

dropped anchor in the tiny fishing hamlet of Charlesville, Nova Scotia, in 1987. Some village residents greeted the refugees with sandwiches and tea before they were “whisked away and relocated” by government agents. Mannik revisits the “social drama” that ensued, contrasting an overwhelmingly negative discourse of breached borders and national threat with the simple hospitality offered by Charlesville residents. In a similar juxtaposition, Linda Briskman and Michelle Dimasi detail efforts by residents of the Australian Territory of Christmas Island to rescue men, women, and children from the wreck of the *Janga*, an asylum-seeker boat that was dashed to pieces in stormy weather. While dominant Australian narratives cast shipwrecked migrants as unwelcome invaders, residents of Christmas Island reacted with compassion and sought to aid and comfort survivors. Articles on art installations and performances, museum exhibits, the protests of mothers of migrant children “disappeared” in transit, as well as discussions of works of fiction help to clarify the often nightmarish labyrinth of hostility and fleeting moments of hospitality encountered by asylum-seekers. The volume is organized in four sections: “Embedded Memories for Public Consumption,” “The Artist and the Illegal Migrant,” “Media, Politics and Representation” and “Stories of Smuggling, Trauma and Rescue.”

The breadth of topics in this volume holds the reader’s attention while maintaining an unwavering focus on the most basic rights of life and liberty. The slipperiness of human rights, however, lies in the fact that sovereign states are responsible for creating the infrastructure through which these rights are made possible. Readers may desire more emphasis on the structural violence that propels desperate citizens to risk all on the open seas or the smug complicity of those who fortify their borders and darken the lighthouses, orchestrating crimes against humanity as

“accidents.” To the editor’s credit, no single, simple cause or solution is presented. Readers will do well to consider the entire volume and to reflect on the powerful image of boats made of rotted planks, weighted beyond capacity with the fragile aspirations of our children. Who has the courage to offer safe harbour? The authors assembled here are not counting on sovereign states to take the lead.

This is a collection that is both useful (for classroom or curatorial purposes) as well as transformative. Authors draw on nearly a century of social science theory, including Hannah Arendt, Victor Turner, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida, without contrivance or pretense. But perhaps the most satisfying quality in this collection results from the ways that each author engages a community beyond academia. There is a prevailing concern for actions, metaphors, or images that transform. Too often, when grave violations of human rights are acknowledged at all, readers are left with a sense of helpless despair. How can safe migration be facilitated? How can new arrivals be incorporated into the social body and national identity? These chapters detail specific effects that individual acts, narratives, protests, exhibits, or performances can have, shifting public perception and, perhaps, changing public policy. The volume seeks to make visible those who have been lost at sea or swallowed in the gaps and holes of global discourses of population management, national identity, and state security. It also charts immediate and strategic ways in which individuals and their communities might hold fast the Rights of Man after all, even in these turbulent and cynical times.

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Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto



Eric Tang

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Eric Tang’s *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* is an important contribution to the literature on Southeast Asian refugees in the United States. As the title conveys, the book challenges the image of Cambodian refugees in the Bronx section of New York City as “saved,” or resettlement as a “solution,” either to the war in Indochina or to what Tang characterizes as a “veritable war” against the poorest residents of America’s

cities. The term *hyperghetto*, which Tang takes from sociologist Loïc Wacquant, refers to the idea that the poorest urban residents are no longer seen as useful by the state or corporate America. Instead of being recruited into the lowest levels of the workforce, they can only be held captive, imprisoned by harsh regulation in the welfare system and physically disciplined and controlled by an increasingly militarized police.¹

Just over half of Cambodian refugees, survivors of the Khmer Rouge atrocities of displacement, forced labour camps, starvation, and mass executions, and years in terrible conditions in refugee camps in Thailand, found themselves relocated to these poor and violent inner city landscapes. Tang argues that contrary to some analyses, Cambodians were not racialized into the underclass—rather they were seen as different from the other residents of the hyperghetto, a pattern he terms “refugee exceptionalism.” Cambodians were resettled there, but only temporarily, until they would inevitably be “saved” and leave. Their supposed ability to do so positions them in sharp contrast to the so-called underserving domestic minorities, and justifies the harsh treatment by the hyperghetto. Refugees are doubly rescued, from us imperialist policies that brought war to Cambodia, and from us domestic policies that enslave those in the inner cities. The rub here is that, for most Cambodians in the Bronx, the redemptive storyline never plays out; they are trapped in the violent captivity of the urban centre.

