the repatriation of globally scattered antiquities is considered an unambiguous good (pp. 126–27), diasporic artists and their works sometimes face an ambiguous reception in Cambodia. A discussion of these sorts of anomalies might have begun a critical appraisal of 'the Cambodian nation'.

But with no fixed centre, little sense of a limit on disciplinary roaming, and the resultant rich theoretical pageant, the intelligent unmoored-ness of this book is perhaps the point. In the preface, the author gives a personal account of struggles with nostalgia and ambivalence, suggesting powerfully that "one of the roles the arts perform in culture and society is … to help us contain and transform our painful and emotional experiences of violence and trauma" (p. xii). Ly's nomadic sensibility, along with the insistence that we pluralize our framing and focus in relation to the Cambodian arts, is as undeniable as it is important.

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*Fifty Years in the Karen Revolution in Burma: The Soldier and the Teacher*. By Saw Ralph and Naw Sheera. Edited by Stephanie Olinga-Shannon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. xvi+172 pp.

*Fifty Years* is a rare and gut-wrenching first-hand account of the long trajectory of Karen struggle at Burma's (Myanmar) peripheries. Riddled with tales of hardship, death, suffering and sacrifice, the book tells the life histories of Saw Ralph, a former brigadier general in the rebel Karen National Union (KNU), and his wife, Naw Sheera, the former general secretary of the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO). The book is narrated in the first person and collated by editor Stephanie Olinga-Shannon, with Martin Smith's introduction

situating the KNU leadership within the different conundrums it faced: between alliances, ceasefires and conflict.

Divided into two parts, following each of the two protagonists, the book begins recounting Saw Ralph's early childhood—born to an Anglo-Arakanese father and Karen mother in British Burma, living through the Japanese occupation and taking up arms in Insein when the Karen Revolution began. With the rebels, Saw Ralph travelled across Burma to Southern Shan State, Karenni State and then finally Karen State in the 1960s, rising ultimately to the rank of brigadier general within the organization. Naw Sheera, on the other hand, educated in the seminary, married Saw Ralph and fled conflict, and survives with their young children. She later joined the KWO, empowering and educating Karen women. Across their stories are family dilemmas, political struggles, faith and religious belief, and accounts of battles fought with the Burmese military.

*Fifty Years* is beautiful; a striking text—the simple language is never embellished, and it does not use elaborate prose to evoke the horrors of warfare or human rights abuses. This is a book filled more with verbs and less with adjectives. The stories are told matter-of-factly, they are not peppered with excessive retrospective commentary, and they never romanticize danger or suffering. The deadpan tone makes bizarre and brutal events even more acute: "while they were operating on our wounds, an enemy plane came and machine-gunned the surroundings.… Fortunately, everyone survived the attack" (p. 60), or Naw Sheera's dreadful accounts of hiding, while pregnant, submerged in rivers and giving birth shortly after (p. 137).

Saw Ralph's and Naw Sheera's rich life histories reveal different aspects of the revolution. There are depictions of the sheer chaos of post-independence Burma: Karen rebels fleeing the Burmese military through communist-aligned villages, or brothers on opposite sides of the Burmese and Karen military forces. There is the luck of surviving battles and explosions, and the bizarre and tragic twists of fate between former enemies. There are reflections on shifting political positions and alliances. There are challenges to faith and

a re-examination of God's role in widespread suffering. There are the heartbreaking snapshots of vulnerabilities faced by women in conflict zones, hunger, disease and infection.

*Fifty Years* is different from other insurgent accounts in Burma, many of which are written by white protagonists telling of their heroic travels and brushes with danger, and others by insider descendants of ethnic minority elite families. *Fifty Years*, told by a high-ranking officer in the KNU who was swept into insurgency and reached his position through luck and leadership, brings out the coincidences, the fog of war, and contingencies that have formed the revolution's history. Coupled with their curiously muted views on the current KNU leadership and the direction it is taking—"there's a new generation running the KWO now and I don't know any of them" (p. 162); "I told myself to stay out of these revolution matters, because it is no longer my time" (p. 110)—they inhabit a somewhat 'detached insider' position, able to comment on the sensitivities of the past without compromising the movement.

It is intriguing that *Fifty Years*, as a memoir, has been published through an academic press. In the first instance, it seems to offer no historical analysis, no theoretical frameworks and no policy recommendations. Yet its accounts and the manner of retelling highlight a set of conundrums and provocations for researchers of armed insurgency. Which insiders can provide 'fair' insight into an insurgency they have fought and bled for? What does an 'honest' account of a movement's shortcomings mean in the face of death and the destruction of worlds? How did the authors reflect on the implications of their stories, and how did this affect the retelling? Will the text help the cause or undermine it; and which of these, if any, would the authors prefer? These are the dilemmas of representation all biographers and researchers face, to varying degrees, in the writing of insurgency. Commendably, the book's editor chose not to add any external commentary or analysis (beyond limited contextual footnotes), or even a conclusion, allowing the gravity of the stories to stand on their own.

*Fifty Years* is not a feel-good book about the triumph of perseverance, nor does it even represent a condemnation of war. It is a story of doing what needed to be done, of helping others where possible, and of survival, faith and luck (or Providence). There are no propositions for peace at the end of the book, and no recommendations for unity or conflict resolution. A call for true federalism, where a Burmese state exists alongside Karen, Shan and other states, is the furthest Saw Ralph ventures (p. 111). There is no real exhortation to continue the struggle; there is no real bitterness. *Fifty Years* will enthral readers looking for an honest, non-sensationalized account of the costs of rebellion for soldiers and civilians alike in ethnic minority areas of Burma. It is a story of continuity; as Saw Ralph puts it: "We could lose a hundred battles but it didn't matter so long as we won the war … we were in this for the long term. After sixty-seven years, the war is still going and we still haven't lost" (p. 53).

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*Towards a New Malaysia? The 2018 Election and Its Aftermath*. Edited by Meredith L. Weiss and Faisal S. Hazis. Singapore: NUS Press, 2020. 283 pp.

Malaysian politics, particularly under the Barisan Nasional regime, often attracts the attention of observers. With the state's spectacular economic performance, especially from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, many observers were baffled by the overarching dominance of Barisan Nasional despite the rapid growth in the middle-class, increasing urbanization and industrialization, and the incremental curtailment of fundamental freedoms. In fact, for Malaysia during those decades,