

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh.** Tasneem Siddiqui, Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 2001, 208+xx pp (ISBN 984-05-1593-4) (hbk).

This volume by Tasneem Siddiqui is an attempt to document and analyse the migration of women workers from Bangladesh to the labour markets of the Middle-East and Southeast Asia. The study is specifically concerned with women as principal migrants, rather than as spouses accompanying or joining their husbands. Typically, these women are employed in jobs requiring low skills and paying relatively low wages on the basis of short-term contracts. The study aims to identify the causal factors and constraints influencing women's labour migration, and the impacts of this experience on the migrants and their families and kin-groups. While use is made of the limited documentary sources available, the findings are primarily based on interviews of selected respondents from among returned migrants as well as the family members of those still working abroad.

The findings indicate that inappropriate state policies, legislation and administrative restrictions have driven women's labour migration "underground", making the activity irregular if not illegal, with corrupt public officials making covert gains in the process. Furthermore, even though such policies have been justified and rationalised by patriarchal values, ostensibly concerned to "protect" the women and "maintain their dignity", the effective consequence has been to increase the vulnerability of female migrants to abuse and trafficking.

The findings also show the emergence of an "enabling" environment in Bangladesh that makes possible international labour migration by women despite restrictions and lack of support from the state. These non-state

institutional and individual facilitators, termed "catalytic factors" by Siddiqui, include fee-charging recruiting agents and sub-agents, middlemen and financiers. It is noted that some of these agencies clearly exploit the women while facilitating their migration. In fact, more than half the costs of migration are met by loans from traditional sources such as moneylenders and friends.

One of the major conclusions of the study is that the considerations underlying the migration by women go well beyond the economic calculus of individualised "rational choice". Nor is the process driven primarily by poverty, since the migrants tend to come from families having some means and the requisite social networks and connections. Siddiqui argues that migrant women constitute investments for their families, playing their parts in a multi-stranded familial strategy of income diversification and one-time accumulation aimed at upward mobility. Evidence is cited to show that families sell land and assets and borrow money to finance the women's migration. The migrant, in turn, is expected to send remittances to her father's or husband's families, subsequently help other family members – inclusive of *male* relatives – to migrate, and earn dowries for herself and/or female relatives.

The evidence adduced by the study points to the gender-specific social and personal considerations motivating some of the women to migrate, including the reluctance to live as a "burden" on the family and the imperatives of escaping from oppressive familial situations and reproductive roles, from threats of sexual abuse, abduction, rape, acid throwing and other forms of harassment and violence.

The study depicts host country job conditions based on case studies of the returned migrants' experiences. In general, the

women suffer from the lack of private space, the unilateral restrictions imposed on their movements and socialisation, and the resultant physical, social and cultural isolation. However, there are occupation-based differentials, with domestic helpers or maids being particularly unfree compared to nurses or factory workers with regular job conditions and formalised entitlements such as off-times and holidays. Many of the women report having to face contract substitution and cheating, exploitation and the failure to abide by contractual stipulations by employers and other concerned agencies. The data indicate that not all migrant women are winners – indeed, some end up as losers, afflicted by misfortune, illness as well as physical and sexual abuse.

However, some of the women report having resisted such acts of exploitation and domination: rather than remaining only victims of the process, these returnees have established groups and associations to protect their own interests as well as promote the welfare of women migrant workers in general. Siddiqui argues that the experience of migration has made many of the women not just conscious of their own rights but also capable of making their own decisions in taking measures to protect their rights and earnings. Such actions provide instances of the emergence of women's agency among the "traditionally docile" female migrant workers from Bangladesh.

The study finds that the migrant women often did not have much control on the use of their remittances, which could be subject to gross misuse or misappropriation by family members. Particularly striking was the fact of land purchased with the money sent by a migrant being registered not in her name but rather that of a male relative. Such instances were indicative of the persistence of patriarchal attitudes towards property ownership, despite the superior income-earning capability of the migrant women workers. However, in those instances where remittances were not misused

by others, priority was given to redeeming the loans incurred or the lands mortgaged to finance the women's migration. Significantly, the women also used their remittances for social, religious and life-cycle rituals as well as for financing dowries and re/marriages for themselves and/or their female relatives.

Siddiqui finds that women's labour migration has had little impact on the gender-based division of labour within the family – most husbands have been reluctant to take on the "female" jobs and responsibilities of their absent wives. Instead, the migrants' mothers or mothers-in-law typically took over their roles and activities, suggesting the strengthening of relationships within the extended family and kin-group. Labour migration by women has also influenced patterns of nuptiality and household formation, leading to the earlier marriages of their sons and daughters or, in cases where such adaptations have not been feasible, to the wholesale dissolution or merger of the migrants' households.

