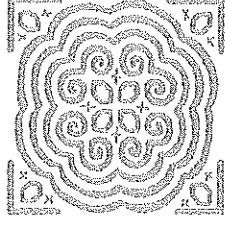


Diversity in Diaspora

Hmong Americans in the Twenty-First Century



Edited by

Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang



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"Reharmonizing" the Generations *Rap, Poetry, and Hmong Oral Tradition*

Nicholas Poss

In 1985, Amy Catlin wrote about performances of Hmong popular music at New Year festivals in the United States that "harmonized" both "the new life with the life left behind, as well as the younger generation with the old" (1985, 96). Born in the post-1975 refugee camps of Thailand, this music combined the soft sounds of Asian and Western pop with themes of loneliness and longing common to traditional Hmong music and verbal arts. Songwriters resituated the homeland lost from China, the place of ancestral origin and return preserved in Hmong rituals, to Laos, the source of the modern Hmong diaspora. The lyrics often pleaded for unity and love in the emerging global Hmong community (G. Y. Lee 2006, 4). As refugees were resettled in third countries such as the United States, France, and Australia, independent artists developed a thriving cassette industry. The movement of these recordings around the globe and new Hmong music industries in Thailand, Laos, and China helped to bridge the diasporic community. As Catlin said at the time, "Perhaps [cassettes of popular music] function to harmonize the entire nation of Hmong in exile by offering a common currency which expresses a united identity."

Today, the Hmong-American community is more diverse than ever and perhaps not so easily reconciled. At the time of Catlin's article, the 1975 communist takeover of Laos and the subsequent persecution and mass movement of Hmong people to Thai refugee camps and beyond was not so far removed. Adults and adolescents had shared memories of the Secret War and personal narratives that included a harrowing journey from Laos to Thailand. Now, third-generation Hmong Americans live side-by-side with recent immigrants from Wat Tham Krabok, some of whom lived in Thai refugee camps for decades. Hmong popular music now includes

everything from boy bands to heavy metal, Christian rock to *mor lam* (a genre of popular music in Laos and Thailand based on traditional folk music). In many ways, the sentimental Hmong popular music pioneered in the 1970s has become a part of traditional culture. It has been the accompaniment to the lives of several generations in all parts of the Hmong diaspora. In the United States, it remains a fixture at Hmong New Year festivals where young and old can share the dance floor.

For many young Hmong Americans, intergenerational communication remains problematic. They are more proficient at speaking English than Hmong, and the culture of their parents and grandparents can seem foreign. Yet they are proud of their heritage and are eager to connect to their family history and traditional Hmong practices. This desire was voiced repeatedly by the young Hmong Americans I met while conducting field research in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Since 2000, I have studied *rajl*, a family of traditional wind instruments including flutes and free-reed pipes. Musicians communicate verbal messages through melodies on these instruments that can be understood sometimes word-for-word by skilled listeners. The practice is maintained by first-generation immigrants, almost all of whom learned to play before arriving in the United States. It has not been passed on to the second generation, most of whom lack the detailed knowledge of the Hmong language and conventional musical phrases to perform on the *rajl* or to understand the messages. Some young Hmong Americans have taken an interest in the *qeej*, a free-reed mouth organ integral to the traditional funeral ritual and also played at New Year festivals. Hmong community organizations around the country offer classes to groups of boys in instrumental technique, repertoire, and the dancelike movements made while playing.¹

I also met a handful of young Hmong artists who have found resonances between contemporary American art forms—such as rap and performance poetry—and the traditional arts practiced by their elders. Brothers Vong and Tou Saiko Lee capitalize on these relationships, not only to entertain audiences through spoken word poetry and rap but to educate people about Hmong history and culture. Their work raises awareness about ongoing crises in the Hmong diaspora and offers a starting point for dialogue between generations. They promote a message of community empowerment through education and respect for the older generations. By playing on themes of Hmong folklore and experiences of modern Hmong American life, they subvert characterizations of Hmong people rooted in the colonial past. Through the intersection of Hmong and American oral traditions, these artists negotiate the complexities of Hmong American

life and contribute to the ongoing development of a transnational Hmong identity.

