

former student radicals played roles across the political spectrum. Their identity, like the nation's treatment of the massacre, has no permanent home.

For scholars of Southeast Asia, Thongchai needs no introduction. His 1994 book *Siam Mapped* is the only book in Thai historiography to be read widely outside of its field. Briefly in *Moments of Silence*, but at greater length in one of his Thai-language articles about 1976, Thongchai writes that *Siam Mapped* was a personal catharsis of a particular type. He dedicated it to all those lost or hurt in the October massacre. And in its rigorous history he shows how the Thai state and its myths—of kingly foresight and benevolence, toleration and assimilation of others—are just that: ideologies serving power and constructed as the modern state took its cartographic shape. The truth of history, as he writes in *Memories of Silence*, is otherwise; it is often cruel, hateful and irrational, and in any case leaves out most people from the story. Giving a fuller portrait of the national biography means remembering those battered by the cruelty and documenting how society handles what it has done.

Arjun Subrahmanyam

Department of History, College of Arts, Business, Law and Social Sciences, Murdoch University, 90 South Street, Murdoch, Western Australia 6150, Australia; email: A.Subrahmanyam@murdoch.edu.au.

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Traces of Trauma: Cambodian Visual Culture and National Identity in the Aftermath of Genocide. By Boreth Ly. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020. 190 pp.

This remarkable book takes an arts-based approach to the question of “how a morally shattered [Cambodian] culture and nation [found]

ways to go on living after the civil war, the US bombing and the Khmer Rouge genocide” (p. 7). It advances original arguments about the embodied nature of trauma—the broken body—in Cambodia (Chapter 1), the cultural trope of scars and scarification (Chapter 2), and how the myth of Neang Neak the serpent princess might be recognized and understood anew (Chapter 5). Ly introduces recent and contemporary artists from Cambodia and the Cambodian diaspora and presents fascinating, emotionally charged analyses of their works, for which many colour plates are provided. The book also contributes to the existing literature on the visual culture of the Khmer Rouge era (Chapter 3) and on the cultures of dress (Chapter 4) and dance (Chapter 5) that remain and which are always being remade *despite* the cultural losses of the Khmer Rouge regime. A bespoke conceptual framing has been crafted for each empirical chapter, but some key concepts are set out in the introduction and briefly returned to in the conclusion.

The book groups artists and works by their concern rather than by an individual artists’ membership in a place-based milieu or generation (survivor generation versus post-memory generation, for example). Ly has thought carefully about statements of intent made by the artists, putting these self-representations into conversation with one other, as well as with the author’s own experience and scholarly frames of reference and understanding. The author’s emphasis on artists’ biographies and practice—often gleaned from personal contact—is especially valuable. While some names and works might be immediately recognizable to wider audiences, many of the artists and works discussed are not well known outside of Cambodia and its diaspora.

Ly disrupts dominant periodizations by simultaneously considering periods of civil conflict prior to the Khmer Rouge regime *and* post-regime periods. Similarly, he re-spatializes questions of conflict and survival by ranging beyond Phnom Penh to Cambodia’s provinces, the north-western city of Battambang, the Thai-Cambodian border camps of the 1980s, border areas to the south and east that were subjected to US bombing from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s,

and diasporic centres and events like Paris, Long Beach and the New York City-based 'Season of Cambodia' Festival of 2013.

Ly also pays particular attention to Khmer Buddhist-informed sociological and psychological diagnoses of the regime, earlier conflict, and refugee flight and resettlement; *Baksbat* ('broken body' and its corollary 'broken courage') is a notable example, drawn from Cambodian psychology into arts critique. There is an obvious preference in the book for immediate frames of understanding that have been generated by Cambodian scholars and artists. Ly holds space for Cambodian analyses, and this is both defensible and welcome. This preference jars slightly with the almost simultaneous inclusion of canonical accounts and theories of memory, race, culture, politics and history. Eight male scholars are listed as having provided a "theoretical framework" for the book—Hal Foster, Nicholas Mirzoeff, Benedict Anderson and Paul Gilroy as well as Geertz, Freud, Hall and Fanon—with Derrida included in an additional qualification (p. 9). The high-order thinking of these writers and theorists is often recalled and extended to great effect in the book. Missing in the mid-ground are a number of younger anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists and historians of Cambodia, despite their having asked related questions of some of the same sites and artists and employing similar ways of working.

A late and compelling discussion in the book centres on the non-translatibility or non-existence of allegory in the Cambodian context. The author argues that "the Khmer broken female body" is iconic rather than allegorical, offering the further statement and question: "The broken body of the Cambodian nation needs to be mended in order for it to be complete and whole again, but is this possible?" (pp. 125–26). But in what way might it be defensible or desirable to theorize the nation as a body in the first place? Without meaning to, this conceptualization skates towards ethno-nationalistic discourses of the national body being vulnerable to attack, or infested by 'foreign' elements. The criticism of overseas Khmer by some political figures in Cambodia and the rise of xenophobia in Cambodia (as in many other nations) is surely relevant here. While

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.

Rachel Hughes

School of Geography, Faculty of Science, The University of Melbourne, 221 Bouverie Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia; email: hughesr@unimelb.edu.au.

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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