The last chapter deals with policy issues and recommendations. Siddiqui emphasises the need to prepare and train the women migrants, to equip them with appropriate job-specific skills and an elementary knowledge of the language of their prospective host countries. Women migrants also need to be made aware of their rights and entitlements both from their own and the host governments, as well as under international law, conventions and protocols pertaining to migrant workers. The recommendations are also concerned with replacing the misconceived policies of the Bangladeshi government with new ones that would facilitate labour migration by women while protecting their rights and interests in an effective manner.

Though claiming to pursue a "holistic perspective", the analytical frame of Siddiqui's study is more accurately described as eclectic, drawing upon different theoretical sources on particular issues as convenient. The primary contribution is empirical rather than analytical

or theoretical, manifested in the generation of data on the largely undocumented issues pertaining to international labour migration by Bangladeshi women.

Due to this preoccupation with description, Siddiqui has not engaged in various topical debates concerning the interpretation of women's labour migration, and its outcomes and implications. For instance, no position is taken on whether expenditure by the women in family life-cycle rituals and other social ceremonies are "wasteful" in narrowly conceived economic terms, or whether these constitute judicious investments in maintaining social relationships essential for their long-term familial relationships and security (cf. Gamburd, 2002, on Sri Lankan migrant women workers). Correspondingly, notwithstanding occasional references, the extent to which patriarchal ideology and practices in Bangladesh have been subject to pressure and change due to the fact and consequences of women's international labour migration are not fully drawn out. There is also no attempt to compare and integrate the features of *international* migration of women workers with corresponding aspects of their *domestic* migration within the country, despite the existence of a considerable body of literature on the latter.

While the research methodology and techniques used in the study draw attention to associations and correlations among the factors and consequences of migration, these are not sufficiently rigorous for inferring causal relationships. The nature of the sampling procedure actually followed limits the representativeness of the findings. Furthermore, as Siddiqui herself acknowledges, the interview techniques used did not allow the kind of prolonged interaction with respondents required for eliciting information on sensitive issues such as those relating to sexual abuse and trafficking. This may well have affected the findings presented, which show a relatively lower incidence of such

experiences among the respondents compared to studies of international migrant women workers from Bangladesh by other scholars (e.g. Blanchet *et al.*, 2002).

The organisation of the chapters in the volume is also not entirely coherent. For instance, it makes little sense to lump together the following components in a single chapter (Chapter 6, inexplicably entitled "Migration Dynamics"): (1) the methodology used for fieldwork; (2) the background of the interviewees; (3) the procedural aspects of migration (information sources, agents and role of a public agency); (4) estimates of the costs of migration; and (5) the causal factors contributing to migration. It is true that the study adduces a fair amount of statistical information; however, the quantitative analysis remains at a rather elementary level. In particular, the tabulation and presentation of statistical data is marred by lapses that could have been easily avoided by calling in some expertise in the matter. Indeed, the volume retains some features of a hastily put together research report which could have been eliminated with proper editing.

Despite these limitations, this volume by Tasneem Siddiqui makes a valuable contribution to knowledge about international labour migration by Bangladeshi women, as well as the process of "feminisation" of labour migration in the context of the global economy. Apart from providing useful documentation, the volume raises many relevant issues and questions. The exploratory analysis and findings of the study can be used to generate plausible hypotheses for further research on many related issues pertaining to international female labour migration. The findings also bear upon women's position and gender relations in Bangladesh, inclusive of patriarchal structures and ideologies, women's agency, nuptiality and marriage patterns, levels of fertility and shifts in household formation and living arrangements.

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**The Geopolitics of South Asia: From Early Empires to the Nuclear Age.** Graham P. Chapman, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, 333 pp (ISBN 0-7546-3442-6) (pbk).

The cover photo of the paperback second edition of Graham Chapman's expansive book is revealing. At the foreground a man stands with arms upraised, face contorted in anger. In the background a fire rages. Underneath the photo is the subtitle of the book: *From Early Empires to the Nuclear Age*. The man at the foreground is dressed strikingly. He is most easily identified as a Hindu – he has a saffron bandanna around his head, and a saffron sacred thread is on his right wrist (the same hand holding a metal rod). This is probably India, after a riot. The Hindu man is also wearing a black, long-sleeved T-shirt lettered in the exotic English of mass-produced shirts in Asia that seem to try to evoke a global cosmopolitanism. The T-shirt reads: "Best Classics American [*sic*] National Baseball". The identification of the man as "Hindu" marks him out as part of a group and plays down his individuality, and in his anger we sense a slight made on a group he identifies with. Chapman writes: "because individuality is much less important in India than in the west, group identity is much stronger... There are, therefore, so many ways to start a communal

riot in India" (p. 61). There remains, though, the striking incongruity of the man's T-shirt, as well as his snazzy cowboy-style belt.

