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Forest of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia.
By Eve Monique Zucker. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press,
2013. 233 pp.

This ethnography is an important book not only for scholars of Cambodia but for any reader with an interest in memories of mass violence and the possibilities of restoring trust, sociality and moral order in a post-conflict society. It is this theoretical linkage between remembering and morality for the purpose of weaving together “the concepts of difficult past, relatedness and the making of a future” (p. 8) that makes the book a captivating read.

Forest of Struggle takes us to a village in the Cardamom Mountains in Cambodia whose inhabitants are trying to rebuild their lives after almost thirty years of violence, war and displacement. These decades included Cambodia’s first civil war, the terror of the Khmer Rouge regime, and a subsequent second civil war that lasted until the late 1990s. When the first civil war started in 1970, the village of O’Thmaa and its neighbours were already a “liberated zone” under the control of the Khmer Rouge. Its inhabitants were classified as “base people” (*neak mouladthan*), peasants from whom the Khmer Rouge drew human and material support for their revolution. To my knowledge this is the first in-depth ethnography that explores the past and present of a former Khmer Rouge “base people” community. It therefore provides an invaluable contribution to our understanding of contemporary Cambodia.

It was already in the early years of war that the social fabric of the village was torn. Villagers accused one another of being “enemies of the revolution” and of the cadres of the Khmer Rouge. This led to executions of many men and to the present-day lack of male elders in the community. This specific history poses serious obstacles to a successful remaking of worlds and relationships, and distinguishes O’Thmaa from other villages in the area. Chapters Three to Five explore the dilemmas connected with this situation. The author discusses the predicaments of trust and distrust after almost thirty

years of war and violence. Trust, argues Zucker, depends on faith in the stability and predictability of the world in which we live. The catastrophic ruptures of the “Pol Pot time” (*samay Pol Pot*) shattered people’s faith in the predictability of a safe future everywhere in Cambodia. But in the village of O’Thmaa the re-establishment of trust seems to have been even more difficult than in other villages in the area. The reader is introduced to the problematic figure of Ta Kam, a former village chief who collaborated with the Khmer Rouge and was responsible for many deaths in the village. Zucker vividly depicts how Ta Kam’s presence represents both the antithesis of moral order and the village’s immoral histories, as well as how that presence thus blocks the remaking of morality and the villagers’ attempts to reconnect to their past before the violence. In addition, the lack of male elders — who would be able to transmit morality and traditional knowledge — prevents full social, cultural and moral recovery.

From this fascinating exploration of the moral dynamics between the individual and the collective, the author then switches to the embedding of social imaginaries of morality into wider Khmer notions of ordering the world and meaning-making. Zucker highlights the importance of kinship, consumption, commensality and food for rebuilding relations and rendering one’s world part of “the civil” (*srok* or *viel*) as opposed to “the wild” (*prey*). These binary moral notions are symbolized by two contrasting Khmer landscapes. The *prey* is the forested and often mountainous wilderness and the *srok* or *viel* the cultivated and domesticated world of the field and the village. She also depicts how the memories of past violence connect to the wider history of violence and morality tales, and how these narratives are embedded into and signified by the local landscape, myths and stories.

While these chapters provide a fascinating and informative read, they somehow lack connection to the well-told individual and collective dilemmas of trust, morality and social memory treated in the first part of the book. It is only towards the end of her ethnography that the author takes us back to these themes. The exploration of the village harvest festival of Bon Dalien brilliantly highlights how

the preparation and performance of an annual ritual strengthens the community and takes the villagers out of time to a past that was not shattered, while at the same time enabling them to imagine a future in which the cultural, social and moral world is intact again. This is one of the most fascinating parts of the ethnography, but I could not help wondering what happened to some of the villagers to whom I was introduced earlier on in previous chapters. The author mentioned that 10 per cent of the villagers — all of them former Khmer Rouge soldiers — were Christian converts. This is an unusually high percentage of conversion for most Cambodian villages. Zucker explores how Christianity offers individuals avenues of coming to terms with a violent past. I would have liked to learn more about the meaning of conversion for the remaking of the moral order of the collective. Can Christians participate in Khmer rituals that incorporate Buddhist monks and practices? If not, what does that mean for the making of village communities and sociality? How is the conversion of former Khmer Rouge soldiers perceived by Buddhist villagers? And how do Christian converts relate to the rest of the village? Building on Zucker's fine in-depth ethnography, future research may explore these questions.

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Mediums, Monks and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today. By Pattana Kitiarsa. Chiang Mai and Seattle: Silkworm Books and University of Washington Press, 2012. xxi + 170 pp.

Magic and related kinds of phenomena have long presented a problem in the study of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. In part this is because those studying Buddhism have had a tendency to privilege textual forms of Buddhism and, in particular, the imagined original Buddhist