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Citation: Johnson, Amy (2021) Disturbed forests, fragmented memories: Jarai and other lives in the Cambodian highlands by Jonathan Padwe, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2020, 256 pp., ISBN: 9780295746906. The Journal of Peasant Studies, 48 (6). pp. 1330-1334. ISSN 0306-6150

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2021.1950301>
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2021.1950301>>

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Disturbed forests, fragmented memories: Jarai and other lives in the Cambodian highlands, by Jonathan Padwe, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2020, 256 pp., US\$30 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-295-74690-6

While entire assemblages of natural and built environments participate in social production, certain features stand out and demand notice in any cultural context. These are the animate and inanimate features that act upon us, inviting use, sparking associations, and recalling memory. Sometimes they catch us by surprise, as described in the opening pages of *Disturbed Forests, Fragmented Memories*, when the author, Jonathan Padwe, is abruptly steered away from an attractive fern (*Platyserium coronarium*) planted outside a gated home in the Cambodian boomtown of Banlung by his companion, Jarai village chief Rocom Kwën. Startled by his friend's dramatic reaction to the epiphyte, Padwe requests an explanation and learns that the plant is considered inauspicious. Called 'spirit's coffin' (bong yang) by the swidden farming Jarai ethnic minority, it is known to host malevolent spirits. Why anyone would keep it in front of their house is a mystery to Kwën who understands that plants, like humans, have souls, cause events, and harbor history. The irony here is that recently arrived ethnic majority Khmer – whose presence in highland towns is an outgrowth of state-directed violence visited on the Jarai, other highlanders, and their environment – are largely unaware that they live alongside malicious spirits displaced from the forests. As Kwën and Padwe hurry away from the unwelcome plant encounter, the landscape of Cambodia's northeast hills begins to transform for the reader from inert background to active agent in everyday life, troubling boundaries of nature and culture and centering environmental knowledge as a means for anchoring and generating social memory and relations.

In his outing with Kwën, Padwe stumbled upon how the Jarai experience the world as an 'animated landscape' – an enlivened material and social force shaped by and shaping history (15). Adopting the Jarai perspective, *Disturbed Forests, Fragmented Memories* moves beyond interpretations of landscapes as passive repositories of cultural memory to account for the reciprocal interaction of landscape formation and social-political formation. Crucially, the landscape the Jarai reside within is one that, for the last hundred years, has been continuously disturbed by violence. French colonialism, Cambodian nationalism, American bombings, and Khmer Rouge-directed relocation and agricultural development policies are shown to have had entangled effects on ecology and social life in Cambodia's northeast hills. The book grapples with how the Jarai and their forests have jointly responded to the trauma of state territorialization, war, and resource extraction. This is not, however, a romanticized account of Jarai peasant resilience or unchanging ecological knowledge. Instead, Padwe takes on the challenging work of representing the ways Jarai call upon remembered plant worlds and their sociality to build life anew in the highlands, making his an ethnography of socio-ecological experimentation and futures as well as of memory, landscape, and nature.

Padwe is uniquely positioned to deliver the arguments and ideas developed in *Disturbed Forests, Fragmented Memories*. The Jarai, an ethnic minority of the lower Annamite Mountains of Cambodia and Vietnam, live in the periphery of the Cambodian state and scholarship, which is generally oriented to the lowlands. Padwe spent years studying the Jarai language in the village of Tang Kadon – the principal site of the book and Padwe's understanding of the Jarai social world. Participating in swidden farming, rituals, and the itinerant day-to-day routines of Tang Kadon villagers, Padwe forged relationships with people and landscapes throughout the region. As he describes, most of his initial insights came about by a methodology of walking into knowledge, encountering plants, landscape features, and histories alongside his Jarai companions (16). He also

carried out extensive oral histories with Jarai and explorations of French colonial archives as well as surveys of Jarai farming systems and multiyear inventories of fields. Working in Jarai, Khmer, French, and English languages and with theories, methods, and subjects spanning Anthropology, Geography, Environmental Humanities, and Southeast Asian Studies, Padwe's first book-length publication is a comprehensive representation of change in the highlands and how, as he writes, 'the landscape is the past that we as people inhabit' (117).