It is very easy to read too much into the cover of a book. But as a representation of the complexities and fascinations of South Asia, this cover is extremely evocative. The cover photo most obviously evokes violence. It gives an impression of an unstable region. But it also speaks of religion, of its integrative and disintegrative nature, and in the man's bizarre T-shirt, the cover photo raises the spectre of American cultural globalisation. It speaks also, then, of the difficulties of chronology (something which Chapman is very aware of): of the coincidence of modern and ancient in the different clothing of the angry young Hindu. Finally, it speaks also of the tension between community and the individual, a tension which is important to appreciating Chapman's book.

Chapman's book is a learned and enthusiastic review of the geopolitics of South Asia "from early empires to the nuclear age". The cover suggests a book focused on the push and pull of uniting and dividing identities and movements. The book is structured along a discussion of four "integrative" forces that seek, in one way or another, to coalesce these identities and movements within territorial nation states. The four integrative forces are "identitive" ("those forces of common identity that link people together") (p. xvi); utilitarian ("bonds of common material interests") (p. xvi); coercive (physical or violent force used to "carve out a state or hold it together") (p. xvii); and administrative (bureaucratic forces and administrative technology). The book may be read as a study of the varying degrees of success these integrative forces have had over time in the face of ambiguous and often plainly divisive forces, such as religion, caste, global war, terrorism and sub-national nationalisms.

The book is divided into four sections. The first, intended to introduce the complex identitive forces in the region, focuses on their

cosmologies and contains highly nuanced and detailed readings of Hinduism and Islam as they are expressed in the Indian subcontinent. Prior to that is a chapter on the physical geography of the region. This makes the case for the physical concreteness of the region as an area where settlement and integration are both viable and likely. The chapters on Hinduism and Islam describe their cosmologies and also survey attempts by the Islamic empire at laying order onto a chaotic space.

The second part of the book begins with the British “usurpers” (p. 65) and ends with a consideration of the new nationalisms they have fostered. This part of the book presents a sweeping history of British military and economic engagement in the region and how these have served to further refine the boundaries of the region. Chapman provides fascinating glimpses into the moral mindset of the British imperialist, taking note of both a fear of “Asian oppressors” and a committed belief in British superiority. I would have liked a little more development of this theme, perhaps with reference to postcolonial theory. The fears, desires and delusions underpinning imperialism have, as many have argued, been important in contemporary postcolonial politics. Indeed, an engagement with such arguments may have added nuance to Chapman’s four integrative forces.

The chapter on the development of India’s economy under the Raj shows the contradictory manner of imperialist economic development. The building of a vast railway network and the cultivation of the much envied Indian Administrative Service are not matched by similar developments in health, education, industry and agriculture. India was a large commodity; it was not in the interests of the imperial state to cultivate human development. Indeed, it was probably against such interests as human development usually leads to political sophistication.

The third part looks at the independent states and the different regionalisms and

integrations within the successor states of the Raj. There is a fascinating and detailed history of the mappings that act as a prelude to Partition. This part of the book culminates in a discussion of the international politics of the region. Chapman concludes by saying that the major deduction of studying South Asia in the international context is that it is an independent geopolitical region. The tension between individual and communitarian or statist perspectives is apparent in his analysis of international politics. The major actors are states in this geopolitics. Not taken up in this book is a more critical geopolitical perspective that draws on poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial theories and seeks to move away from a focus on sovereignty towards a reconsideration of how the impression of sovereign agency on the part of the state has been constructed. A consideration of such arguments may have led to a further consideration of the constitution of political community and the tensions therein.

The book ends with a consideration of Huntington’s chilling clash of civilisations thesis as it might apply to South Asia. The book began (in the Preface) with a presumption of anarchy – Hedley Bull’s suggestion that the international system of sovereign states is marked by a condition of anarchy. The likelihood of Huntington’s clash is less, Chapman suggests, the more bonds overcoming conditions of anarchy are developed in the region. And yet, conditions of anarchy and clashes of civilisation appear an unsatisfactory way to end this book. Chapman has written a tale of South Asia that treats the complex societies and the affective links that they generate in a nuanced and sensitive manner. However, the tension between the individual or local and communal or statist scale in the book leads to a consideration of international relations and geopolitics that takes for granted the location of politics and the character of the political subject. Conditions of anarchy and the simplistic mappings of populations and civilisations upon which Huntington’s thesis

rests, need to be historicised: Chapman has more than enough of the raw material in his stunning and evocative study of the history and geography of the region to do this. Specifically, political community and political and civilisational identification in the region may be illumined through a study of issues of gender and class (perhaps through a consideration of the subaltern studies literature) and how these, in turn, illumine the way religion, caste and other bonds of identity are understood. Fundamentally, such a focus may look critically at how certain bonds of identity are promoted and others downplayed in order to promote the idea of the sovereign state as a fundamental actor in geopolitics.

