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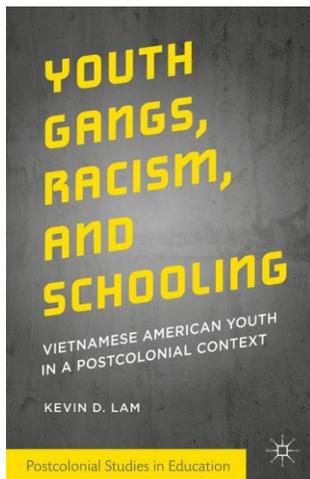
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In *Youth, Gangs, Racism, and Schooling: Vietnamese American Youth in a Postcolonial Context*, Kevin Lam outlines the history of the Vietnamese American youth gang phenomenon as it relates to U.S. imperialism and state sanctioned violence within the backdrop of US occupation in Vietnam and American racism. He describes the formation of Vietnamese American youth gangs in Southern California from 1979-2009, focusing particularly on those involved during the 1990s, as a way to examine how factors such as class, race, citizenship, migration, and laws affect youth Vietnamese refugees. In particular, Lam's project theorizes, through a materialist cultural studies lens, a way to understand youth subcultures, racialized identities, and urban schooling.

His study is based on the life narratives from three gang members collected in 2007. Using critical narrative methodology, he engages dialogically in interviews with two Vietnamese/Asian American men (P-Dog and Melo) and one woman (Linh) who at the time at the interviews were in their late 20's and early 30's. He observes how these "subjects want to be in dialogue with the rest of the world." One of Lam's subjects states "No one is looking into our shit!" And "don't understand the roots of it" (p. 85). Thus, his research "looks into" and understands the roots of gang formation through the collective voices of these young Vietnamese. P-Dog, Melo, and Linh were involved between 13 and 19 years old. Considering their ages, which would categorize them as youth or young people, Lam challenges the notion of youth as a "biological state" and borrows Nayak's use of the term where youth is viewed as more as a social and mutable category (p. 85). Additionally, he gives a full view (avoids just



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participant observation) of youth gangs by including the politics of imperialism, globalization of capital and labor, and theorizing of racialization.

Lam places his study in colonial and postcolonial contexts and traces U.S. involvement in the migrations of Vietnamese from 1975-1977 (the first wave) and 1977-1985 (the second wave, i.e., the boat people). In chapter one, he discusses resettlement and racialization as it relates to the lives of the refugees. The lasting effects of war can be linked to the economical, physical, and psychological damages accumulated over three decades (1945-1975). However, U.S. involvement did not end there. Currently, the United States, which ended its embargo in 1994, has greatly influenced Vietnam's participation in Global "free market" economies. Lam suggests that the relationship—imperial or allied—has maintained a great influence on Vietnamese and American relations, particularly in the context of the United States.

For many of the first wave refugees, the transition was easier because many of them were a part of a more educated class. As Lam notes, "Western assimilation had begun well before they arrived on U.S. soil." On the other hand, the second wave of refugees, predominantly rural and working class, many of whom identified as Chinese-Vietnamese, received international support due to the dreadful experiences attributed to traveling on crowded boats. Yet, these refugees were met with distrust by many Americans who were not in favor of Vietnamese resettlement in the United States. Such antagonisms fed the racialization process of Vietnamese refugees. Within the Vietnamese diaspora, individuals are racialized in two ways: the subaltern or emblematic victim (p. 37). In combination with the political economy of Southern California and class formations in Los Angeles, Vietnamese refugees were viewed as "good refugees," those who were willing to participate in minimum wage, unskilled or low skilled, part-time jobs and act as model minorities willing to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Conversely, due to Southern California's highly stratified economy, alternate economies, including gang and underground economies, emerged and reinforced the notion that these were unworthy and possibly dangerous immigrants. Further, Latino and Asian immigrants were racialized against each other as a way to "divide and conquer" (p. 44).

Lam strives to dismantle the dehumanizing effects of racism by examining how race is shaped as a problem in terms of sociology and education, and also critique how it is placed in binary relationships. For example he reminds us that race is a part of a structure of power rather than individual qualities, which are reinforced by the categorization of race and racial identity. For Asian Americans, the model minority myth acts as a hegemonic device that ignores Asian Americans who are poor and working class as well as those who experience violence. More recently, there has been a lumping of identities related to Asians in U.S. communities. Lam is concerned that panethnic identities are used to turn Asians into a monolith. Using a materialist critique to examine race, he asserts that the racialization of Asian Americans must include an analysis of class formation and political economy as way to decenter success and look closer at how American imperialism and state sanctioned racism has shaped and informed physical and psychic violence. We learn in this book that in California's San Gabriel Valley, youth gang members interrupt the racial myths of "good refugee" and "model minority." Lam borrows

Boal's "theatre of the oppressed" to describe the violence performed by youth gang members within their communities and schools during a time where increased forms of legislation was designed to take on youth and violence. These laws help propel the criminalization of Asian American youth who were racialized through the images of public violence, and diminished further the chance for many youth of color to achieve social and educational success.

To make the links between youth gang culture and U.S. imperialism, Lam examines three themes developed from his interviews: "One, the politics of Migration and resettlement; two, space, labor, and street conflict; and three, racialization, racism and representation (p. 113). Across these discussions, he works through the personal stories of P-Dog, Melo, and Linh to articulate how their communities became a hotbed for violence. The author connects the logics of turf with the formations of refugee spaces in Southern California and argues that central to the struggles for these young people were local responses and tensions tied to competition for space and capital mapped on interracial and intraracial terrains.

In closing, Lam's project, which he describes as a "recovery of our history," bridges the worlds of youth, violence, and racism while honoring the personal stories and histories of Vietnamese Americans. In Fanonian fashion, Lam reminds us that the subaltern not only speaks but writes back, talks back and researches back in order to humanize the struggle for liberation associated with the U.S. foreign policies and criminalization of youth. Challenging the racist notion that all Asian Americans are high achievers, Lam forces the reader to examine the material realities of individuals whose experiences tell a counterstory and a counterhistory. To conclude, Lam initiates an important dialogue about the idea of "global responsibility." By bringing this to the front door of education, educators, scholars and activists must account for how we view globalization and humanization. In many ways, there is a deep connectedness that is missing in our approaches to critical work. So, if we want to attend to how and what it means to do the anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist work that he refers to, we must not only acknowledge that we are not alone in this world but confront, critique, and build on those connections in order to transform the present and future.

About the Author



Ezekiel Joubert III is a PhD student at the University of Minnesota in the Curriculum and Instruction Department and Culture and Teaching Program. His research interests focus on the role race and racialization and space and migration in creating curriculum and pedagogy, and the use of African American literature and narratives as a mode to understand history, memory, and representation.



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