



The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China

Erik Muggler

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In Erik Mueggler's powerful and imaginative ethnography, a rural minority community in the mountains of Southwest China struggles to find its place at the end of a century of violence and at the margins of a nation-state. Here, people describe the present age, beginning with the Great Leap Famine of 1958-1960 and continuing through the 1990s, as "the age of wild ghosts." Their stories of this age converge on a dream of community—a bad dream, embodied in the life, death, and reawakening of a single institution: a rotating headman-ship system that expired violently under the Maoist regime. Displaying a sensitive understanding of both Chinese and the Tibeto-Burman language spoken in this region, Mueggler explores memories of this institution, including the rituals and poetics that once surrounded it and the bitter conflicts that now haunt it. To exorcise "wild ghosts," he shows, is nothing less than to imagine the state and its power, to trace the responsibility for violence to its morally ambiguous origins, and to enunciate calls for justice and articulate longings for reconciliation.

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