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**AIDS in the Twenty-First Century: Disease and Globalisation.** Tony Barnett & Alan Whiteside, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 415 pp (ISBN 1-4039-0006-X).

This is both a wide-ranging and timely book, for which the authors should be congratulated. Tony Barnett and Alan Whiteside are familiar names in connection with the study of HIV/AIDS from a social science perspective. In *AIDS in the Twenty-First Century: Disease and Globalisation*, the authors are ambitious in turning their attention to areas usually dominated by the work of clinicians, statisticians, geographers, economists, political scientists and other specialists.

The book's 14 chapters are structured into three sections: "Introduction" (Chapters 1-2), "Exploration of Susceptibility" (Chapters 3-5), and an in-depth exploration of "Vulnerability and Impact" (Chapters 6-14). The book covers a lot of ground and lives up fairly well to the global focus it claims in the title. There is an obvious strength of attention devoted to

Africa, which reflects the regional bias of the authors' primary experience, but there are also fairly good efforts to delve into the unfolding pandemic in other places including India and the Ukraine. Given that the greatest number of infected individuals and AIDS-related deaths have been in sub-Saharan Africa (as highlighted in Chapter 1 on the global nature, facts and figures of the enormity and scale of the epidemic), the strength of focus on sub-Saharan Africa is justified, though it might be frustrating to readers with other particular regional interests. The depth of emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa is most evident in Chapter 5, which asks: "Why Africa?". In this chapter, the authors deal in an enlightening and informative way with how and why sub-Saharan Africa has the highest infection rates – basing explanations on sustained environments of susceptibility, and therefore risky sexual behaviour, not least due to social dislocation subsequent to war, and to corruption, violence and even development.

By drawing together material from multiple disciplines, Barnett and Whiteside seek to tell a holistic story about the nature, impacts and implications of the globally unfolding HIV/AIDS pandemic. At times they make a good job of this. For example, explaining in Chapter 2 how statistics for HIV/AIDS are gathered, reported and projected, they clearly demonstrate how information about the pandemic are less "hard facts", but rather outcomes of economic, social and political processes. At other points they seem to be on shakier foundations and are less convincing – for instance in dealing with ideas of gender identity and behaviour associated with what they call "exaggerated masculinity" in the context of the loss of social cohesion (p. 82). Similarly, in Chapter 4, which is a set of case studies of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in different countries with varying geographical locations, economic characteristics and epidemics, not everyone is likely to agree with the authors' classification of countries into categories of low/high wealth and low/high social cohesion.

Overall, the authors are to be congratulated on drawing together so much diverse material on such a pertinent issue. It is certainly time there was a book like this to update the efforts made about a decade ago to provide overviews of the HIV/AIDS situation worldwide and in Africa (Barnett & Blaikie, 1992; Gould, 1993). *AIDS in the Twenty-First Century* is of interest not just to geographers in or concerned with the tropics, but should be paid attention to by geographers everywhere – barely any of us are not affected by the HIV/AIDS global pandemic. It is clearly a book to recommend to students, or the general reader – not least for being written in a generally accessible style in which specialised terms and ideas are explained for the student or non-specialist. However, perhaps this is where the volume is open to criticism – by trying to be too general and accessible to all. This does have positive aspects. Thus, this reviewer at least learnt some interesting facts, such as about the existence of prions as vectors of disease spread, and the fact that Cuba had tested the whole of its population for HIV in the mid-1980s, isolated the infected and, consequently, has a low infection rate today. Similarly, for non-medically trained individuals, the basic science of HIV/AIDS in Chapter 2 proves very clear and helpful.

It would be unfair to dwell too much on the faults incurred in the craft of writing and producing this volume. However, it is only fair to warn the reader that, at times, *AIDS in the Twenty-First Century* does not appear to be the high quality book expected. Rather, it gives the impression in places that some sections were rapidly assembled by cutting, pasting and reproducing materials from many sources, with insufficient attention to detail and copyediting. The result is difficult to follow at times and causes great annoyance to the reader. To identify just two examples: Table 1.2 (p. 20) and Figure 2.4 (p. 43) are not well integrated with the text. In addition, there are needless typographical errors in many places (e.g. p. 66, p. 358). Furthermore, not all the material in

the boxes is referred to in the text (e.g. in Chapter 3). The resulting conclusion is that at least part of this book was produced with undue haste and/or carelessness. A further minor quibble is that on some pages, the print quality is rather poor, but this is presumably the fault of the publishers' production process, rather than the authors.

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**Empire's New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement.** József Böröcz & Melinda Kovács (eds.), Shropshire, UK: Central Europe Review Ltd., 2001, e-book web-link <<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~eu/Empire.pdf>>, 305 pp (ISBN 1-84287-009-2).

