

sites of agency demonstrate that while homonationalism is pervasive and proliferating, it is never complete. Chapter 3, “How to Be Gay (Refugee Version),” is quite instructive in this regard. Analyzing the rehearsals for a public play—which begins with a complex narrative and aesthetic but, through several disciplinary rehearsals, ends with the straightened speech and conduct of the “real” gay character—Murray carefully illustrates “how a performance of a gay male self that does not reflect the experiences and privileges of a hegemonic gay cultural identity . . . renders the performer suspect, that is, not ‘really’ gay” (76). As such, the chapter highlights how refugee claimants attempt to frustrate the encompassing and coercive force of the state-based determination process—and thus its protocols of intelligibility about sexuality and gender—while realizing that they remain constrained within an epistemic border zone that heightens their precarity. Further challenges to the CRA’s homonationalist discourse can be found in Murray’s findings that claimants have complicated relationships to Western conceptions of gender and sexuality, have complex stories about their decisions to file refugee claims in Canada, and have complex affective orientations toward their countries of origin and Canada. These findings suggest that claimant-subjects are never completely folded into homonationalist discourse.

Overall, the book makes a solid contribution to the inter-related fields of queer migration and SOGI refugee studies in the Canadian context, especially so in its focus on how the figure of the SOGI refugee claimant occupies an ambivalent relationship to homonationalism. One central question it raises is how we conceptualize the agency of “the claimant”—as a subject who is stranded within the border zone produced by the CRA, especially if this subject is at once a site of “incommensurability” (57) and “potentiality” (45)? This question is central to understanding the question mark in the book’s title, as it pushes us to think critically about what it means for claimants to simultaneously speak within, outside of, and against the hegemonic framework of intelligibility about gender and sexuality.

NOTE

- 1 M. Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

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Navigating a River by Its Bends: A Comparison of Cambodian Remigration



Gea Wijers

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N*avigating a River by Its Bends* is the book version of Gea Wijers’s doctoral dissertation. It comprises a collection of authored or co-authored articles and book chapters based on multi-sited fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2011 in France, the United States, and Cambodia. The study examines the life trajectories of first-generation Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees and explores how they made use of their special forms of social capital when engaging in “institutional entrepreneurship” upon return to Cambodia. The study revolves around those Cambodians who arrived in America or France before 1979 and who subsequently returned to Cambodia with hopes of helping to rebuild their country after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991.

Dr. Wijers also asked in what ways refugee settlement policies in Long Beach, California, and Lyon, France, affected the abilities of these Cambodians to adapt both

to life in exile and life upon return to their homeland. Of particular interest for the study was the question of how transnational networks and experiences from exile might influence returnees’ chances of establishing themselves back in Cambodia.

The interviews were analyzed using several key concepts such as that of “embeddedness,” by which Wijers means the process by which legitimacy is created in social networks. This notion underlies the author’s interest in the returnees’ transnational webs of relations and their ability to mobilize social capital upon return to Cambodia.

The author presents a valuable historical overview of the various groups of refugees that have spent large parts of their lives in either France or the United States. She also describes how the social, cultural, and political climate of each country at the time of resettlement and the different modes of reception have influenced how these groups have

evolved and adapted. She notes how these differences are then played out in the way returnees from each country have tended to be perceived in Cambodia and how, against this background, they have tried to navigate the social landscape upon return to their native country.

Wijers notes how Cambodian American returnees have tended not to reintegrate into the entrenched patron-clientelism that endures in Cambodia and that they have often become active in civil society advocacy organizations, thereby positioning themselves as critics of, rather than participants in, Cambodian norms and networks. She contrasts this with the Cambodian French returnees' preference for trying to influence the system from within after they returned, often by accepting positions in government or the civil service, usually as supporters or members of the royalist opposition party FUNCINPEC.

Wijers concludes that the social capital acquired overseas by Cambodians returning from the United States or France is not an unmitigated bonus for gaining legitimacy back in their homeland. She notes that although the knowledge, experience, and social networks returnees gained from living in other countries offer some advantages, these people also struggle for recognition as "real Khmers" back in Cambodia. Without a strong foothold in local patron-client networks, their loyalties may be called into question. Wijers observes that, over time, many therefore find themselves forced to demonstrate allegiances to power-holders in order to secure their own social survival.

Further, the author points out that the geopolitical position of the returnees' respective host countries also affects how they tended to be viewed upon return to Cambodia. If they failed to maintain their Khmer language skills while away, this could further limit their opportunities for reintegrating.

There are many interesting and insightful passages in this book. The information is clearly presented, and it is easy to follow the author's arguments. Wijers more than adequately fulfils her humble ambition of "filling a gap" in research on this topic and, in fact, makes original contributions to our knowledge about the kinds of problems that returnees—not only to Cambodia—face after spending years in other countries.

However, as noted above, this is a doctoral dissertation comprising several published articles loosely drawn together by an introduction and some general concluding remarks. As such, the book contains considerable repetition, some of which is, indeed, verbatim, with several quotations,

for instance, recurring in two places in the book. The volume would, therefore, have benefitted from some purposeful revision geared toward eliminating redundant text.

My second concern with this work is about the methodology and use of interview material. After reading the introduction, I was anticipating some reasonably "thick description" of the lives of at least a few of the author's interlocutors. I imagined that there would be one or two more elaborate life stories, or sections of them, included to illustrate the more general points that the book makes about the opportunities and constraints refugees experience in a host country and upon return to their native country. Chapter 5 is the richest in ethnographic data but, overall, it would have strengthened this work considerably to hear more detail about the people themselves and the intricacies of their everyday lives. For instance, the author tells us about the lack of a sense of community among Cambodians living in France; yet there is little ethnographic detail, such as descriptions of the relationships or tensions between individuals or households through work, schooling, kinship connections, and so on. In general, the quotations from interlocutors seem to be mainly opinions or generalizations, which the author sometimes, rather uncritically, accepts as fact, but they give little information about the complexity of these refugees' own personal experience.

Finally, the book's subtitle, "A Comparison of Cambodian Returnees' Contributions to the Transformation of Cambodia," is somewhat misleading. The reader may expect a work focusing on Cambodia's dramatic transformation in recent decades and the ways in which these groups of returnees have helped bring this about. In fact, the book says little about the particular ways in which the country has been transformed under Prime Minister Hun Sen's leadership and, if anything, simply shows that neither of these groups of returnees has been able to exert much influence in the process of creating the Cambodia we see today.

Notwithstanding these reservations, this work is praiseworthy as a piece of original research that enriches our understanding of the factors influencing the possibilities as well as limitations that refugees may experience upon returning to their homeland.

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