Tou Saiko was born in the Nong Khai refugee camp in 1979, but he spent most of his early life in the inner city of Syracuse, New York. In the words of his brother Vong, who was born shortly after their family moved to the United States, Syracuse was like "a forgotten city, all of these abandoned homes no one cared about. It was just a crumbling city, lots of corruption. We didn't realize how bad it was when we were little, until now" (18XEEM 2007). Theirs was one of the few Hmong families in a neighborhood dominated by African Americans and Latinos where hip-hop was the common culture.

The brothers were interested in rap, but they didn't begin to write poetry until they moved to St. Paul as teenagers. Tou Saiko recalls writing poems at age thirteen about his experiences with gangs and racism for a class at school. Three years later, he spent time in a juvenile correctional facility for being involved in a gang-related fight. The experience intensified his desire to write poetry and lyrics. In his words, "I was in this very blank space with no walls. That's what forced me to be creative. I couldn't just do nothing" (Collopy 2008). When Vong later encountered his brother's work, he was inspired to write his own lyrics, and the two decided to collaborate as rappers. From the beginning, they wanted to communicate their experiences as Hmong Americans, and in 1999, when they performed for the first time, there were few Hmong rappers. "There needed to be a group that represented our people and we wanted to be that group," says Vong, who goes by the emcee name "Knowstalgic" (V. Lee 2008).

Although their music addresses Hmong issues, both Tou Saiko and Vong rap in the English language. Tou Saiko feels that the English language is vital to his identity and to expressing himself truthfully: "I think, dream, and feel in English" (T. S. Lee 2004). His knowledge of Hmong is more practical than poetic. He speaks Hmong with his parents and grandparents when talking about running an errand to the grocery store or planning a family get-together on the weekend. According to Vong, this was encouraged by their parents, who upon arriving "heard that this was the land of opportunity and you won't make it if you don't know English. They taught us the basics of Hmong—just enough to understand people and communicate, and then the rest was just English" (18XEEM 2007). This limited vocabulary precludes the clever wordplay and articulate delivery expected of a hip-hop artist, especially during extemporaneous rapping or freestyling. Rapping in English has the advantage of making their message of community improvement through understanding and education accessible to a wide audience.

Their broad appeal allows Delicious Venom to participate in the diverse hip-hop scene in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, while also supporting the growing number of Hmong emcees following in their footsteps. They feel no conflict as Hmong people performing in a genre that has historically been associated with the African American community. Andy Bennett has written,

The commercial availability of rap music and hip hop style at a global level has ensured its broadening appeal with the result that it is no longer viable to speak in terms of rap and hip hop as being exclusively "black" cultural forms. Taking the basic tenets of the rap style, young people of differing ethnic backgrounds in cities and regions across the globe have reworked the rap text in ways that incorporate local knowledges and sensibilities, thus transforming rap into a means of communication that works in the context of specific localities. (Bennett 2001)

For Vong and Tou Saiko, rapping is a natural outgrowth of their cultural experience, although they tailor their message for Hmong Americans. As Vong says,

I feel that Hip Hop has been adapted into many traditions already.... It is not too popular in the Hmong community yet, but I feel that the direction that we are taking our music is making it become more acceptable to the Hmong community because they can connect with our lyrics. I see it affecting our community in a great way because there is so much bottled up inside so many of us and [we] need a way to express ourselves. (V. Lee 2008)

Tou Saiko's lyrics in an untitled rap from a 2004 album demonstrate an ability to playfully combine elements of Hmong American life in the context of hip-hop. Through references to papaya salad, soccer, and musical performances, he evokes the atmosphere of a Fourth of July soccer tournament, a popular gathering time for the Hmong American community. In quick succession, Tou Saiko touches on emblems of traditional Hmong culture such as ancestor worship, "Green, White, and Striped" (designations of three major Hmong culture and language groups), and even jokes about the influx of immigrants from the Wat Tham Krabok resettlement. Following is an excerpt of Tou Saiko Lee's verse by Delicious Venom, 2004, transcribed by Nicholas Poss and edited by Tou Saiko Lee:

Green, White, and Striped
The few nights of madness
third and forth hype
•
The sight of people that have this
past tournaments, heat rash and cash
For papaya salad
Rice and ice water for the bands
Audio refugee camp
A hot mix of rock 'n' roll and hip hop
When it don't stop
It becomes a movement
You can chose to watch soccer fights or music
...
Ancestor spirits
Too many people fear us
They just don't understand
And labeled us savages
That don't have a land
From the camps of Thailand
To the jungles of Laos
We're going all out
For more, like
Fifteen thousand refugees
Knocking on your door