On 7 February 1584, a 52-year-old peasant from Montereale, a small hill town of the Italian Friuli, was called to trial before the Inquisition. As the historian Carlo Ginzburg (1983) reminds us, the name of the accused was Domenico Scandella, but he was simply called Menocchio by the local townsfolk. At issue were certain apparently blasphemous statements attributed to Menocchio, a miller, which the villagers reported in a more or less fragmentary and disconnected way to the vicar general in charge of the trial: "The air is God... the earth is our mother"; "Who do you imagine God to be? God is nothing but a little breath, and whatever else man imagines him to be" (Ginzburg, 1983: 4). Most seriously, Menocchio spoke of a "new world" to come that had nothing to do with the world of

heavenly paradise, but was most materially engraved in the lives of labouring men and women here on earth. Through a careful reading of the texts believed to have influenced Menocchio's religious beliefs, Ginzburg mapped an explosive discrepancy between the textual and oral tradition informing the miller's thoughts. Such a vision could be reduced neither to the authorial intent of books nor to the semi-literate rantings of the spoken word, but its outcomes nevertheless produced a coherent *imago mundi* reflecting a deeply rooted peasant utopian tradition characteristic of these sub-tropical lands. In forging such an exegetical and "evidentiary" methodology, Ginzburg attempted to ground a materialist frame for the understanding of everyday life in the early modern period, one that avoided the implicit elitism of contemporaneous literary and post-humanist approaches to the study of popular cultures.

In the book *Empire's New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*, the editors József Böröcz and Melinda Kovács draw on Ginzburg's evidentiary method to argue that the entire process of European "enlargement" – the phrase used to describe the European Union's (EU) inclusion of ten new member states from east-central Europe on 1 May 2004 – is irremediably tainted by the logic of European colonial and imperial rule. In this assertion, they make a timely and important point. As Böröcz makes clear in his introduction, "Empire and Coloniality in the 'Eastern Enlargement' of the European Union" (pp. 4-50), the absence of any theoretical engagement with notions of empire and coloniality in the mainstream sociology of west European statehood has privileged an "internalist" perspective to the study of the state that has successfully occluded reference to the ongoing connectedness of those societies to the rest of the world. Such a perspective, indeed, continues to make it possible to view Europe's external relations as conceptually disconnected from its internal dynamics, thus masking the ways in which the experiences of western Europe, and by

implication its grand integrative schemes, have been and continue to be mutually constituted through important social, cultural and economic dynamics operating "beyond Europe".

The thesis that eastward enlargement represents a new "Di-vision of Europe" (Sher, pp. 235-72) according to older practices of European colonial and imperial rule, follows from the simple observation that all the European states currently engaged in the "sharing and pooling" (p. 13) of sovereignty have, at one time or another, been deeply implicated in modern overseas empire-building. We are reminded that, "as recently as two generations ago, nine of the fifteen states that constitute the European Union today directly controlled 31 percent to 46 percent of the land surface of the world outside Europe" (p. 11). This fact is used to sustain the importance of "the lasting, pivotal significance of the experience of colonial empire in the histories of those societies" (p. 12). Although the different colonial trajectories of western European member states are acknowledged, Böröcz emphasises that, viewed from east and central Europe, the EU "is unique, and quite distinct from the eastern half of the continent, in its key member societies having inherited the entirety of the European colonial legacy" (p. 14, original emphasis). Through deft surgery, this legacy in turn is linked to a selective reading of the (western) European enlightenment, framed as a unitary historical form. So defined, the enlightenment is purported to have laid the philosophical foundations for western European subjectivity based on ethical, civilised, secular and cosmopolitan principles, a self-fashioning that required as its condition of being an east-central European *other*, defined as backward, religious, immoral and parochial.

From this, it is but a quick jump to propose two sub-hypotheses: (1) that the formation of the EU represents in fact a global imperial strategy "of sorts"; and (2) that the specific

histories of European colonialism and empire are reflected through the sociocultural patterns of “governmentality” of the EU. Regarding western Europe’s relationship with its east and central European hinterlands, the substance of this imperial governmentality is elucidated through the following mechanisms of control: (1) *unequal economic exchange*; (2) *coloniality*, defined as “the cognitive mapping of empire’s populations creating a fixed system of inferiorised otherness”; (3) *export of governmentality*, via the “normalising, standardising and control mechanisms of modern statehood”; and (4) *geopolitics*, defined by “a long-term global strategy of projecting the central state’s power to its external environment” (p. 18).