Disturbed Forests is organized into an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. The chapters unfold from deep to recent past, starting with the pre-colonial and moving to the French Colonial, Khmerization, American Vietnam War, Democratic Kampuchea, and later periods. Interspersed in the text are detailed maps of the borderland and Tang Kadon village created by Aaron Reiss, which situate the reader in the Jarai's highland landscape and its changes over time.

The introduction outlines the conceptual arguments of the monograph mentioned above, as well as the fieldwork and methodology. Background to the highlands is provided in the first chapter, 'Cambodia's Northeast Hills.' Here the reader is introduced to the physical and social environment with an emphasis on the conviviality of Tang Kadon and the swidden cycle which underscores seasonal life for the Jarai and other highlanders. Much of the ethnological and historical discussion of the Jarai and the borderlands is reserved for chapter two, 'Slaveholding Chiefs on the Resource Frontier.' In this chapter, stories the Jarai tell each other about chiefs, hunters, and the origins of rice anchor Padwe's expansive discussion of the Jarai's political position in the early nineteenth century. The chapter centers Jarai perspectives on external relations, social formation, and state power during an era of growing state expansion over natural resources. Representations of the past and the self performed by the Jarai in story and ritual are complemented in the third chapter with reflections on outsiders' views of the Jarai and the highlands. 'Jungle Girl and the Wild Man' expounds upon the ways physical and representational landscapes blur into one another, such that the southern Annamite Mountains become associated with conceptual landscapes of animality, wildness, and savagery in the minds of lowland Khmer, orientalist, and cryptozoologists, each of whom entertains the notion that, among other myths, the region is home to a race of men with tails.

The orientalist evolutionary fantasies of 'missing links' represented by contemporary and historical tales of wild men and jungle girls are no laughing matter, Padwe explains. They directly contribute to the dehumanization of the highlands and perpetuate violence. 'Rubber, Rule, and Revolt' explores this argument by tracing the role of first the French and, following Cambodia's independence from France in 1958, the Sihanouk regime's efforts to control what was considered to be an uncivilized, 'backward,' and communist-leaning frontier zone by replacing swidden fields with rubber plantations. However, the state territorialization mission backfired spectacularly. The neat orderly rows of rubber which entranced Sihanouk's regime in fact entrenched resistance to Khmerization and provided cover for covert communist activity within frontier plantation sanctuaries.

While the book is not divided into parts, there is a discernable pivot after chapter four toward more active discussion of the agency of the landscape and its animate beings, including ghosts and spirits, in shaping highland history. Chapter five, 'Ecologies of Invasion,' is a lynchpin for the book's arguments about the imbrication of ecology and memory. The chapter describes the militarization of the highlands during the American Vietnam War and how Jarai confront this history in their everyday interactions with specific places – burial grounds, abandoned settlements, bombed villages – and the forest ecology. A highlight of the chapter is Padwe's analysis of how, as one woman powerfully surmised, 'during the bombings, flowers fell from the sky' (128),

introducing new species. Although Padwe documents that some plants associated with the landscape's militarization were already established in the highlands, he nonetheless poignantly describes the ways pioneering plants like 'airplane weeds' and 'American thorn' – which prefer to colonize disturbed zones – are experienced as mundane materializations of war that crop up in fields and forest.

The final two ethnographic chapters of the book carry forward insights into ecology and memory through the exposition of high-modernist agricultural development and recuperative agroecology. 'Revolution in a Rice Field' turns to the era of the Democratic Kampuchea when, in an attempt to intensify rice production and re-start history in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge forcefully relocated villagers into collectives and expanded rice farming. Padwe claims that the highlands were spared some of the worst violence of this period because of the strategic role the highlands played in sheltering communists before and during the Vietnam War. But they did not escape a lasting consequence of the regime's intervention into Cambodia's ecology: the de-diversification of agriculture. The chapter convincingly connects Khmer Rouge interest in eliminating cultural differences to efforts to assert agricultural uniformity and describes the consequential catastrophic decline of traditional heirloom plants, rice varieties, and local ecological knowledge.

