

presidencies)—allowing for a political and ethical rethinking of global cinema, and of how Philippine indie cinema represents discontent with neoliberalism and greater conservatism and renders political futures.

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Silence and Sacrifice: Family Stories of Care and the Limits of Love in Vietnam. By Merav Shohet. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021. xvii+267 pp.

What does someone mean by not answering a question? How do some forms of verbal exchange generate non-verbal responses? Why would someone respond to talk by not talking? In short, how does a social analyst interpret silence? Sooner or later, anyone who studies society must confront the fact that silence is notoriously difficult to interpret. What analysts call a “non-response” or “ethnographic refusal” is conventionally discarded in favour of verbal data. Yet what does the silence actually mean? It may signify disagreement with the question or, conversely, mute agreement with its pretext. It may simply mean nothing at all. Of course, how one interprets silence depends on cultural context and historical situation, especially in places where violence has cut lives short or coercion punishes unacceptable speech. In these situations, reaching a point of silence might signal a stopping point, effectively ending communication. But explaining why an inquiry ends here can become a kind of guesswork, perhaps even prompting the analyst to fill in the silence with words that have never been spoken.

One of Merav Shohet’s signal achievements in *Silence and Sacrifice* is facing this problem of silent non-response and tackling its interpretation head on. Far from something that signifies nothing, silence, in Shohet’s view, is meaningful, powerful and moral.

Exquisitely attuned to cultural context and historical situation, her book invokes a Vietnam where families, especially women, have long struggled quietly but steadfastly to maintain bonds of kinship against countervailing forces of war, dislocation and economic transformation. Among other important findings is her argument that “muted suffering over years connotes sacrifice” (p. 42), linking silence to surrendering one’s own goals, comfort or values in exchange for someone else’s. This idea of sacrifice (*hy sinh*) pervades Vietnamese speech about raising children, caring for elderly parents, remembering war victims or simply skipping lunch to get work done. Further, mutely enduring ordinary and extraordinary challenges signifies an ethical stance. “Only silent sacrifice”, Shohet writes, “counts as moral care” (p. 158). Enduring social demands and persisting without complaint or pride is encouraged, even expected. Doing so connotes someone who is admirably committed to the care, love and memory of others.

Building on these insights into sacrifice and silence, Shohet advances a theoretical framework that helps explain personal comportment, familial cohesion and state commemoration in contemporary Vietnam. Conceptualizing sacrifice in the family enables the author to reappropriate an idea frequently associated with patriotic discourses about wartime loss. Stridently nationalist discourses of sacrifice are masculinist, argues Shohet, but they do not exhaust sacrifice’s meaning. Taking the reader into “quotidian sacrifice” on the home front, she illustrates “muted everyday acts of care usually associated with women’s devotion to their families” (p. 11). Intimately connected with an idea of “love” (*inh ảm*), this form of sacrifice describes the practices that keep kin together. Working in tandem and expressed through care, sacrifice and love help Vietnamese families cohere. They also stitch together hierarchies, subordinating wives to husbands and to kin, young, old and extended. Further, performing love and sacrifice is hard work, especially for the women expected to perform it silently at the expense of their health, careers and well-being. Here, Shohet exposes limits to love

and loving, revealing tensions that strike at the core of domestic situations, community practices and nationalist rituals.

Approaching family life in Vietnam with nuance, *Silence and Sacrifice* offers a creative methodology, insight into an understudied place and helpful hints for the non-specialist. An anthropologist by training, Shohet undertakes a “family-centered ethnography, instead of stopping at the level of individuals” in order to capture the “multiple, conflicting attachments” that being in a family demands of its members (p. 202; italics in original). She takes the reader through videotaped activities to track bodily movements, analyses interview transcripts to highlight linguistic nuance and identify communication aporias, and reflects on the questions that living with a family prompted her to answer about its members. Based in the city of Đà Nẵng, her study contributes to a growing literature on the central region of Vietnam, where some of the fiercest fighting in the 1960s and 1970s—what her informants call the “American War”—took place. Short explanations introduce each of the book’s two parts, guiding the reader through the fine detail presented in five substantive chapters.

This is a wonderful book that deserves wide readership. I caught one small historical error: the American forces that assisted the Viet Minh after World War II were not affiliated with the Green Berets (pp. 25, 44), established only in 1952, but with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Yet this quibble hardly diminishes the work’s high quality and wide relevance. Indeed, *Silence and Sacrifice* should be required reading for Vietnam specialists. More broadly, it will appeal to scholars interested in gender, family and the afterlives of violence. Finally, anyone who has ever been advised to consider the balance between family and career will discover in this book new ways to think about, and live with, the conflicting demands of social life.

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