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### Cultures of Commemoration: the politics of war, memory, and history in the Mariana Islands. By Keith Camacho

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## Book Review

*Cultures of Commemoration: the politics of war, memory, and history in the Mariana Islands.* By Keith Camacho. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2011. xviii+225 pp., illus., maps, endnotes, bibliog., index. ISBN 978-0-8248-3670-2 (pbk). US\$25.00.

This pioneering book examines memories and the remembrance of war from the perspective of those whose islands became one of the fiercest battlegrounds in the Pacific War. Often war and its remembrance are studied from the point of view of the warring nations. Thus detailed campaign histories have been written about battlegrounds such as Guadalcanal and Saipan, but with little reference to the local inhabitants. In *Cultures of Commemoration*, Keith Camacho highlights the Mariana Islanders' war experience and traces how their memories and commemoration of the Pacific War have evolved since the end of the war.

The book is an intriguing study set against the complex background of the history of colonisation. Starting with the Spanish in the 16th century, several colonisers ruled the Mariana Islands. From 1898, Guam was governed by the Americans, while the Northern Mariana Islands were colonised by the Germans and then by the Japanese after World War I. As a consequence of this colonial divide, Chamorro people, who had lived in the archipelago for thousands of years, were placed under two different administrations. Japan eagerly developed the Northern Mariana Islands, particularly Saipan, into sugar cane fields through large-scale labour migration from Japan, Okinawa and Korea in the inter-war years. Guam fell to the Japanese forces at the start of the Pacific War and the Guam Chamorros were placed under Japanese control until the island was liberated by US forces in July 1944. During this period, the Chamorros in Guam encountered not only the Japanese military, but also Chamorros from Saipan who worked for the Japanese as police aides and interpreters. Camacho presents a vivid picture of an Indigenous society that was torn between their loyalties to their colonisers. In the post-war years, the Northern Mariana Islands were transferred to American administration and the Islanders had to search for some means to reunite their different histories. The author demonstrates that war commemorations were effective means to create a unified identity under the United States.

Camacho sets out to examine 'memories of World War II in the Mariana Islands, and the degree to which they are informed by the politics of colonialism, indigenous cultural agency and, finally, commemoration' (p. 2). Following a chronologically organised account focused mainly on the American colonial period in Guam, Camacho then discusses the post-war realignment of commemoration movements. He also touches upon the commemorations carried out by American and Japanese visitors and how each expected local involvement. Throughout the discussion, Camacho probes the meaning of loyalty and liberation for the Chamorros and argues that they interpreted these notions in their own ways, if ambivalently. The Chamorros were faced with the question of who they were going to be loyal to when the colonial masters fought against each other in the war. While the outcome of the war was totally beyond their control, the consequences of each individual's action or inaction, and which of the opposing sides they aligned themselves with, were significant. The post-war politics in the region also influenced how the Chamorros interpreted questions of loyalty and liberation. These issues are explored through the evolution of the Liberation Day celebration (chapter 4) and the narratives about Father Dueñas, who was executed by the Japanese (chapter 7).

The most interesting and challenging discussion takes place in chapter 6, which explores the memories of Chamorros who acted as Japanese collaborators. Here Camacho demonstrates insight and sensitivity in his analysis of those who are often left out of public memories. His capacities as a Native anthropologist are demonstrated in his study through oral and archival sources of those who worked for/with the Japanese. Instead of labelling them as victims who did not have any other choice but to collaborate, Camacho shows how they made particular choices at the time and lived with their consequences. What comes across strongly throughout the discussion is the agency of Indigenous people who encountered turmoils yet managed to tackle issues in their own way.

A few issues need to be raised. First, the author tends to over-reference – particularly in the earlier chapters when he discusses historiography – and this tends to disrupt the flow of his writing.

Second, further cultural analysis of the differences in war commemorations by the Americans and the Japanese could illuminate cultural interactions with the Chamorros in the post-war period. For example, the photograph on page 118 shows a Shinto shrine with a *torii* gate, but the caption describes it as a peace memorial. Deeper research on the commemoration of the Japanese war dead is necessary here. Last, Camacho's research focuses mainly on the Chamorros from Guam, probably because Camacho himself comes from Guam. More extensive discussion of the Chamorros in Saipan could have brought out interesting contrasts.

*Culture of Commemoration* illuminates how a group of Islanders remember war and how their remembrance has evolved during almost seventy years of political and cultural changes. Hopefully, comparable studies on Indigenous experiences of war and its memories will, in the near future, follow Camacho's fine book.

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