

Explorations in Sights and Sounds

skimpier than this prose that carries elegantly—in her simple informative style—so much weighty personal and communal legacy.

Walters illustrates from her “insider” point of view the alienation and confusion of a Native child in a white educational system. In school, Indians were discussed always in reference to the past or were erased completely from the curriculum because they were seen as defeated people.

In literature, Walters sees the misrepresentations and the eradication of tribal people as educative propaganda used to keep Indians in their place—that is, invisible, dead—while maintaining the “mainstream’s” status quo. Because nontribal scholars “do not necessarily know tribal people best,” Walters argues for the “inherent right of tribal people to interpret events and time in their worlds according to their own aesthetics and values, as a component of American history, even when this interpretation is different from that of mainstream history.” So far, she adds, even after five hundred years, Native people “remain strangers to American society and history.”

With this book, Walters’ discussion of her own life and literature makes her and her nontribal readers less estranged from one another. Walters generously offers readers a rather comprehensive look into the legacy of one Native American writer, her way of thinking and being in the world, a personal definition that refines and expands public definitions of “American “ history and literature.

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Usha Welaratna. *Beyond the Killing Fields: Voices of Nine Cambodian Survivors in America.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993) 285 pp., \$29.95 hard cover.

Although approximately 150,000 Cambodians now reside in the United States, very little information has been published on this group. When available at all, descriptive and statistical data about Cambodians is generally lumped together with that of Laotians and Vietnamese in the category “Southeast Asian Refugees.” This is a grave shortcoming: first, because the Cambodians’ culture is quite different from that of other Southeast Asians—making aggregate accounts of their experience inaccurate; and second, and perhaps even more important, is the fact that the Cambodian people have experienced one of the most horrible holocausts in modern history, making their ordeal one which should be well-documented such that

humanity might prevent its repetition. However, with the publication of *Beyond the Killing Fields*, a valuable new source of information about Cambodians in the United States has become available.

The author feels a strong kinship with the Cambodians because, like them, she is also an Asian immigrant (from Sri Lanka) and a devotee of Theravada Buddhism. Based upon this highly personal approach, the book is built around in-depth interviews with nine Cambodians residing in the San Francisco Bay area.

The respondents, whom the author refers to as “narrators,” are a diverse group and include a former monk, a teenage girl, a welfare mother, and a college student, among others. Each offers a detailed record of his or her life history and world view including life before, during, and after “the Pol Pot time,” when a revolutionary movement attempted to remake Cambodian society from the bottom up and, in so doing, annihilated 1.5 million of the nation’s seven million inhabitants.

Subjects describe how they were able to survive during a time when so many others perished. Because the author is interested in Buddhism, she directs her narrators and readers to consider the huge contradiction involved in how a Buddhist people who prohibit killing could engage in such an orgy of violence, as well as how the survivors of this holocaust cope with the moral and spiritual implications of these events. Welaratna finds that while some narrators wish they could “kill the Pol Pot” for their evil actions, others remain true to Buddhist teachings and continue to reject violence.

Another of the book’s major concerns is the extent to which Cambodians are accepting typically American outlooks and cultural practices. The author concludes that while Cambodians adopt certain Americanisms, they are less willing to assimilate than many other contemporary immigrant and refugee groups—including the Vietnamese, with whom they are often compared. Welaratna argues that scholars and policy makers who condemn Cambodians’ “lack of success” in the United States fail to understand Cambodians’ actions in terms of the culturally-rooted values and motives that they, themselves, hold dear.

My criticisms of *Beyond the Killing Fields* center around the author’s use of oral history methodology. While her nine respondents give very vivid accounts of their experiences, such a small group fails to give a broad picture of the Cambodian experience in the United States. Further, while the author emphasizes Cambodian culture’s emphasis on collectivism, the book has a decidedly individualistic focus—rooted both in the narrators’ life histories as well as the author’s references to her own background and interactions with the subjects. In contrast, there is virtually no information about

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Cambodian communities in the United States. We are not even informed of the neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area where these narrators live.

Consequently, a reader of this book would have no idea of the full nature of Cambodian adaptation to the United States, one that includes thriving Cambodian business districts in Long Beach, California, and Revere, Massachusetts, or their extensive involvement in Southern California donut shops as revealed in Charles Davis' documentary *Cambodian Donut Dreams* which aired on PBS.

These criticisms notwithstanding, *Beyond the Killing Fields* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Cambodian refugees and holocaust studies. It is inherently fascinating and the interviews are rich and well edited. The book is appropriate for a broad range of readers, including both academics and an interested public.

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Lynn Brodie Welch, ed. *Perspectives on Minority Women in Higher Education*. (New York: Praeger, 1992) x, 163 pp., \$39.95.

This book is a compilation of papers presented at various International Conferences for Women in Higher Education sponsored by the University of Texas at El Paso. The chapters focus on the educational experience from very different views including classroom experiences, relations with co-workers, historical aspects, and minority women as leaders. In addition, there are chapters focusing on the experiences of specific ethnic groups, with the content at times being only marginally related to the higher educational experience. Collectively, the chapters provide the reader with a broad perspective on the situations minority women are likely to encounter while working in colleges and universities in many parts of the world.

One weakness of the book is a lack of references at the end of each article. There is an extensive list of sources provided in the bibliography at the end of the book, but this makes it difficult to determine all of the sources which were used to support the content of a specific article. This would be less critical if the book had been written by one author, but as a cumulation of works from various individuals, the reader has no sense of how well an author's conclusions are supported by previous research.

In covering a wide range of issues related to the experiences of minority women in higher education, the shortness of the total book dictates that each of the issues is not covered in great depth. As