



Consoling Ghosts: Stories of Medicine and Mourning from Southeast Asians in Exile

Jean M. Langford

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In conversation with emigrants from Laos and Cambodia, Jean M. Langford repeatedly met with spirits: the wandering souls of the seriously ill, dangerous ghosts of those who died by violence, restless ancestors displaced from their homes. For these emigrants, the dead not only appear in memories, safely ensconced in the past, but also erupt with a physical force into the daily life and dreams of the present.

Inspired by these conversations, *Consoling Ghosts* is a sustained contemplation of relationships with the dying and the dead. At their heart, as Langford's work reveals, emigrants' stories are parables not of cultural difference but rather of life and death. Langford inquires how and why spirits become implicated in remembering and responding to violence, whether the bloody violence of war or the more structural violence of social marginalization and poverty. What is at stake, she asks, when spirits break out of their usual confinement as symbolic figures for history, heritage, or trauma to haunt the corridors of hospitals and funeral homes? Emigrants' theories and stories of ghosts, Langford suggests, inherently question the metaphorical status of spirits, in the process challenging both contemporary bioethics of dying and dominant styles of mourning. *Consoling Ghosts* explores the possibilities opened up by a more literal existence of ghosts, from the confrontation of shades of past violence through bodily ritual to rites of mourning that unfold in acts of material care for the dead instead of memorialization.

Ultimately the book invites us to consider alternate ways of facing death, conducting relationships with the dead and dying, and addressing the effects of violence that continue to reverberate in bodies and social worlds.

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