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Living Kinship, Fearing Spirits: Sociality among the Khmu of Northern Laos. By Rosalie Stolz. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2021. xii+349p.

At first glance, this book appears to be a classic ethnographic study of kinship among a minority group in the uplands of Laos; but it is much more. In dealing with what she identifies as sociality in Pliya, a relocated Khmu Yuan village in Luang Nam Tha Province in northwestern Laos, Rosalie Stolz delivers a very intimate and self-reflexive account of what kinship practically entails in the life (and afterlife) trajectories of the Khmu of Pliya.

Khmu societies constitute the second-largest ethnic group in Laos and have been relatively well documented since the mid-twentieth century, especially on issues concerning linguistics and their relationships with the lowland Tai population. Khmu kinship, on the other hand, has not been studied as much and has never been the subject of a long-term ethnographic study. As a thorough ethnographically based description of Khmu descent and affinal relations, Stolz's monograph fills this gap in the literature.

However, her study is not only about what Khmu kinship is but also about how it is put into practice and engaged with in the day-to-day exchanges that characterize social life in Pliya. Efficacy is one of the cross-cutting themes of Stolz's study. People not only have to possess a formal knowledge about the different type of relationships that bind them to their kins, but they also need to transform those theoretical relations into efficacious kin ties—through formal rituals, and mundane cooperative relations and exchanges—in order to lead a fulfilling life and ultimately become an ancestor spirit. In this regard, an immersive sixteen-month ethnographic study in Pliya and her incorporation into a local kin-group enabled her to study how kinship is embedded in daily practical decisions. One striking benefit of this method is how she accounts for the importance of regular food offerings between wife-takers and wife-givers. Not strictly considered as exchanges in classical anthropological descriptions, these regular

offerings turn out to be socially performative transactions. The author's situated position within local kin groups allowed her to emphasize the relevance of these seemingly insignificant micro-events, which a classical kinship study would probably have considered irrelevant.

This is precisely one of the ambitions of this book—that is, not to adopt a 'bird's-eye view' on kinship. The way the book is presented serves this purpose as many sections revolve around vivid extended ethnographic vignettes. Moreover, the researcher's presence is rarely evacuated in these descriptions and the ethnographer appears as a full actor of the kinship performances described.

If chapter 1 is organized in a rather classical way, the anecdotes that open it are particularly evocative of the importance of exchanges between kin in the course of life and in the supramundane becoming. The author's main informant recounts the story of a neighbouring wife who had been buried in a very simple way and, because of this, could never become an ancestor spirit. The informant explains that the wife came from a family who had nothing to share and, as such, could not partake in significant exchange of offerings that structure local relations and collective work. This short anecdote raises the importance of daily transactions during life and in the afterlife.

The succeeding chapters are organized using different analytical perspectives on local kinship. Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of being knowledgeable to others in kinship terms as "a precondition of personhood" (p. 25) and illustrates the main features of the local system. Chapter 3 describes the different milestones in a person's life regarding kinship. Weddings and deaths appear to be the most important transitions. Chapter 4 convincingly shows the importance of work in Khmu society as "productively reproducing kin ties" (p. 189) and of considering rituals as cooperative work between kin groups. Chapter 5 develops a distinction between symmetrical relationships within the same house that are epitomized by the idiom of common commensality and sharing and the asymmetrical relationships between wife-givers and wife-receivers that are expressed through the idiom of exchange. Chapter 6 draws a more general overview of what

sociality looks like in Pliya and how kin ties are embedded in a particular social setting where humans and spirits interact.

The last chapter returns to the main ambitions of the book. One of them is to propose an analysis of kinship that is not restricted to the description of a disembodied system, but which, on the contrary, accounts for kinship ties as they are crafted through practice. Even though this promise is not new in the field of anthropology, the book fulfils it brilliantly. One regret, however, is that the author deals very little, if at all, with some recent local changes that might have a direct or indirect impact on relations between kin groups or on how people practically engage in these relations and exchanges—such as the impact of local Chinese investments on labour migration patterns, or the impact of cash crops on local hierarchy and land tenure. Beyond these minor remarks, the author's first monograph not only constitutes a significant contribution to Khmu and kinship studies in general, but it is also a vivid lesson of what ethnography should look like.

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Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, Volume 1, His Voyages, Legacies and Modernity, Volume 2, His Voyages, Legacies and Colonial History. By Hadijah Rahmat. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020. 556pp+720pp.

Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munshi—the name of a significant figure in Singapore's early British imperial historiography—quite appropriately functions as the main title of Hadijah Rahmat's two-volume work on his life, writings and legacies. Hadijah first encountered Abdullah in undergraduate classes offered at the Department of Malay Studies at the University of Singapore in the late 1970s. Her use of Abdullah's