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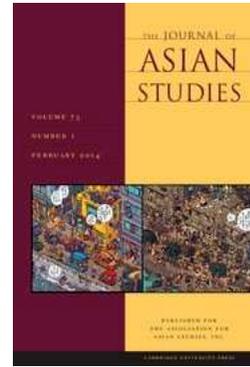
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***Forest of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia.* By Eve Monique Zucker. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. xi, 233 pp. \ \$57.00 (cloth); \ \$28.00 (paper).**

Courtney Work

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subject of U.S. empire. Debt, she writes, is “a politics of loss and absence,” but it is also “a politics of what is given in its place. To be indebted is to continue to live after war and dispossession, but with these things not having ended” (p. 182). Although brief, this thoughtful conclusion leaves the reader with rich musings on the role of the refugee or immigrant and its relationship to war, empire, and, most importantly, freedom.

In sum, this engaging first book compels readers to rethink the refugee figure beyond the narrow confines of human rights discourse. My one point of contention is that the author does not problematize the issue of the liberal media itself, which would have reinforced her already incisive critique of various media representations of liberalism. Even so, Nguyen offers a refreshing perspective on cultural formations rarely researched in area studies, and *The Gift of Freedom* is a major contribution to Vietnamese and Vietnamese diasporic studies. As such, this book is recommended to scholars of cultural studies, critical race studies, immigration and migration studies, transnationalism, Asian American studies, and Asian studies.

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Forest of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia. By EVE MONIQUE ZUCKER. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. xi, 233 pp. \$57.00 (cloth); \$28.00 (paper).
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Set in the forested highlands of Southwestern Cambodia on the eastern slopes of the Cardamom Mountains, this ethnography is an intimate portrait of community trauma, collective memory, and the slow-healing wounds of war. The villagers in this forest of struggle (*prei brâyut*) were never the source of a revolutionary movement, but their communities played host to and suffered the effects of revolutions from the earliest strikes against the French protectorate. Zucker focuses on the thirty years from 1969 to 1999, when the mountains served as a revolutionary base for the Khmer Rouge, both before and after its short-lived regime in the 1970s. Villagers in this region were embroiled in the Khmer Rouge's struggles, and the death tolls were high. The author's data come primarily from one small village and are supported by accounts from neighboring communities that tell their stories of destruction and reconstruction; the result is a thought-provoking journey through the ruts left behind by trauma and some of the pathways traveled in recovery.

This is not a typical Khmer Rouge survivor story. It is a story from the illiterate countryside that adds much-needed depth to the construction of victims and perpetrators found in the memoirs of elite survivors; as such it fills an important gap in the literature. As a story from the countryside, it is not typical however, as very few Cambodian villages suffered the kinds of losses and long-term instability that the book describes. Nonetheless, the historical depth of the author's treatment, along with her comparative regional data, successfully situates this story of disproportionate drama inside the larger trajectory of Cambodia's thirty-year war and gives voice to the lesser-known stories of the Khmer Rouge era. While it can be described as an ethnography, this is primarily an ethnography of memory. The quotidian rhythms of life and livelihoods remain in the background unless they speak directly to the reconstruction of memories.

The strengths of the book are its rich evocation of the past and the data that it brings to bear on existing theories of social memory and paradigms of morality. The author explores the banality of evil through the stories of a former village head held responsible for many local deaths. He did not do the killing, but he leveled false accusations against fellow villagers and kin who were then eliminated. Arendt's provocative study of the bureaucratic functionary haunts Zucker's analysis, which suggests that the village head may have acted more within culturally salient models of pragmatic leadership than out of intentional cruelty. The accused leader did not comment directly on the charges leveled against him, which detracts somewhat from the author's analysis, but his words are subtly contextualized. The author's detailed descriptions of the social and political culture of Cambodia during that era create a useful intervention into the moral topography of war crimes. The discussion both challenges and adds to other treatments of the Cambodian trauma. The author does not find revenge to be the most salient feature of the Khmer moral landscape, as suggested by others. She notes rather that erasure and the social recourse to amoral subjectivities are the important frameworks that ease the past into the present, smoothing over the fault lines of collective trauma.

As a work focused on collective trauma, this book speaks not to the literature on post-conflict studies, but rather to a body of work that considers the intertwining of landscape, memory, and myth. This theoretical framework allows for a productive discussion of how past traumas persist within the mythic structures of the present and become embedded in the physical terrain. A focus on structure and function mars the analysis slightly, but Zucker ultimately sheds light on how present concerns and moral aspirations shape the way the past is invoked and how the past is called into the social work of the present.

The violence and disjuncture that continue to plague the lives of the very poor in this and other regions in Cambodia are not the focus of this book. Instead, it examines a past social trauma in a particular location and adds the insights from that experience to existing theoretical frameworks in the work of social memory and reconstruction. Hence the book will be especially useful for scholars interested in social suffering, trauma, and reconciliation in cross-cultural situations. It is also a valuable contribution to the literature on this historical period. Scholars of modern Cambodian history and culture will benefit from the author's treatment of Khmer Rouge history and her insightful contributions to contemporary constructions of morality, both in and beyond Cambodia.

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