
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Reviewer: *Arafaat A. Valiani*
Columbia University

With close attention paid to the contours of healing and violence, Erik Mueggler's textured ethnography of the struggles and memories of Zhizuo makes a timely appearance. This book sheds light upon the forms and substance of memory, violence and healing. The violence that Mueggler's ethnography discusses pertains to those experiences which members of Zhizuo (or Lipo) underwent; they are a "minority" community residing in Yongren, southwest China. Mueggler's analysis begins roughly at the end of the 1960s and concludes with the 1990s. The experiences of Zhizuoens began with the political interventions of the Chinese state and included the imposition of the policies associated with *Liberation*, land reform, collectivization, *The Great Leap Forward*, *The Cultural Revolution*, the revival of household cultivation, market reforms and family planning campaigns. The violence of these policies involved famine and death experienced by the community during The Great Leap Forward, and the revenge killings occurring after Liberation. More generally, these changes brought about the regimented ordering of time and space, both in practice and in the collective imagination, as imposed on Zhizuo by a weak socialist state.

The author seeks to trace the manners in which the people of Zhizuo carve out a "habitable" place and a historical vision for themselves, at a time when the regimentation of space and "the ordering of time" was the principle prerogative of the state (p. 4). The substance of such views of a Zhizuoen past and place involves countering an ineffective state which assumed a magical character due to its disorganization and its tendency to impose only an illusory vision of itself on its subjects and spaces. It is the community's "practices and poetics" which challenge the state's illusions. Treating afflictions, performing rituals of fertility, and removing non-human entities from bodies and houses are the practices employed by Zhizuoens to escape "the grasp"

of the state (p. 5). The author is careful to note that the state is not external to daily life but it is:

a constitutive force at the heart of the social world. To envision it is to pose and answer questions about the social world, about relations to this world and the objects of which are its substance, and about social needs and social desires. (p. 5)

Stories, and songs too, dot the landscape of Zhizuoen resistance. The official history of policies is employed by the author as devices that translate the community's narratives. These narratives are "an oppositional practice of time" which are meant to undermine the "the temporality of official history" (p. 7); they are not mere stories, they are a means of living. Also, stories included reinterpreting the causality for collective loss which the state rarely admitted or simply shunned. In short, the re-telling of shards from the past is a means for this community to question the politics and state violence of the present and recent past. The stories manifest themselves in concrete practices which help Zhizuoens to find the means to survive and understand their past and future. They also permit them to "articulate longings for reconciliation" (p. 9).

In one particular set of narratives, Mueggler recounts the tale of the *ts'ici*. Officially, it was remembered as an institution which circulated among the prominent houses of the Zhizuoen community. It took responsibility for the community's political and ritual duties. This included hosting outsiders, arbitrating disputes, and the like. The tale of the *ts'ici* tells of its decay, death and rebirth in a ghostly and adulterated form under the socialist state. Originally, the houses which took on the responsibilities of the *ts'ici* were supposed to descend from a single ancestor and bind the community "in a circle of affinal relations" (p. 8). As such, it became a unified entity, location and symbol of the Yi people; ultimately, the basis for the community's national identity. Under the socialist state, the *ts'ici* was taken over and many of the residents who held it were eliminated or attacked as counter-revolutionaries. Just before The Cultural Revolution, the Zhizuoens ritually killed the *ts'ici* at a gathering of community members. Since the genealogy of the community emanated from the *ts'ici*, in part, its public and ritualized

killing stood for a moment in which the *ts'ici*'s corruption "transformed the family of collective ancestors into a cabal of *wild ghosts*, which haunted the community for the next thirty years" (p. 8). During The Cultural Revolution, these ghosts killed off those held responsible for the *ts'ici*'s downfall, for the famine of the Great Leap Forward (1950s), and into the eras of national reconciliation and market reforms. The state was seen as "spectral," ringing hollow in its promises of Liberation (1940s), and "dominated" by those who had died during the famine (Chapter Six: *A Spectral State*).

From the 1940s to the 1990s, the state hoped to penetrate this community but then showed its failings. The author narrates haunting instances when the new socialist state sought to make examples of any challengers by murdering them. This was an era in which the bureaucracy was rendered spectral because it was caught up in its own rhetoric of material excess (super production and procurement, unlimited consumption and socialist redistribution), but also hilarious moments when officials hoping to establish agriculture collectives had to compromise and sponsor "superstitious" rituals in order to ensure rains, collective favour, and, ultimately, local co-operation.