In his introduction, Böröcz is careful to distinguish the practices of modern European “coloniality” from its historicised links to an older European colonialism. In so doing, he gestures toward a potentially fruitful paradox: due to the absence of a colonial past from the history of east-central Europe, these societies of the former state socialist world have had no occasion to experience the forms of moral political “cleansing” wrought upon western European member states as a result of decolonisation. The power of racial and other hierarchical cognitive schemata is therefore “not only present in the cultures of east and central Europe, it occupies a highly marked, indeed quite cultic location: it lurks in their prized cultural cargo arriving from the westerly direction” (p. 29). Since official communist political discourse placed the moral onus of colonialism, like nazism, squarely on the shoulders of the western European powers, this has marked the post-socialist context with a “naive gullibility” (p. 29) towards the notion of population hierarchies on the basis of racial and cultural-civilisational criteria. As a result, the east and central European desire for EU membership is interpreted in terms of an “implicit and un-articulated nostalgia for the contemporary advantages and identity designs originating in somebody else’s

colonial-imperial past” (p. 30). Distinguishing between two different forms of imperial rule – detached and contiguous – Böröcz is thus keen to emphasise that all the societies of east-central Europe have yet to fully confront their experience with the latter, a form of empire-building which has produced unreconciled collective memories both as rulers and as subjects.

Yet in sustaining the “evidentiary” claim for the inherent coloniality of the European enlargement project, and in the zeal to overcome eurocentric social-scientific biases, the specific nuances offered by east-central Europe’s existential “in-betweenness” are overshadowed by an overly schematic rendering of western Europe, both in its traditions and current practices. Through a tendentious reading of EU policy documents, the authors in this volume thereby focus their attention on only one half of the Ginzburgian couplet. In so doing, they preclude the very possibilities for counter-tactics of ruse and resistance – what might appropriately be called “Menocchioesque” stratagems – that would speak to the inherently dialogical nature of all colonial enterprise, while also offering the grounds for a post-enlargement politics for the inhabitants of the region. Ironically, in spite of the frequent recourse to a literature that would point otherwise – such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Edward Said, Mary Louise Pratt – it would appear that, for the authors, the internal heterogeneity and mutually constitutive nature of the European orientalisating gaze is entirely absent.

Most of the subsequent chapters thus tend simply to read off the dynamics of eastward enlargement from the narrative of a singularly repressive western enlightenment cum colonial legacy, reinforcing Böröcz’s view that the reassertion of European empire and coloniality in the wake of the demise of communism is “something we have indeed seen before: the postcolonial *status quo*” (p. 36). The bulk of the contributions focus on textual evidence, culled primarily from official

EU opinions on the respective candidate countries, to substantiate the postcolonial “return of the same” in east-central Europe. Focusing on such “specimens of consequential discourse” (p. 19), the essays of Böröcz, Kovács and Peter Kabachnik, and Anna Sher explore a sociology of state rhetorical stratagems to reveal the inherently unequal and hierarchical practices of othering encountered in the process of candidate application and evaluation. Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro analyses the global geopolitical context overdetermining the relationship of east-central Europe with respect to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the EU; and Katalin Dancsi plumbs the idiom of racialised *otherness* used by the Austrian Freedom Party to reject the European pretensions of “eastern” applicant candidates. Throughout these interventions, a relentlessly opaque and discriminatory west European bureaucracy is counterpoised against arbitrarily marginalised and inferiorised east-central European candidate states.

Such renderings of EU-candidate member dynamics, I suggest, do not do justice to the complexities and ambiguities of postsocialist transformation hinted at in Böröcz’s introductory remarks. Rather than exploring the mutual imbrication of western enlightenment and colonial reason with current practices of east-central European self-fashioning, the elaboration of a narrative of geopolitical “innocence” elides the necessary task of engaging with the region’s own imperial legacy of communist rule. I would argue that this settling of accounts with contiguous colonial memory is crucial for the east and central European candidate countries, and a necessary precondition for their engagement with western European member states as postcolonial equals. Were they to deny their own recent colonial complicities in this instance, as they had done with nazism during the second half of the twentieth century, they may very well fall prey to a twenty-first century cultural politics which, as the war on Iraq has

made clear, conceives of its responsibilities towards the outside world in no other terms than those of pre-emptive entitlement. This is not the “new world” Menocchio had foretold for Europe. Had the authors in this volume followed the sub-tropical spirit of Ginzburg’s evidentiary method to its logical limits, they might have discovered a more forward-looking politics for east-central Europe today.

## REFERENCE

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**Diaspora and Identity: The Sociology of Culture in Southeast Asia.** John Clammer, Subang Jaya, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 2002, 340 pp, bibliography and index (ISBN 967-978-791-5).

*Diaspora and Identity: The Sociology of Culture in Southeast Asia* is divided into four parts. The first, which constitutes almost half the book, consists of a lengthy rumination on doing cultural studies in Southeast Asia, while the last three offer a more substantive study of Chinese diasporas in the region, with an emphasis on the Straits Chinese (or *peranakan*) of Malaysia and Singapore. The chapters found in parts II-IV are presumably meant to stand as exemplars of the sort of analysis the author calls for in Part I.

