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Review of *Captive Fathers, Captive Children: Legacies of the War in the Far East* by Terry Smyth

Gary Baines

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Chapter 7 explores popular mediums of disclosure such as tourism, theatre and television and the ways in which activism and interest from elsewhere in Asia produced a new awareness of local comfort women's stories. Recognition of Singapore's centrality to the history of comfort stations forced the government to engage with transnational controversies leading eventually to the acknowledgement and conservation of specific 'dark heritage' sites. The conclusion deftly situates the study in the broader Asia-wide debates on this subject, in the face of right-wing nationalist opposition to their exposition in Japan. It confirms Blackburn's demonstration (in his many publications) of Singapore's continual entanglement in broader historical processes and the impossibility of an insular and hegemonic national discourse.

ANOMA PIERIS
The University of Melbourne, Australia
DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v10i2.1818

Terry Smyth, *Captive Fathers, Captive Children: Legacies of the War in the Far East*. London: Bloomsbury, 2022. 244pp. + xv. ISBN: 978-1350194298 (hardback). £82.08.

The once 'forgotten army' of British Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOWs) has received increasing attention from academics and journalists in recent years. Stories of their experiences of captivity have been represented in scholarly literature and documentary films, as well as memoirs, biopics, and other cultural artefacts. Their heroic sacrifices have been commemorated at the UK's National Memorial Arboretum, while their maltreatment at the hands of their captors is depicted at numerous sites scattered throughout the short-lived Japanese wartime empire. This 'memory boom' owes much to the work of ex-POW associations whose membership was initially drawn from the ranks of war veterans but now primarily comprise the children and family members of the FEPOWs.

The author of *Captive Fathers, Captive Children*, Terry Smyth, is the son of a FEPOW. As such, he is personally invested in the project which is self-evidently cathartic. His acute awareness of his own subjectivities and sensitive handling of the topic turns out to be its strength. The focus of his study is not so much the FEPOWs' experiences of captivity (the subject of a single chapter, Chapter 1) but their post-war lives and the effect that this had on their children and families, collectively known as the Community of Far East Prisoners of War or COFEPOW (to which he devotes six chapters).

The Introduction sets out Smyth's approach and methodology and thus provides the scaffolding for the structure of the book. His point of departure is that '[p]risoners of war were not the only captives to emerge from the Far East war: many of their children also became captives – of their fathers' trauma' (p. 5). Drawing on insights from psychoanalysis and social memory studies, Smyth employs a psychosocial approach to his subject. He investigates 'the lives of those children who were both observers of their fathers' struggles, and survivors of their legacy' (p. 6). He seeks to explain why their fathers' POW stories continued to exert a hold on the second generation and why so many became preoccupied with the subject (p. 12). Much of the oral testimony gathered to explore these questions was gleaned from open-ended interviews and communications with other FEPOW children. His reading of these transcripts in conjunction with reflections on his own experience, enabled Smyth to explore the alignment between motivational dispositions and the memory practices of the children of FEPOWs.

Chapter 2 discusses the demobilization and repatriation of ex-FEPOWs. Smyth notes that they largely complied with the injunction of the military authorities to remain silent about their horrific experiences as prisoners of the Japanese. As with soldiers in so many other theatres of war who returned home, there was inadequate provision for psychological support during their transition back into society (pp. 49-50). Smyth discusses the travails and traumatisation that complicated their re-adaptation to civilian life at some length. But he might have elaborated further upon their social stigmatisation and own absence of guilt, issues that are relegated to footnotes (Fn21 and Fn30 p. 200). This, arguably, is related to the fact that the ex-FEPOWs were part of the army in the Far East theatre of operations that ignominiously surrendered in Singapore or were defeated by the Japanese in other engagements. In the public mind, the ex-FEPOWs did not reveal the same indefatigable fighting spirit as, say, the pilots in the Battle of Britain or the civilian population that had withstood the Blitz. The ex-FEPOWs, rightly, felt 'let down by politicians and the Army' and understandably harboured resentment at having been betrayed. A discussion of the blame and shame game might have shed more light on the circumstances with which returning ex-FEPOWs had to contend in the immediate post-war years. Indeed, Smyth's life-course perspective (p 64) would have been enhanced by situating personal stories within the wider context of social and political changes in post-war Britain.

In Chapter 3, the author adroitly navigates the field of memory studies insofar as it relates to the study of war and, more specifically, unpacks those concepts that inform his study. One such concept is *postmemory*, a term originally coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe the intergenerational transmission of trauma from Holocaust survivors to

their children.[1] Smyth applies it to the children of FEPOWs in order to explain how the memory practices of the 'hinge generation' have evolved.[2] He alludes to the role of films and artworks in transmitting traumatic memories and references a number that have been influential in shaping the affiliative postmemories of the COFEPOW community (p. 78). Surprisingly, he fails to engage with the way in which literature may have impacted upon the imaginations and memories of the COFEPOW. With the passing of the FEPOWs, Smyth and many others of the hinge generation have become memory activists. They occasionally have face-to-face encounters, or form touring parties that visit FEPOW sites, but most of their interaction occurs online. In effect, they constitute a virtual mnemonic community whose members host a string of websites, some of which showcase the labours of their research while others serve as personal memorial websites.

Smyth offers an insightful analysis of the home as a site of remembrance in Chapter 5. He argues that '[m]aterial objects in themselves have no intrinsic meaning' but may assume 'attributed meanings mediated by the memories and experiences of the individuals concerned' (p. 118). Such objects include photographs and other keepsakes from wartime possessions that belonged to FEPOW fathers. In some cases, these items may be secreted away but in other instances they may be given pride of place in the home and assume the attributes of a shrine. This discussion of domestic memorialization offers a valuable corrective to the emphasis accorded public rituals of commemoration and memorialization by memory studies scholars.

All in all, this is a captivating (pun intended) book with moving testimonies and compelling arguments.

GARY BAINES
Rhodes University, South Africa
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[1]Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
[2]Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).