The bureaucracy also focussed its energies on regulating the space and modalities of production and, later, its gaze turned to the wombs and bodies of the community by policing and enforcing family planning programs. In defence, the ghosts of the *ts'ici*—who also came to represent ancestors and government officials who "had died badly"—preyed on living officials, their collaborators, community members, and their health and sanity. *It was the age of wild ghosts*.

Because this is also an ethnography of place, Mueggler traces the various sites which people struggle to inhabit, both physically, in language, and in the imagination. As such, there are separate sections on the afflicted body, family homes, the valley that surrounds the community and the landscape which connects the inhabited world of the community with the nation and the cosmos. Mueggler's work demonstrates how time and space are constantly *made* by his subjects; they are not pre-given by the locality or the state.

The second chapter (*An Intimate Immensity*) takes the reader through a vivid ritual meant to rid Li Qunhua's dreams, body and family of a spirit (*mæ*). Li Qunhua suffered from troubling dreams in which she was plagued with visions of her bearing and carrying children. At the time, the entire community was feeling the burden of mass sterilization programs which sought to deprive families of a precious resource and a source of emotional contentment: the thought and process of bearing and nurturing children. In Li Qunhua's particular case, she bought, hauled, and sold machine-embroidered strips of cloth in order to educate three of her four children who were still of schooling age. Sterilization stood for the source of an enervating force which could rob a woman of her sexual strength and gradually render her permanently weak and ill. Here, the figure of the *mæ* brings together the origin of the violence of sterilization, the state's

intervention into the most intimate spheres of the household (a woman's body and social reproduction), and all the discomfords and anxieties that Li Qunhua experienced. It "unified the source of the violence" of forced sterilization and gave a face to policies, procedures, and the brutal enforcement of "rules" which Zhizuoens just did not comprehend (p. 50).

Exorcising spirits was the only means to rid oneself of such haunting, to begin collective healing, and to mourn *all* those who had died a violent death, or had passed away without a proper funeral and burial. Mueggler's weaving of Li Qunhua's emotional state, her social conditions, the very complicated exorcising ritual, and the state's policies is quite lyrical and not at all mechanical. The author, most definitely, succeeds in connecting the social and political conditions of exercising state power with the disciplining of bodies, while also inviting the reader into the cosmos of the ghost and the spirits.

The third chapter entails a thick description of the allocation and placing of things and people. The direction of the nearby river's flow, the sun's rays, the location of shade, are all enmeshed into the placement of an abode's foundation, its rooms, and the people who will occupy them, with reference to their status and gender. These "representations of space" shape the manner in which spatial practices emerge and produce social relations. In turn, the two "give rise to lived representational space."

Though well-documented, I cannot help but voice a question which needled me from the outset. Accepting the author's principal enterprise as being ethnographic, what about the changes taking place among the Zhizuoens' spatial practices which historical detail may illuminate? His ethnography comes dangerously close to emulating a more sensitive version of "the traditions and rituals of the X"; a form of ethnography which plagued the discipline prior to the 1960s. I found the manners in which he described the organization of the household far too structured and coming close to being an unchanging "culture" and set of "traditions." From my own ethnographic work on space and place in India, I have found that similar practices and concerns exist when it comes to the imagination and enabling of space. However, these principles are the kinds of explanations which an outsider observes and has performed for him or her. But residing in such spaces over a longer period of time (which Mueggler certainly did)—and simultaneously conducting historical and ethnographic investigations—one discovers the discontinuities of the practices which *seem* to be quite durable. One also observes the malleability of relationships between social relations and space. The substance of human interaction, its *un*predictability in terms of status and gender, the dynamics of negotiation, and the cajoling of household members give one a completely different vision of the space, people, and site one is investigating. Glimpses of these types of admissions *are* revealed by the author, but the ethnography of this chapter illustrates a setting which is governed—somewhat too firmly—by what seems to be unchanging practices.

This book is definitely worth reading and should be included as an example of what ethnography can do today. It offers precious insight into the manners in which the violence perpetrated by the socialist Chinese state influenced the intimate lives of the Zhizuoens, and how they resisted it.

