

South Asian Diaspora

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CONTENTS

Articles

Inscribing *kala pani* in Ernest Moutoussamy's *A la recherche de l'Inde perdue*
Brinda J. Mehta 1

Transgression and power: special reference to Srividya temple at Rush, New York
P. Pratap Kumar 19

Money flows two ways between transnational families in Australia and India
Supriya Singh and Liliya Gatina 33

What is 'South Asian'? A quantitative content analysis evaluating the use of
South Asian ethnic categorization in Canadian health research
Gayathri Naganathan and Farah Islam 49

Book Reviews

Transnational migration, by Thomas Faist, Margit Fauser, and Eveline Reisenauer
Delphine Munos 63

Appropriately Indian: gender and culture in a new transnational class, by Smitha
Radhakrishnan
Rajan Joseph Barrett 65

'Post'-9/11 South Asian diasporic fiction: uncanny terror, by Pei-Chen Liao
Paromita Chakrabarti 66

Bridging imaginations: South Asian diaspora in Australia, edited by Amit Sarwal
Alia Rehana Somani 68

Migration citizenship and development: diasporic membership policies and
overseas Indians in the United States, by Daniel Noujoks
Rajan Joseph Barrett 70

Settled strangers: Asian business elites in East Africa (1800-2000),
by Gijsbert Oonk
Dan Ojwang 71

Commerce with the universe: Africa, India, and the Afrasian imagination,
by Gaurav Desai
Asma Sayed 73

The immigration and settlement of Asian Indians in Phoenix, Arizona 1965-2011:
ethnic pride vs. racial discrimination in the suburbs, by Emily Skop
Paromita Chakrabarti 75

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BOOK REVIEWS

Transnational migration, by Thomas Faist, Margit Fauser, and Eveline Reisenauer, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, 209 pp., UK£15.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-74564-9788

It may now have become clichéd to remark that 'transnational' is a 'catch-all term' (9), which can be alternatively applied, among other things, to cross-border relocation, transnational entrepreneurship, long-distance nationalist engagement, the sustenance of transnational kinship, and even transcontinental tourism. Focusing on today's cross-border migration and its consequences, in *Transnational Migration*, Thomas Faist, Margit Fauser, and Eveline Reisenauer carefully locate the category of the 'transnational' in the light of the current controversies surrounding the use of this term and its relevance, while providing a comprehensive introduction to the ways in which a transnational approach might aptly capture the paradoxes and complexities of present-day migration.

As early as the 1990s, influential migration theorists such as Nina Glick Schiller have seriously come to doubt that the concepts of assimilation and cultural pluralism could still do justice to present-day practices of cross-border migration – the assimilationist paradigm would simplistically posit the 'loss of past identity' (13) while at the other end, the cultural pluralism approach would problematically rely on 'an essentialist perspective that treats ethnic identities as immutable' (13). Drawing on Glick Schiller's observation that, unlike what happened in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, present-day practices of cross-border migration far from implying the severing of all homeland social and cultural relations, Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer define the 'transnational' as a process by which 'migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (8). For the authors, an important feature of contemporary cross-border migration is indeed that it might generate the creation of new ties to the country of origin. Far from 'burning the bridge' upon arrival in the new land, today's migrants participate in the emergence of a 'third social world' (4) – in Faist's terminology a 'transnational social space' spanning borders and impacting upon migrants and non-migrants alike.

As the introduction to the book makes it clear, the authors might borrow from Glick Schiller's now-classic vocabulary of 'transnationalism', 'transmigrant', as well as embrace her preference for a 'transnationalism from below'. As opposed to preexisting transnational scholarship within migration studies, however, Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer prove critical of the ways in which the early 1990s transnational migration paradigm has sneaked through an 'ideology' (9). For Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer, such an 'ideology' is guilty, first; of conflating the quite different ideas of state (as territorial unit) and nation (as social collective), in fact of subsuming the category of the 'transnational' into that of the 'cross-border' – or, to use Faist's neologism, into that of the 'trans-state' (cf. 9) – second; of linking transnational practices with physical mobility

only. It is also debatable that the emergence of the 'transnational' as a methodological framework should mark the absolute demise of previous concepts such as that of assimilation – something that Glick Schiller all-too-hastily announced during the early 1990s and that Faist and his colleagues now problematize in this study by exploring the relation between assimilation and contemporary cross-border practices.