I must confess to finding this book’s titling somewhat misleading. The subtitle’s reference to sociology seems misplaced because the book’s key disciplinary identification is with cultural studies. Furthermore, the absence of any reference to Straits Chinese in the title is

also perhaps a little disingenuous. As the “empirical” component of this study, the Nanyang Chinese are to be found hiding behind the term “diaspora”. This concept, we discover, functions as the book’s key metaphor for culture in the region – migration, pluralism and cross-cultural contact being for Clammer definitive of contemporary Southeast Asian identities. “[L]ong before postmodernism was ever heard of”, he opines, “the fundamental character of the region was a genius for synthesis, a blending of differences and the coexistence of alternatives within the same spatial contexts” (p. 10). In a deft move, the historical experience of the Nanyang Chinese comes to epitomise the figure of Southeast Asian identity, and the book’s focus on this particular group of Southeast Asians is “naturalised”.

One can come up with a couple of immediate objections to such an approach. The most obvious relates to the problematic nature of privileging reflexively hybrid populations like the *peranakan*, eurasians, Chinese-Filipino mestizos, for example, as exemplary Southeast Asians. What about that considerable proportion of inhabitants of the region who build their identities on metaphors of autochthony and cultural purity, and to whom the application of the category of diaspora is not appropriate at all, even if a “diaspora-lite” version of the concept (a hollowed out definition which merely signals a putative hybrid postmodern subjectivity without complex migratory histories)? Indeed, applying the term “diaspora” to the Straits Chinese is not a straightforward proposition either, especially in the case of Chinese Singaporeans: consider the patchy success of the Singapore state’s initiative to get them to reactivate their diasporic selves as links within a transnational Chinese economy.

On the issue of a Southeast Asian cultural studies, Clammer makes a plea for the development of “indigenous” forms of social thought to counter the hegemony of (western) European social theory in the region. He sees

great potential for cultural studies as a discipline (or interdisciplinary field) in Southeast Asia because of its capacity to operate in a middle register that mediates between, on the one hand, local historical experiences and sociocultural realities, and on the other, developments in social theory occurring mostly in the west. Going further, he suggests in a somewhat utopian vein that indigenous varieties of *religious* thought may form the basis for an Asian social theory:

If Western theory has grown out of an individualist, rationalist, egalitarian, secular... compost, then Asian theory should grow out of a soil permeated by religion, a concern for a more relational understanding of the self, a central place for the emotions and a greater comfort with ideas of hierarchy (p. 53).

And elsewhere:

A Buddhist epistemology is a much greater challenge to the philosophical assumptions of the West than any amount of political posturing by Asian Marxists, who in reality share a Western ideology (p. 110).

It is a little hard to know what to make of these assertions. Personally, I can only read Clammer’s pronouncement that the foundation of an Asian social science must be based on the “recovery of indigenous notions of the self and with them the genuine differences that separate cultures” (p. 56) as a somewhat naive yearning for a lost precolonial essence. Surely an “Asian” social science will most likely be characterised by specific configurations of appropriation, indigenisation, syncretism and hybridisation of western and non-western elements (as is the case with other Asian modernities, for instance in the visual arts) emerging as the result of struggles within local *and* global fields of intellectual cultural production. The idea that Asian Marxists will only be inauthentic mimics of western ideology until they turn to Buddhist

thought is... well, both offensive and preposterous.

In Part II of the book, the author moves on to a discussion of the history and social structure of the Straits Chinese diaspora in Singapore and Malaysia. Here, despite Clammer's promise to offer a fresh and critical interpretation from a sociology of culture perspective, we discover a strikingly orthodox restatement of the "Chinese immigrant enterprise syndrome" identified by Yao Souchou (2002). Based almost exclusively on secondary sources, this section comes complete with a near-uncritical reproduction of the myths of overseas Chinese entrepreneurship, kinship-orientation, trust, *guanxi*, family business, frugality and "functional congruence between belief and business ideology" (p. 172).

Part III addresses the issues of memory and nostalgia in the construction of ethnic identity among overseas Chinese. In this section, the author seeks to develop a distinctively cultural studies approach to kinship which would reclaim the "edge" of this field from a staid anthropology. This initiative lies in approaching kinship as practice and not structure, and relating it to questions of gender and sexuality lying at the nexus of law, economics, culture and politics. These problematics are illustrated in an interesting case study of the legal determination of magnate Yeap Chor Ee's inheritance, and the postcolonial Malaysian legal system's attempts to come to grips with "traditional" Chinese kinship and the question of sexuality within it.

Part IV of the book deals with religion, addressing the *peranakan* negotiation of Chinese and Malay cosmologies, and (a little out of place in this book) the phenomenon of Japanese new religions and the sociology of conversion in Singapore.