The effects of the Khmer Rouge's policies are further examined in chapter seven, 'Garden Variety Histories.' In his final chapter, Padwe presents the aftermath of the fall of the Democratic Kampuchea from the perspective of Jarai farmers as they work to recuperate their fields and revive swidden agriculture. Noting how the Jarai do not see their actions as a heroic recovery of a past agroecology, Padwe argues that 'recuperation' more accurately depicts the decentralized ways Jarai individuals invoked existing social ties across the borderlands to bring plants back to Tang Kadon. Each plant, Padwe explains, is a recent arrival and serves as an artifact of renewed social-ecological relations. This makes them subjects of 'garden variety histories' – fragmentary, ordinary, repositories of the past worked into everyday life. Like 'Ecologies of Invasion,' this chapter feels like a complete representation of Padwe's theoretical ambitions and is a powerful conceptual close to the book. The formal conclusion, 'Fragments Shored against Ruins,' provides the reader with a glimpse of Padwe's own closure as he revisits Tang Kadon and once again finds the landscape and people in the midst of socioecological transformation, this time from a renewed push for rubber plantations.

Arguably the book's greatest accomplishment is its revival of landscape as a productive concept for studying the interaction of environment, history, and social-political formation. Padwe's holistic interpretation of landscape as ecology, representation, and materiality provides a pathway for reconciling the temporality of social meaning, imagination, and memory with the timelines of seasons, geomorphology, and the weathering of infrastructure. There is also an element of the more-than-human embedded in Padwe's usage of landscape. However, what I found most refreshing was Padwe's instinct to reach around posthumanism as a theoretical anchor and tether his arguments to Jarai emic theories of landscape and human-environment relations. He also never loses focus on the Jarai's unique position in highland history, politics, and ecology – a point of view that has not been privileged in past scholarship, but one that challenges taken-for-granted narratives of highland-lowland interaction, state formation, and agrarian change.

Inevitably, a book as ambitious as Padwe's will be unable to satisfy all the demands of its reader. As Padwe admits, women are underrepresented in his account of Jarai agrarianism and social life. This is partially, as explained in the introduction, a consequence of the author's positionality in Tang Kadon and his limited ability to socialize with women outside his host family.

But it is notable that while masculinity is reflected upon in the choice of peripatetic methods, discussions of gender and the body are subdued in the text. When women appear, however, they add invaluable insight into the articulation of memory and ecology. One moving example occurs in chapter five, when two midwives sing of American bombings in the borderlands. Their dirge for lost homes, animals, rice, and possessions is saturated with a grief that feels present, rather than past. I was left wanting to learn more about how women carry grief in Jarai society and what acts they take to recuperate loss. For, like the land, bodies – marked by gender and kinship – also suffer, change, and become lived sites of history.

Ultimately, *Disturbed Forests, Fragmented Memories* masterfully illuminates a century of violence in Cambodia through an empathetic portrayal of Jarai highlander's efforts to remake community and landscapes, one seed at a time. Its blended ethnographic and historical methods and cross-fertilization of western and Jarai theories of landscape and human-environment relations make it a welcome contribution to Anthropology, Geography, the Environmental Humanities, and Southeast Asian Studies. Anthropologists of the environment, development, and the state will find the book a rich resource for re-engaging landscape as a force for social and political (trans)formation. Southeast Asia scholars in multiple fields will be drawn to the book for its impeccable attention to the ethnographic, oral, and archival record of the Vietnam-Cambodian borderlands. Given its clear prose, humor, and conceptual sophistication, the book would be ideal for Introduction to Southeast Asia, Development Studies, and Environmental Anthropology undergraduate courses. It should interest anyone with a passion for the highlands and for understanding landscapes of violence and repair.

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