Tang constructs the argument by telling the story of a woman named Ra Pronh, her husband Heng, and their seven children. Her story describes her forced marriage to Heng under the Khmer Rouge regime, her life in the refugee camps, and resettlement in the Bronx in 1986. Crucial to this telling is the concept of “refugee temporality,” Tang’s notion that across all these circumstances there is no turning point, no freedom, but rather a familiar ongoing sense of entrapment that Ra resists through continual movement. Chapter 2 focuses on housing, following Ra and her family as they move through a series of appalling unheated, substandard apartments. Chapter 3 analyzes Ra’s family’s dependence on and resistance to the welfare system, especially after the changes to the system in 1996. Here Tang draws on his own engagement with the community by working with the Young Leaders Project to resist these changes.

Chapter 4 analyzes workfare and the “welfare trap.” Workfare was supposed to take so much of the recipients’ time they could not “cheat” with outside cash employment, while at the same time welfare did not provide enough income to survive. Instead Ra and others choose home-based, sweatshop production, what Tang in chapter 5 calls “the sweatshops of the neoplantation.” Here Tang makes the good point that discussions of “global cities” or the “third worlding” of us cities usually focus on ethnic enclaves and miss the global sweatshop workers of the hyperghetto. Finally, chapter 6, “Motherhood,” focuses on the destruction of family by the combined social service and criminal justice systems. Ra, in striking out at a man she perceives as threatening her daughter, is convicted of assault. Then, after saying in a counselling session that she had hit her child, she is restricted from access to her youngest son. Tang analyzes

the violence of the hyperghetto as gendered, where Black women are cast as deviants, criminals, and “bad mothers.” Cambodian women do not suffer quite the same casting but are subjected to a different form of racist gendering—the need to be saved from their own backward culture. In the conclusion, Ra is injured in a traffic accident, becomes eligible for Supplemental Security Income (a federal income supplement), and is finally relieved of the stress of needing multiple forms of income. At the time the book was written, five of the seven children had full-time jobs and two had finished undergraduate university degrees, but Tang cautions that the “specter of chronic unemployment and welfare dependency still loomed” (168). Only the child who had become a hair stylist in Manhattan felt he was on a path to long-term economic security.

Tang is writing against earlier work on refugees in the United States, which focused on cultural groups without giving adequate consideration to the context where they were resettled. Indeed this is the key contribution of the book. At the same time, *Unsettled* could have benefitted from including some references to Cambodian cultural models—not as a reified, static system, but as one source of ideas from which Ra and others who left Cambodia as adults are no doubt drawing. Instead Tang seems to go to great lengths to avoid this approach. When the Cambodians he is trying to help organize have their own ideas about how to stage a protest, Tang turns to Paulo Freire on education (108–9); or when discussing resistance he introduces the idea of “blues epistemology,” which critiques “linear progressive narratives” (133). These concepts may be fruitful sources for understanding the hybrid cultural world of Cambodians in the Bronx, yet surely Ra is also using concepts of social hierarchy and Buddhist notions of cyclical time drawn from the cognitive map from her youth. Buddhism appears only once in the text, when Ra’s daughter says about a Buddha image in the living room, “We never forget religion.” Understanding Ra’s choices, within the limits of the hyperghetto world, would have benefitted from considering her cultural roots. Tang’s work thus complements earlier work by Nancy Smith-Hefner, Aihwa Ong, and others; taken together with and contrasted with these works, Tang’s book helps flesh out our understanding of the lives of Cambodians in the United States.²

