures of her informants could easily be mixed up with the points of view and knowledge of the translators. Eventually, however, the author has successfully attempted to bring forward the messages from twelve ladies representing millions more with hopes for a better society, more democracy, and more equality in the future.

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