At the end of the verse, Tou Saiko alludes to characterizations of the Hmong as "savages." References to the Hmong as untamed barbarians and fierce warriors date back hundreds of years to Qing Dynasty accounts of Hmong inhabitants on the southwestern frontier of China who refused to submit to imperial rule. These stereotypes have persisted in the romanticized motto, "Hmong means free," which, as Mai Na Lee argues, essentializes Hmong identity and echoes colonial attitudes (1998). Tou Saiko's lyrics root this oversimplification in fear and misunderstanding. He demystifies young Hmong Americans: They like rock 'n' roll and hip-hop, but they also have ties to traditional Hmong culture. As Gary Via Lee has noted, "[The Hmong] are not one single homogenous group located in one single geographical area, but a multi-ethnic and multilingual community living with many people in many countries" (1996). The music of Delicious Venom emphasizes this diversity and gives voice to the varied manifestations of shared history.

In "30 Year Secret," from 2005, Delicious Venom brings together several narrative strands of Hmong diaspora. The song is a collaboration between Tou Saiko and Vong, as well as rapper Doua Yang, singer Ly VS Thao, and guitarist Xeev Xwm Vaj. The only instrumental accompaniment is a repeated riff played on an acoustic guitar. The gentle sound of Vaj's guitar is joined by the wordless singing of Thao, who weaves a simple melody through the rich, R & B-influenced harmony. In the first verse, Tou Saiko vividly portrays the suffering of Hmong people in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, as well as the human rights violations perpetrated against Hmong people around the Xaysomboun District of Laos who continue to resist the communist government. He begins,

Thirty years of war
Persecuted and scorned
Behind enemy lines
A small child is born.
What will he live for
Fighting for the rest of his life,
Gunshots, chemical bombs
Or sliced with a knife.

Vong Lee follows with a verse that personalizes the struggles and perseverance of the Hmong in America. Rather than "orphans of history," as one newspaper headline described the Hmong diaspora, he sees survivors who value family and community (Magagnoli 2000). He sees not helplessness but strength in mutual support and diversity. Vong's final plea is for personal action based on education and awareness (excerpt of Vong Lee's verse from "30 Year Secret," H Project, 2005, transcribed by Nicholas Poss and edited by Vong Lee):

Sister's in the kitchen
Cooking breakfast to the smell of smoke
Flea market weekend
Sleeping sixty minutes
Two, two hours
Been working overtime
Ain't had no time to take a shower
Family business slow
Still on the go
Blow for blow

We slug it out
Against the winter and snow

Ever since existence
We have been survivors
Neglected
Never claim a country
Just want to live and let live
Now it's been thirty years
Since imprisonment in the jungle
For the Hmong
Remind your elders
And educate the young
Laotian government, genocide
Human rights and violation
Clock is running down
To total annihilation
Lift a finger now
Stop procrastinating
Save a child
Save a mother
Throw your clock
And watch away
The time is now
Stop searching for time
Time is running out
Stop searching for time
Time is running out

Tou and Vong offer no political solutions in their lyrics, but they draw connections across the Hmong diaspora to raise awareness about the continuing persecution of Hmong people. In Vong's words, "It's not that it's neglected, but it's something that most Hmong can't even begin to fathom because of how painful it is to think about it. I think that the song opens up discussion for people and allows them to ponder on the subject, and that was one of our main purposes of writing it" (V. Lee 2008). Conventional characterizations of Hmong people based in colonial history present them as culturally backward and warlike. Delicious Venom confronts these essentialized representations by voicing Hmong experiences from multiple places and times. George Lipsitz describes such postcolonial cultural expressions as

based in the experiences of people and communities, rather than on the master narratives of the nation state. They foreground questions of cultural and social identity, rather than direct struggles for political power. They are pragmatic, immediate, and non-ideological, seeking to change life but putting forth no single blueprint for the future. (Lipsitz 1994, 32).

He further suggests that this is embodied in hip-hop culture, the popularity of which

has been perhaps the most important recent manifestation of post-colonial culture on a global scale.... It brings a community into being through performance, and it maps out real and imagined relations between people that speak to the realities of displacement, disillusion, and despair created by the austerity economy of post-industrial capitalism. (34)

Delicious Venom envisages a transnational and multigenerational Hmong community that perseveres against political and economic hardship. Tou and Vong have been contacted about the song from Hmong people as far away as France, Australia, and Thailand—evidence that they have succeeded in disseminating their message.

