

## Book and Media Reviews

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*Cultures of Commemoration: The Politics of War, Memory, and History in the Mariana Islands*, by Keith L Camacho. Pacific Islands Monograph Series 25. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8248-3670-2; 280 pages, illustrations, maps, notes, references, index. Paper, US\$25.00.

Only a fraction of the thousands of Chamorros who survived World War II remain alive today. This “greatest generation” will all pass within the next few decades, like the last set of waves breaking on the shores of the Mariana Islands. When my grandparents share their memories about the war with me, bombs and screams echo. Even in their silences, the war echoes. As Chamorro scholar Laura Torres Souder once wrote: “The war has not ended” (*Psyche Under Siege: Uncle Sam, Look What You’ve Done to Us*, 1991, 123).

I carry my grandparents’ stories within me—their prayers and cries, their songs and whispers. I hear their voices woven into the pages of Keith L Camacho’s *Cultures of Commemoration: The Politics of War, Memory, and History in the Mariana Islands*, the twenty-fifth volume in the landmark Pacific Islands Monograph Series. Recently, *Cultures of Commemoration* was awarded the Masayoshi Ohira Memorial Prize, and Camacho received the 2011–2012 Don T Nakanishi Award for Outstanding Engaged Scholarship in Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles.

*Cultures of Commemoration* is the

“first sustained attempt by a Chamorro author to narrate a history of the Mariana Islands that considers Chamorro cross-cultural and intra-cultural relations throughout the archipelago” (3). Most histories of the region follow colonial partitions and focus on either the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or the US Unincorporated Territory of Guåhan (Guam). The archipelagic bond between the Chamorro people had been “severed [*sic*],” to borrow Chamorro poet Cecilia C T Perez’s poignant characterization (*Signs of Being: A Chamoru Spiritual Journey*, 1997, 4, 26). Camacho’s comparative methodology weaves our severed histories into a symbolic reunification of the Chamorro archipelago.

To accomplish this comparative weaving, Camacho drew from various archives: the University of Guam’s Micronesia Area Research Center, the University of Hawai’i’s Pacific Collection, the Northern Marianas College’s Pacific Collection, the US Library of Congress, the US Navy Historical Center, and the US National Archives and Records Administration. His primary materials range from commemorative brochures, newspaper articles, and autobiographical manuscripts to interviews that Camacho conducted with war survivors and their descendants.

While conventional histories of the war focus on narratives of soldiers, military strategies, triumph, and tragedy, *Cultures of Commemoration* is rooted in the diverse and complex range of Chamorro experiences and remembrances of the periods before, during, and after the war. Throughout, Camacho draws attention to

how commemorative acts express the “power and reach of local and national identity, collective and individual memory, and colonial and indigenous history” (11).

The first three chapters provide historical analysis of the colonial and military presence in the Marianas. Chapter 1, “Loyalty and Liberation,” examines how prewar US colonialism in Guam and Japanese colonialism in the Northern Mariana Islands attempted to produce the “loyal Chamorro subject” through educational, propagandist, and commemorative activities; chapter 2, “World War II in the Mariana Islands,” details the “wounds of profound magnitude” (58) inflicted on Chamorros during the war years; and chapter 3, “The War Aftermath,” illuminates the “rehabilitation” period following the war. Camacho questions the colonial historiographies of these periods by foregrounding the ambivalent nature of Chamorro “loyalty,” the false rhetoric of “liberation,” and the exploitative aspects of “rehabilitation.” Overall, these chapters detail the “key historical markers for the commemoration of World War II in the Mariana Islands” (60).