Wenona Giles, *Portuguese Women in Toronto: Gender, Immigration, and Nationalism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Reviewer: *M. Gabriela Torres*
York University

The histories of immigrant women in Canada are fundamental to our understanding of how Canada constructs itself through the purposeful inclusion, sidelining and overt exclusion of its prospective citizens. Wenona Giles provides a revealing look into the role that immigrant women play in the construction of Canada's self-image in *Portuguese Women in Toronto*. The everyday dynamics of Canada's nation-building project is illustrated through an analysis of the discourses and practices of Portuguese immigrant women in the 1990s.

Using rich interview narratives and census data Giles shows the complexities of the work and home lives of first- and second-generation Portuguese immigrant women in Toronto. In addition to providing a dynamic portrait of immigration and settlement in Canada's largest city, *Portuguese Women in Toronto* is a revealing look at the everyday effects of Canada's multiculturalism and immigration policies. Though Giles' study is firmly focussed on everyday life in Toronto, it also addresses the broader issue of how women's citizenship, in general, can be influenced by male-biased national policies and the inequalities of global political and economic trends.

Giles' study first focusses on households through a comparative analysis of life stories taken from the first two generations of "Portuguese-Canadians." Particular emphasis is placed on the changes in gender relations that result from immigration and settlement experiences. Looking at different degrees of change in gender relations, Giles emphasizes both the impact of Canadian multiculturalism and immigration policies—as well as global economic and political inequities—on the strategies for survival and advancement adopted by Portuguese immigrant women.

Because women were defined as dependents of men from their entry into Canada, their survival and advancement are particularly affected by the definition of their community as unified and homogenous "ethnicity" in multiculturalism policies. For Giles, the definition of the "Portuguese Community" best serves the interest of the Canadian state and not the varied interests of the women and men defined as its members. For Giles, one of the primary disadvantages

of being defined exclusively as part of an "ethnic minority" by the state is the obfuscation of the degree to which immigrants to Canada have been active participants in the economies and societies of the cities in which they settled.

Portuguese immigrants of diverse class and geographic origins—both men and women—came to Canada as labourers between 1950 and the 1980s to work in the manufacturing, construction, and domestic and retail service industries. Settlement in Canada relied more on personal, regional and familial networks than on government-sponsored settlement and integration programs.

In her discussion of women's work lives, Giles highlights the activist working histories of first-generation women and contrasts these to the non-unionized working spaces where their daughters tend to labour. Second-generation Portuguese women are now employed in clerical, administrative and retail jobs where Giles documents a lack of impulse to collectively change shortcomings in their working conditions. Nevertheless, Giles does note that second-generation women do resist what they still perceive as ethnic- and gender-based discrimination through their involvement in formal party politics.

Yet, women's strategies for resistance are for Giles also defined in part through the influence of hegemonic cultures—Portuguese culture, Portuguese immigrant culture, and the elusive but well used "Canadian" culture. Women must manage the allegiance to competing nationalisms implied by the cultures within which they live. As the life stories show, both first- and second-generation Portuguese women in Toronto must manage competing prescriptions of their behaviour in the home, their involvement outside the home, their attitudes towards education, the ways that they approach child rearing, and even their very definitions of home. Based on a discourse analysis of the proceedings of three Portuguese community conferences between 1982 and 1997, *Portuguese Women in Toronto* explores the construction of community-based strategies of resistance to multiculturalism's ideal of the Canadian nation. These strategies range from advocating a seamless integration into Canada to a type of strategic essentialism that promotes a simplified ideal of "Portuguese-ness." Giles notes that Portuguese immigrant women must also manage the intersection of cultural prescriptions with discriminatory settlement policies that together ensure the privileging of English as a second language education and job training for male heads of household.

Giles shares the critique of Multiculturalism policies that states that Canadian policies attempt to define those seen as "different" Canadians into ethnic enclaves in an effort to control and manage difference. The disjuncture between the rhetoric of inclusion in multiculturalism and the reality of exclusion in the practices of the Canadian state is best illustrated for Giles through the analysis of women's access to education. As Giles' data shows first-generation Portuguese immigrant women were seldom able to access a high school education and have a school life expectancy of only 7.2 years.