"30 Year Secret" was part of the H Project, a collaboration between Hmong artists across the United States in response to the ongoing conflict between the government of Laos and the Hmong resistance. Around three hundred thousand Hmong live in relative peace as citizens of Laos, but a small group of eight hundred to two thousand Hmong people hold out against the communist government. These families hide in the jungle, surviving by foraging for food under constant threat of attack by Lao military forces. Hmong who surrender or who are captured have been subject to forced labor, arbitrary detention, and other forms of ill-treatment in violation of their human rights (Amnesty International 2007). Their roots go back to the Laotian Civil War, when many Hmong people fought against the communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. Some people continue to hope that they will be rescued by the United States, which supported the Hmong during what came to be called the Secret War. Their plight was not widely known until 2002, when the Fact Finding Commission, a Hmong lobby group, circulated a video documenting the hunger and violence they face. Soon, Western journalists including Andrew Perrin of *Time Asia* and Ruhi Hamid of the BBC made contact with various groups, drawing

even more attention to the situation (Lee and Tapp 2005).² Vong and Tou Saiko were motivated by rallies held by the Minnesota group Hmoob Hlub Hmoob publicizing the human rights abuses. Together with other artists, they decided to produce a CD of music and perform a series of concerts. According to Vong, "We worked with H3, and got them to donate DVDs so we could do a callout to artists who wanted to help with the project and anyone who was interested. We mailed them each a DVD of the presentation, a documentary of what was going on in Laos, to educate them, and hopefully inspire them" (18XHEM 2007). The album, *The H-Project: Silence No More*, gathered together the contributions, which included performances ranging from spoken word poetry to hard rock and electronica.

Over the past few years, Tou Saiko and Vong have learned more about Hmong oral traditions and have come to see their work as an extension of those traditions. After high school, Tou Saiko began to study spoken word poetry and the history of rap. Cheryl Keyes has said, "Rappin—talking in rhythm over music or to an internally realized beat," as found in hip-hop, can be traced from "African bardic traditions to the rural oral southern-based expressive forms of African Americans: storytellers, blues singers, preachers, toasters and prison boasters" (Keyes 1996). Such art forms place an emphasis on the playful use of language and honest personal expression. Geneva Smitherman has described rappers as "postmodern African griots," the traditional praise singers and cultural historians in several West African cultures (Smitherman 1997, 4). Like a griot, a rapper must be "lyrically/linguistically fluent; he or she is expected to testify, to speak the truth, to come wit [sic] it in no uncertain terms." Tou Saiko found these elements embodied in work of Black Nationalist poets of the 1960s such as the Last Poets, the Watts Prophets, and Gil Scott-Heron. They rhythmically recited poetry, often with musical accompaniment—an important forerunner to modern rappers.

Mai Neng Moua, a Hmong American poet and editor of the *Paj Ntaub Voice* literary magazine, was one of the first to suggest a connection to Tou Saiko between his spoken word poetry based on African American oral traditions and Hmong *kwv txhiaj*, a form of extemporaneous, sung poetry (T. S. Lee 2004). At the time, he was becoming more interested in traditional Hmong culture, and he approached his grandmother, Youa Chang, a skilled performer of *kwv txhiaj*. Tou Saiko remembers sharing one of his early Hmong language poems with her:

[S]he was like, "That all you got?" She started just saying this really fast poem in Hmong. It was tight.... She never had the opportunity

to go to school. She never learned how to read or write. So she either had to memorize poems or she had to freestyle it. . . . I thought it was amazing she could freestyle her poetry. So my grandmother is an MC, essentially. I made a connection between what she does with *kvv txhiaj* and what I do with spoken word poetry and hip hop. It's the same thing, except it's in a different style and in a different generation. (T. S. Lee 2008)