Finally, on sexual violence, Tang writes, “Khmer Rouge soldiers routinely raped Cambodian women” (139). In the early historical work on the period, rape was said to have never occurred, since the Khmer Rouge punished those who violated the strict code of conduct for their own cadre with death. We know from first-person accounts published later that rape did occur, but most often when the crime could be hidden, such as just before women were to be executed. From my knowledge of this literature, it is inaccurate to call this

“routine.” Tang also represents all Khmer Rouge era “forced” marriages as negative and violent, citing Peg Levine’s work; but in fact she takes issue with this characterization, even questioning the word forced. Part of Ra’s “captivity” is that she remained in such a marriage, but Levine points out that the majority of such marriages endured, partly because of the bonds created by the struggle to survive the Khmer Rouge era.³

NOTES

- ¹ Loïc Wacquant, “Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh,” *Punishment and Society* 3, no. 1 (2001): 95–133.

- ² Nancy Smith-Hefner, *Khmer American: Identity and Moral Education in a Diasporic Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Aihwa Ong, *Budha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship and the New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- ³ Peg Levine, *Love and Dread in Cambodia: Weddings, Births, and Ritual Harm under the Khmer Rouge* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2010).

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Across the Seas: Australia’s Response to Refugees—A History



Klaus Neumann

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In his latest book, Klaus Neumann takes us on a very exciting tour through the deeps and shallows of Australia’s history of migration and asylum policies between 1901 and 1977 and sets out how subsequent administrations in Canberra have dealt with refugees intending to reach the “lucky country.” Not only is Neumann’s book very timely, given the record numbers of displaced people around the entire globe, but also, by covering the gamut of key global events and domestic stimuli for Australia’s more recent refugee policies, his go-to compendium fills a gaping hole in the accessible academic literature.

Against popular belief that Australia is the most sought-after refuge among the world’s displaced people, Neumann shows that for most of the 20th century, Australia was not a preferred destination for refugees, simply because it was deemed too remote and expensive to reach. More importantly, Australia, which at the time had an even more ethnically homogeneous population than its distant motherland, was not open to people with the “wrong” skin colour or the “wrong” religion. Too robust were the fears “of infiltration by professional trouble makers, whether Jewish terrorists or Communists agents, [who] will arouse the natural suspicion of all who wish to see Australia kept Australian” (93). Even before migration and border control became as sophisticated as it is today, there were many ways to block the entry of unwanted people. With expensive landing fees in place—it would have been useful if this book had contextualized them with current costs—that all migrants, other than a few who were exempt, had to pay upon embarkation, Australia

made sure that those who were simply too poor could not enter (although not long ago, public opinion also deemed that being too wealthy was inappropriate for a “deserving” refugee).

Neumann tells of Chinese stowaways, East German ballerinas, KGB spies, and others whose arrival in Australia was not necessarily the end of an enduring venture. One of the most illuminating stories is that of the publicist Walter Stoltzing. A non-practising Jew from Germany, Stoltzing fell under the 1935 Nuremberg laws, under which Jewish Germans no longer had the same rights as non-Jewish Germans. In order to escape the Nazis and save his life, he came to Australia, only to be viewed as a potentially pro-German enemy alien and interned in a camp, which later circumscribed his employment options.

Despite the prevailing anti-Jewish sentiment, even after the news about the Holocaust had come through, Australia did agree to take in German and, later on, also Polish Jews (yes, there was a clear hierarchy of the desirability of the persecuted). According to Neumann, the prime motivation was not humanitarian, but rather Australia’s urge to keep pace with its peers. Later in the book he presents a similar argument about the slow abolition of the White Australia policy; he considers politicians feared the negative effect it had on Australia’s reputation around the globe.

Whereas chapter 1 lays out how Australia attempted to prevent the arrival of refugees, subsequent chapters show how Australia, particularly when there was a labour shortage, slowly, and not without severe setbacks, started to open