Looking at 'South-North' migration and international (rather than domestic or internal) patterns of transnational practices, *Transnational Migration* draws empirical instances from cross-border migration concerning the USA and Mexico and the countries of Latin America, as well as from cases involving Turkey and Germany. The originality of this study is that it puts forward a new vocabulary by disaggregating the term 'transnational' into three core concepts – namely that of transnationalization, transnational social spaces, and transnationality. Interestingly, while the first two concepts can be traced back to two subsequent generations of scholarship, the third concept, that of transnationality, is presented to be a truly innovative one, one that helps shift the ground of analysis to those symbolic ties created by transcontinental migration, whether it involves sending or receiving societies, those who migrate physically or those who stay put, or the relation between all of these categories.

With chapters on classic themes such as development (Chapter 4), migrant integration (Chapter 5) and political practices (Chapter 6), the book also provides an overview of at cross-border ties and practices in Chapter 2, while introducing the concept of transnational social spaces in Chapter 3. In a less classic way, *Transnational Migration* extends the understanding of transnational practices from matters of geographical mobility only to issues of connectivity, and ends up proposing a transnational research methodology in its last chapter. By also looking at societies which are not typically associated with contemporary migration, such as Germany, *Transnational Migration* offers a refreshing corrective to Glick Schiller's US-oriented early 1990s research, in which assimilation 'is reduced to the ideology of the melting pot, with its image of what it means to be an American in a land of economic opportunity' (Kivisto, 2001, 554). As suggested above, Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer also complement the work of their precursors, notably because they seek to integrate notions of assimilation, rather than dismiss them altogether.

The structure of *Transnational Migration* thus reflects a truly comprehensive move, looking back at two decades of scholarship on transnationalism, while progressively taking on board those contentious issues that have recently arisen and that were oversimplified or left unanswered by the 'big names' traditionally associated with the transnational paradigm – among which the debate as to whether transnational life among migrants and non-migrants is a 'new' phenomenon or can be traced back to earlier times as well, the pertinence of seeing transnational practices as a new form of, rather than an alternative to, assimilation, the different degrees of transnational involvement among migrants, or the ways in which transnational practices might have changed the practice and understanding of national citizenship (and vice versa). To the extent that *Transnational Migration* is concerned with extending the ground of analysis to those symbolic ties created by transcontinental migration, it is regrettable, however, that this wide-ranging study does not hybridize, at times, empirical instances of cross-border migration with cultural productions that are concerned with the same issues – save for a few illuminating words about Fatih Akin's excellent film *The Edge of Heaven*. That being said, *Transnational Migration* makes an important contribution to the field of transnational migration studies by offering a compelling synthesis of the transnational approach for students and scholars alike.

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Appropriately Indian: gender and culture in a new transnational class, by Smitha Radhakrishnan, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011, 256 pp., US\$ 22.95 (paperback), ISBN 9780822348702

To define India from a macro historical perspective will perhaps not be possible in the near future. There seem to be two reasons at least for this, the first being that metahistories have gone out of date with postmodernism coming in, the second being that things are moving too fast in the vast subcontinent after globalization with different people of different cultural backgrounds who still would like to consider themselves Indian pitching in with their notion of 'Indianness'. *Appropriately Indian* while acutely aware of the history of India, especially keeping the postcolonial in mind, examines the sociocultural and socioeconomic redefinition of what is it to be Indian after Manmohandhamomics has infected the new middle class, and after Thomas Freidman derives his notion of a 'flat world' from a visit to Bangalore. 'Cultural streamlining', a term that Smitha Radhakrishnan uses, seems to give life to 'national integration' through a jump-the-gun economic route. However, Smitha Radhakrishnan demonstrates that identity formation among the niche IT workers is not quite national integration because there is a blending of what it takes to be Indian as dictated to by a culture of Globalization (read Americanization).

What is brilliantly puzzling about the book seems to be the inclusion of the transnationals of South Africa who are diasporic Indians and yet the question of being of Indian origin and the values of the upper caste, upper class seems rooted, questionably, in their identity formation. In fact I seemed to nurse a grudge on its inclusion as I read through the book as it focused on a well-defined group of people who were changing rapidly and defining what it was to be Indian from across the two continents, the USA and India. I kept grappling with why the South African does not become extraneous when it seems like a lost arm of Indian Culture sutured to Indian historical accounts that would find themselves in Nationalist Histories. It however seemed as if this inclusion was methodological as a foil to the heavy traffic on the highway of getting 'Bangalored'. This narrative is not the narrative of a brahminical class grown up on the *rasam* and rice of South Indian culture. A lot of cultural gaps and erasures ask for a probe into the multiculturalism and cultural memory that gets reconstructed, perhaps obtusely, with globalization. This is one of the reasons why I have insisted that my students doing a course on 'Diasporic Writings of the Indian Subcontinent' read the text. The notion of the 'Transnational', who can be at home in at least two different cultures, besides, is an important tool of character analysis and identity formation as high speed globalization makes them conspicuous in contemporary writing/culture.