Until the development of a romanized script in the early 1950s, Hmong culture was primarily oral, and verbal arts like *kvv txhiaj* were widespread. In *kvv txhiaj*, skilled singers compose words and melodies on the spot, following poetic and musical conventions. Each verse is typically made up of two similar sections (sometimes called *ob fab*, or two sides). The first *fab* of the verse usually consists of two rhymed lines between several unrhymed lines. The rhyming words agree in vowel but not necessarily in lexical tone and may occur at any point of the line. The *fab* is then repeated but with a new pair of rhymed words replacing the previous pair. Depending upon the context of performance, the new pair of words can be synonyms, antonyms, or words with similar meaning to the earlier rhymed words (Catlin 1982, 72). A typical performance of *kvv txhiaj* is made up of several verses, each of which begin with a repeated musical/poetic motive that serves to identify the style (Hmoob Dawb, Moob Leeg, etc.), genre, and pitch range. In Laos and Thailand, *kvv txhiaj* continue to be sung during courtship rituals at annual New Year festivals. Young women and men display their skill, intelligence, and wit as they trade verses with potential spouses. *Kvv txhiaj* are also performed in the United States in a variety of contexts, and recordings of *kvv txhiaj* remain popular, especially among the older generation. Rather than improvising songs, second-generation Hmong people often memorize words to sing onstage at New Year celebrations in the United States.

Tou Saiko and Vong appreciate the ability of their elders to creatively combine words and rhymes in performance, similar to the spontaneous wordplay of freestyle rap and spoken word poetry. But there is a deeper relationship between their art and the art of the older generation. As Tou Saiko says, "My grandmother is passing on the values that she was taught by her mother in her own storytelling through the poetry of *kvv txhiaj*" (T. S. Lee 2006). *Kvv txhiaj* plees may be about love and longing in courtship, but the value of education and the importance of respect for elders and care for the community are frequent themes in other genres. Tou Saiko continues, "Respect for the ones before us and being influential for the ones

coming up after us is definitely something that we value deeply." Their rap and poetry transmit these values and provide a link to Hmong traditions. Personal expression is also vital to hip-hop and traditional Hmong verbal arts. Catlin suggests that Hmong arts like *kvv txhiaj* and traditional Hmong verbal arts on instruments permit the communication of strong feelings that would be inappropriate to speak in other contexts (Catlin 1992, 50). Vong sees his rapping as an "adaptation" of hip-hop to Hmong culture: "I feel that the way we are taking our music is making it become more acceptable to the Hmong community in a great way because there is so much bottled up inside so many of us and we need a way to express ourselves" (V. Lee 2008).

The differences between rap, spoken word poetry, and *kvv txhiaj* are significant. *Kvv txhiaj* are sung using a wide variety of scale types, while rap and spoken word tend to be recited without much melodic content. Rhythmically, *kvv txhiaj* tend to be sung with a steady but flexible pulse that can be modulated to highlight important words. Spoken word poetry can be performed utilizing a variety of rhythmic techniques, but rap is governed by a strict metrical structure in which accent and syncopation are used for variety and emphasis. Rap and spoken word also make more extensive use of rhyme, both at the ends of lines and within lines. Despite the origin of these genres in oral tradition, Tricia Rose notes that this type of composition shows the influence of "literate" forms of thought (1994, 87–88). Rose draws on Walter Ong's concept of "postliterate orality" to describe the oral performance of rap: "The concept of postliterate orality merges orally influenced traditions that are created and embedded in a postliterate, technologically sophisticated cultural context. Postliterate orality describes the way oral traditions are revised and presented in a technologically sophisticated context" (86). A rapper usually writes out a set of lyrics and memorizes it for performance rather than combining poetic formulas extemporaneously. This leads to a sense of individual authorship uncommon in oral cultures. At the same time, spoken word poets and rappers do engage in improvised performances. Freestyling is most strongly associated with rap battles in which two rappers trade insults. The opponents respond to the immediate situation but draw on preconceived patterns and rhymes. This more closely approximates the way in which singers of *kvv txhiaj* construct a performance, but the performative context and sonic effect have little in common.

These differences have not prevented Youa Chang from appreciating the art of her grandchildren. Tou Saiko says, "It comes from the same soul. And it's a voice. You're giving a voice to your community and your perspectives, and even my grandmother, when she saw us perform, she said, 'That's

something that's similar to what I do" (Roberts 2006). Youa and Tou Saiko now perform together as Fresh Traditions. In performance, they alternate a stanza at a time—Tou Saiko reciting and improvising spoken word poetry in English and his grandmother singing *kvv txhiaj* in Hmong. They decide on a theme before each performance but commonly address the importance of education and the ordinary struggle of daily life. Youa takes the stage in traditional Hmong dress (an ornately embroidered skirt and deep purple headress), while Tou Saiko prefers jeans and a T-shirt, although they wear matching sunglasses. A single microphone is passed between them—not unlike the antiphonal performance of *kvv txhiaj* between two singers. Tou Saiko also takes time to educate the audience about Hmong history and culture and the relationships he finds between his poetry and the *kvv txhiaj* of his grandmother.

