

researchers. It is a bold and refreshing reminder to readers of how racial hierarchies have deep roots in the histories of warfare and colonialism and continue to influence governance and conflict in the present.

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THE SAIGON SISTERS: Privileged Women in the Resistance. *NIU Southeast Asian Series.* By *Patricia D. Norland.* Ithaca; London: Northern Illinois University Press [an imprint of Cornell University Press], 2020. xxiv, 253 pp. (B&W photos.) US\$39.95, cloth. ISBN 978-1-5017-4973-5.

In Vietnamese studies and books analyzing the wars for Indochina in the twentieth century, the amplification of women's roles, perspectives, and voices is a salutary trend. Patricia D. Norland, a public diplomacy officer and former member of the non-profit organization, the Indochina Project, positively contributes to this development. In this informative collection of oral histories, nine women provided Norland with their personal stories and comprehensive thoughts; the author conducted the interviews in French, beginning in 1989.

Norland's project began with meeting Nguyen Thi Oanh, a social worker, who then slowly brought Norland into Oanh's network of friends whose relationships emerged during their years as students at the prestigious Lycée Marie Curie in the late 1940s. The group, which included three siblings—Minh, Trang, and Thanh—along with six other friends, and called themselves the “Saigon Sisters,” joined the resistance against French and American intervention in ways as diverse as the individuals who offered their memories for Norland to organize into this illuminating collection. Their views are transcendent in many respects. As Minh, the eldest of the three biological sisters explained: “Our generation was the generation at the crossroads” (238). The political awakening inculcated in these women led them to resist directly against French and later American imperialism, with the only other options being to collaborate, or to leave Vietnam.

1950 served as a pivotal year sparking revolutionary fervor for these women, but also for thousands of students across South Vietnam. Among key events leading to decisive action for the Saigon Sisters, the death of Tran Van On—a student who died as a result of police violence during a massive protest in front of the Associated State of Vietnam's Ministry of Education in Saigon—served as a catalyst and also marked the generational division Minh perceived. Through separate and illuminating chapters, each of the different sisters recounts her political evolution after January 1950, along with how she adjusted as French colonial domination and Confucian order diminished, and as concomitant social expectations of women in South Vietnam changed.

The book is divided chronologically into two sections, with nine well-organized chapters each. Part 1 begins with the sisters' descriptions of their personal and political lives at Lycée Marie Curie up until the time of the Geneva Accords in 1954. The second half of the book, which covers the sisters' accounts from 1954 to 2017, demonstrates how revolution in Vietnam was political but also social and personal. New perspectives on familial obligations are woven into these women's stories and they explain how they managed relationships in more modern ways as Confucianism receded and did not dominate their lives.

Separate chapters, which focus on the individual accounts of the women Norland interviewed, are augmented by vibrant recollections of others connected with the women. In one case, one of the sisters, Xuan, and her husband Lau, worked together to publish the *Saigon Daily News* which had a circulation of near 20,000 in Vietnam and abroad. The *News* was created "to influence opinion in a subtle way by adding pieces favorable to the Viet Cong that demonstrated their strength and appeal" (200). Lau's commentary contextualizes his wife's contributions while also demonstrating how couples and families managed to promote resistance to the Republic of Vietnam through diverse means. Such accounts add significant colour to Norland's overall collection. A highlight in the same account includes how Lau mentioned meeting American newsman Walter Cronkite, who asked Lau, "How can the Viet Cong vanquish the Americans who are a thousand times better equipped than the French had been against the Viet Minh?" To which Lau replied, "the Vietcong were 1,001 times better organized than the Viet Minh had been against the French" (201). Such smart and evidently accurate remarks and analysis are common throughout this relatively compact and edifying book.

The result one gains from reading this collection of oral histories is thus multi-dimensional and while focused on women, it rises above gender to evaluate the humanity these women promoted during a series of horrific wars between 1945 and 1975. This quality transcends gendered discussions in important ways, but the unique and remarkable stories these women share should encourage historians to include the book in graduate and advanced undergraduate forums.

The book is authored, in many respects and as Norland seems to suggest, by the "Saigon Sisters" themselves. However, the motivation, organization, and remarkable skill Norland brings to bear in producing this outstanding collection of revelatory views on revolution in Indochina demonstrates how valuable oral history can be and how it adds remarkable dimensions to other historical accounts. Also notable is how Norland articulates Vietnamese female-authored historiography in her succinct preface, in which she highlights work by Duong Van Mai Elliott, Nguyen Thi Dinh's memoir *No Other Road to Take* (translated by Mai Elliott, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1976), Mai Tu Van, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Xuan Phuong, and many

others. Instructors seeking to show students the rich and growing amount of scholarship authored by women will benefit from how Norland frames this book in the field. It is quite easy, and motivating as well, to imagine a course on Vietnamese history after World War II that includes only work by women and with *The Saigon Sisters* as a pivotal work connecting them all.

As a way of closing, one of the “sisters,” Thanh, centred her thoughts on the powerful commonality that grounded her friends’ affinities even though they took different paths: “We found that, wherever we ended up, we all worked toward the same goal. We all wanted to serve the country. That bond ties us together” (231). As Norland’s powerful oral-history recounting of the lives of this “band of sisters” demonstrates, friendship and independence required vigilance but endured despite decades of war.

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BABAYLAN SING BACK: Philippine Shamans and Voice, Gender, and Place. *By Grace Nono.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021. xi, 239 pp. (Maps, B&W photos.) US\$23.95, paper. ISBN 9781501760099.

Babaylan are Philippine ritual experts who contact spirits through their singing voice for healing. The attributions healer, spirit medium, shaman, and Native ritual expert are all somehow applicable, yet at the same time not very percipient. The central Philippine term *babaylan* (also *bailan*, *baylan*, *baliana*, *balyana*, *babalyan*) has established itself as an umbrella term in scientific literature, but the diverse manifestations of these indigenous ritual experts cannot be squeezed into one definition. In the colonial past, they were persecuted as agents of evil and superstition; in modern times, they have been valorized as symbols of anti-colonial resistance, of gender pluralism, of women’s power. This valorization owes much to the identity politics of the Philippine middle class and the exoticist imaginary of Western intellectuals. The *babaylan* construct produced in this process is often marked by archaizing and romanticizing components. As contemporary individuals, however, *babaylan* have remained largely invisible and continue to lead a marginalized existence to this day. With her excellent book, ethnomusicologist and singer Grace Nono has changed this. The title *Babaylan Sing Back* is borrowed from activist-scholar bell hook’s book *Talking Back*, which calls for marginalized people to speak “as an equal to an authority figure” (South End Press, 1989, 5). Nono replaces “talk” with “song,” with the goal of making Native Philippine ritual specialists heard, and as a critique of the appropriation of indigenous traditions by non-Natives. The overarching goal of this book is thus the “decolonization of Native and non-Native social relations, dialogues, and reciprocal learning, in the service of the mutual survival of all” (13).