

Keith Camacho (2019). *Sacred men: Law torture, and retribution in Guam*. Durham NC: Duke University Press. 312pp. pbk: ISBN: 978-1-4780-0634-3. US\$27.95.

In *Sacred men*, Keith Camacho mines the trial transcripts of the US Navy War Crimes Tribunal Program that took place on Guam between 1945 and 1949. The trials have generally been celebrated for the efficiency and impartiality with which they dispensed justice on Japanese war criminals, but Camacho's work stands out as the first to focus attention on indigenous Chamorros who were also put on trial for crimes committed during wartime. Often, these men had been employees of the Japanese imperial government that had ruled the Northern Marianas since 1914. Others were Guam Chamorros and Japanese settlers who had lived on Guam under the pre-WWII American government until Japan successfully conquered the island in 1941. Chamorros also entered these courtrooms as witnesses, providing testimony against the accused. This exploration of internal tensions among the indigenous people of the islands complicates the simple colonizer/colonized dichotomies that proliferate in many recent historical writings about the Marianas. Nevertheless, the larger thesis of this book emphasizes the power disparity between Chamorros and both the Japanese and American colonial governments. Chamorros contended with impossible choices as they navigated shifting imposed loyalties to colonial regimes. Following Giorgio Agamben, Camacho asserts that because of the ambiguous legal status of these colonial subjects, the Navy was able to treat Chamorros as "*homo sacer*" (sacred men), an exceptional category for people who are not given the rights of citizens of sovereign states. Furthermore, he makes a compelling case that this establishment of juridical authority helped assure postwar American claims to the entire archipelago.

Camacho is an indigenous Chamorro scholar with deep roots in both the American Territory of Guam and in the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). This gives him a unique perspective on the misconceptions imbedded in popular understandings of the historical relationship between these islands. Like his groundbreaking 2011 publication *Cultures of commemoration*, *Sacred men* is a courageous dive into the sensitive topic of World War II. Camacho brings to life the agony of a war for Chamorros who found themselves pitted against cousins whose histories had only recently diverged. The Marianas, the homeland of the Chamorro people for nearly 4,000 years, had been a Spanish colony when the US took the southernmost island of Guam as a spoil of the Spanish American War. The northern islands were briefly German until Japan seized them in 1914. Japan then enlisted Northern Marianas Chamorros during World War II to help establish the Japanese government in Guam. During the war, Guam Chamorros suffered at the hands of these enemy "collaborators." The memory of the war had enduring consequences as it helped ensure Guam would vote down the political unification of the islands in 1969.

Histories of wartime collaboration, of torture, rape, forced prostitution and various other atrocities and traitorous acts are now commonplace in the historiography of World War II. But this is not so in the Marianas. Indigenous scholars in the Marianas have generally shied away from digging deep into such topics. The individual stakes can be prohibitively high within the small, closely related local population. As in other small island states and colonies, it is much easier to focus on problems imposed by external forces. And yet, these things happened. The survivors of the war entered the post war world with these realities seared into their consciousness, and post-war history cannot be understood without this piece of the puzzle. In the Marianas, indigenous scholars are best equipped to tell these stories and Camacho does so masterfully. In doing so, he moves beyond caricatured depictions of war as a battle of good versus evil. Some cases were hard to accept, such as those of Northern Marianas Chamorros

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who took pleasure participating in torture. But for most so-called collaborators, context is needed. These indigenous men were law-abiding subjects of the Japanese emperor who found themselves at the mercy of conquering Americans who could just as easily have defined them as prisoners of war with the rights of enemy combatants. Camacho also sheds light on a few Guam Chamorros who, eventually finding themselves on the winning side of the war, seized opportunities to engage in morally questionable acts. A secondary thesis that runs through the book is that of Chamorro agency as individuals found pathways for revenge under the US naval government. For some, flexible rules of the trials allowed for revenge on the “collaborators” by bringing in testimony that in other courts systems might be considered inadmissible gossip. Similarly, the US naval government looked the other way as Guam Chamorros recruited into the straggler hunting ‘combat patrol’ ignored rules mandating Japanese prisoners be brought in alive.

Through uncovering these once buried stories, Camacho illustrates a wide range of human responses to the pressures of war and colonial domination. Although difficult at times to read, it is refreshing to see this fuller picture of the reality of the war brought to light. The connections Camacho draws between the war crimes trials and the establishment of US sovereignty in these islands are equally important and constitute a radical reinterpretation of what was once a seemingly settled matter. For these and other reasons highlighted in this review, *Sacred men* will prove to be a welcome addition to the cannon of Marianas history.

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