This dialogue between generations is not confined to the stage. It provides a model of interaction for young Hmong Americans who are interested in their heritage but unsure of how the culture of the older generation relates to their lives. The experience has inspired Tou Saiko to learn how to sing *kvv txhiaj* under the direction of his grandmother. He was recently awarded a Jerome Foundation Grant to travel to Thailand, where he will study with his aunt, as well. Vong has also been inspired to learn more about Hmong history so he can become a teacher. In this way, their message is more than rhetoric. It inspires actions that bridge geographic, generational, and cultural differences. As Tou Saiko explains, they are carrying on tradition in their own way—a way that embraces the diversity of the Hmong diaspora and offers a path for the generations to come.

Harmonizing, in a musical sense, is usually associated with combining individual pitches in a pleasing way. The aural effect is a single sound—a chord. In Catlin's usage, music was able to unify generations within the Hmong American community harmoniously. As seen in the lives of Tou Saiko and Vang, contemporary Hmong Americans are more varied and complex and unity is elusive. Yet, Delicious Venom consciously makes the connection between their rapping and the verbal arts of their elders in a way that emphasizes the similarities despite the great sonic differences. While "30 Year Secret" would never be confused with a *kvv txhiaj*, the individual voice is still there—rhyming, recounting history, and teaching Hmong people to take care of each other the same as always. Similarly, Tou Saiko joins his voice with his grandmother to make the point: Despite the differences you see and hear, we are deeply alike. Tou puts it more poetically: "Our roots are deep underground / Through lands we were forced out of / We grow together with seeds close to the surface / And breathe in

this new land" (T. S. Lee 2008). To play on Catlin's metaphor, this might be a "reharmonization": setting a familiar melody to a new set of chords. The tune is familiar, even if the song does not sound quite the same.

Notes

1. Yer Thao (2006) asserts that only males can play the *qeej*, but the players I have met say that women are not forbidden to learn the instrument. While I have not seen a girl student in any of the *qeej* classes I have witnessed, I have spoken to a few young women who hope to learn to play in the future. Issues of gender have been overlooked in Hmong music scholarship and deserve more critical scrutiny, especially in the face of rapid cultural change.
2. Other journalists have since made contact with Hmong resistance groups, and in 2006, Rebecca Sommer produced the documentary "Hunted Like Animals," featuring interviews with Hmong who had recently escaped into Thailand and been placed in refugee camps.

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Haunting and Inhabitation in Yang's *Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*

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According to Teri Shaffer Yamada, Cambodian American autobiography is a "painful testimony of cultural genocide and dislocation" that shifts the traditional understanding of American autobiography away from a reflection on individualism to a powerful form of "testimonial discourse" in the theater of "global human rights" (2004, 144). Cambodian American autobiographies were well received in the 1980s by a public whose horror at Pol Pot's genocide paved the way for the genre's enthusiastic reception, argues Yamada. Equally numerous have been autobiographies by victims of so-called Third World antidemocratic political regimes: those who survived the Vietnam War, including accounts of perilous sea journeys taken by Vietnamese boat people, as well as narratives of starvation, humiliation, and hard labor experienced by Chinese subjects during Mao's Cultural Revolution.¹ These autobiographies increasingly inhabited the American consciousness for the incredible stories they offered about the ability to survive Cambodia's sanctioned genocide, for example, or the challenge of rising above communist oppression and violence. More appealing, however, were their anticipated conclusions, wrapped up in American dream narratives in which hard work and the painful process of reacclimation were well worth the yearned-for freedom and abundance of democratic America. While Yamada delineates how Cambodian American autobiography follows such a dream trajectory, she does so to promote a more important point: Cambodian American writing is a witnessing and a subsequent testimony that indicts. That is, documented Cambodian American suffering may galvanize public sympathy, but its logical, necessary conclusion is the necessary legal recognition within international courts of its Cambodian American victims. To be acknowledged as witnesses to a