The second half of the book turns to war commemorations. Chapter 5, “Processions to Parades,” traces the history of “Liberation Day” in Guam, celebrated on 21 July to commemorate the return of US forces. At first, Liberation Day resembled Catholic rituals and focused on the themes of salvation, rebirth, forgiveness, and reconciliation, illustrating the “interconnected nature of spirituality, identity, and nationality in postwar Guam” (89). From the 1950s onward,

loyalty and patriotic fervor became the key commemorative themes, and Liberation Day transformed into a civic celebration with a parade, floats, marching bands, fireworks, and even the crowning of a Liberation Day Queen. In the 1960s and 1970s, Liberation Day catered to the tourism industry by promoting a “peaceful” postwar image of the Japanese. In the 1980s, Liberation Day embraced multiculturalism to reflect a new population of Asian settlers. In the 1990s, Chamorro political activist groups critiqued Liberation Day’s narratives of triumph and loyalty, suggesting that the name “Reoccupation Day” would better reflect the colonial reality of Guam. Camacho’s in-depth analysis of Liberation Day shows how the commemoration was a “marker of island history” because it “possessed tremendous flexibility as a platform for local and national politics, and even economics” (93).

The next chapter, “The Land without Heroes,” traces the development of Liberation Day in the Northern Mariana Islands, which commemorates the release of civilians from Camp Susupe on 4 July 1946. After the US takeover of the Northern Marianas, the United States interned Chamorro and Refaluwasch families (Carolinian descendants from the Woleai, Lamotrek, Elato, and Satawal atolls, who settled in the Mariana Islands in the early 1800s) to teach them the English language and American political and social life. After being freed from the camp, most people felt apathy toward celebrating the American war effort and were more focused on returning to their land and rebuilding their lives. Thus, Libera-

tion Day lapsed for almost a decade. Japanese commemorations—such as peace memorials, bone-collecting missions, cremation rituals, and pilgrimages—became far more popular and profitable in terms of tourism. However, the American Memorial Park was eventually created in the 1990s, and it manifested American loyalty and liberation. As in Guam, there were also critiques of the commemoration; for example, Taotao I Redondo, a peace activist group, drew attention on Tinian to the harmful efforts of war and nuclearism. Comparing and contrasting how differently Chamorros experienced, remember, and commemorate the war in Guam and in the Northern Marianas illuminates how profoundly divergent experiences of Japanese and American colonialisms has shaped our severed culture.

The last major chapter, “On the Margins of Memory and History,” speaks to the suppressed, controversial, and painful memories of war in the Marianas, such as Chamorro collaborations with Japan’s colonial police force and the presence of sexual slavery. Chamorro police officers were recruited to enforce Japanese laws in the Marianas; sadly, some officers enjoyed tormenting and punishing their fellow Chamorros, thus causing intracultural tension that still resonates today. Camacho also takes readers into the painful memories of military sexual slavery in Guam and the lives of Chamorro women who constantly faced sexual violence. Such memories from the war are often suppressed because they cause shame, anger, fear, and trauma. By invoking these painful memories, Camacho creates a public space in his work for

these memories to be commemorated. As he profoundly notes, the process of making history is “as much about forgetting as it is about remembering” (160).

*Cultures of Commemoration* is itself a commemorative act. It honors the centrality and diversity of Chamorro experience, agency, and memory; moreover, it honors the ancestral bonds of Chamorros across the archipelago. Overall, Camacho shows how commemorations have the power to shape cultural beliefs and collective memory and, at the same time, how culture has the power to fashion commemorations to reflect historical and ideological shifts. Considering the further militarizing of Guam and the Northern Marianas as a result of the cold war between the US and China, this book teaches us an important lesson at this pivotal moment in our history: if we conscientiously shape our public memories and histories of the past, then we will be better able to determine our future.

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*The Testimony Project: Papua*, edited by Charles E Farhadian. Jayapura: Deiyai Press, 2007. ISBN 978-979-96077-6-8; xvii + 179 pages, black-and-white photos. Paper, US\$14.99.

The straightforward prose used by Charles Farhadian stands as an example to all anthropologists who strive to make their source material available to people beyond restricted academic audiences. Transcripts of extended interviews with twelve