While much of the discussion is provocative and interesting, one cannot help feeling that

the ethnographic substance promised in the first part of this book is at best deferred, and at worst absent. There is an excessive reliance on secondary texts, and what appears to be original ethnography (it is often hard to tell) is frequently superficial. The work also languishes in a very general and "middling" level of discussion that does not achieve any significant theoretical sophistication and insight, or empirical detail, richness and originality. Perhaps its greatest value is as a provocation.

## REFERENCE

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**Rethinking Environmental Management in the Pacific Rim: Exploring Local Participation in Bangkok, Thailand.** Amrita Daniere & Lois M. Takahashi, Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002, 171 pp (ISBN: 0-7546-1725-4).

The focus of this useful book is the "environmental governance" of health-threatening local environmental problems in urban areas in Southeast Asia. It uses the case of Bangkok, Thailand, to explore the complexities in considerable detail. It makes both empirical and theoretical contributions and will be of special interest to specialists on Thailand, although it deserves a wider readership than that.

While the book shows its worth in several strong chapters that focus on Bangkok, it unfortunately starts in a somewhat lacklustre manner. Chapter 1 ("Economic Growth and Urban Environmental Degradation in the

Pacific Rim”) provides background information and statistics on the nature and severity of the problems addressed by the book and the main approaches to these being adopted in cities of the region. The intention seems to be to provide context and motivation for the detailed treatment of the Bangkok case which occupies the rest of the volume. This may be useful for readers unfamiliar with the region but the chapter often seems a little plodding and covers material that has been amply reported elsewhere. The book would also have benefited from some early introduction to the goals of the volume as a whole, which would have helped to frame the presentation of background information. Another small criticism is that, although the book is well illustrated with photographs, these often seem to have been inserted as an afterthought, and often seem not to relate closely to adjacent text.

Chapter 2 provides background on environmental management systems in Southeast Asia, with most of the chapter devoted to three case studies drawn from reviews of secondary sources: water provision in Jakarta (Indonesia), waste management in Metro Manila (the Philippines), and air pollution in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam). These case studies usefully introduce an important theme for the book as a whole, namely civic participation and the extent to which community-focused approaches might be important for environmental management.

The heart of this book consists of three solidly researched chapters that focus on the case of Bangkok, drawing on research by the authors. The first of these, Chapter 3, offers an excellent review and analysis of the role of the Thai state and its bureaucratic institutions involved in environmental management. This treatment integrates in an engaging and lively way key theoretical approaches to understanding the Thai state and Thai society with insightful discussion of the realities on the ground in Bangkok. The authors posit the notion of “environmental governance” as “a

way to clarify and articulate the role and practices of state, para-state, and non-state actors in environmental management in Thailand” (p. 69). The next two chapters build on this non-state-centric perspective with critical analysis of the roles of local residents and communities and of other non-state actors in Bangkok, in particular non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of community participation through a review of literature on this in developing countries, followed by an analysis of a survey of low-income Bangkok residents which investigated linkages between cultural values, attitudes and perceptions, and behaviour and action. This survey revealed a number of interesting findings, from environmental priorities of the residents (mosquitoes, flies, rats and other vermin were rated very highly as problems while traffic issues were rated rather low), to the importance of a widespread lack of knowledge about the links between health and environmental conditions, especially water quality. The survey also highlighted complexities in the role of cultural values relevant to governance and how these influenced household behaviour related to environmental health issues and community action to deal with them. In particular, the authors argue that their findings reveal strong links between a lack of belief in traditional patron-client relationships and a willingness to participate in community action. However, they also highlight great complexity in interpreting this finding and its implications for policy. They also argue that economic and policy analysis of local environmental infrastructure (such as sanitation, water treatment and supply, and solid waste disposal), which tends to focus on willingness-to-pay issues, should be complemented by investigation of environmental priorities and values.

Chapter 5 examines another level of civil society involvement by focusing especially on the diverse roles of various Thai environmental NGOs. The discussion builds

on theoretical literature and, through a detailed review of the Thai NGO scene, addresses the question of the extent to which Thai environmental-NGO activity can best be seen as contributing to a corporatist “shadow state” rather than as actively resisting the state. This chapter would perhaps have benefited from more detailed case study material on key NGOs of interest. Nevertheless, the authors succeed in providing an interesting and insightful treatment which uncovers the diversity within civil society and avoids simplistic answers. NGOs of various types are highlighted, ranging from corporate-linked organisations such as the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), to more grassroots-oriented groups such as the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER). The authors provide a nuanced appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector, including sounding a warning to international donor agencies not to naively assume that all

NGOs will necessarily promote community participation and grassroots decision-making. The two final chapters then do a good job of bringing together the findings from Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to provide a clear summary and integration, pointing to the practical and theoretical significance of the study.

This volume is recommended to post-graduates, scholars and policy practitioners with an interest in the role of community, civil society and non-state centred approaches to urban governance or environmental governance, urban environmental health issues, urban infrastructure policy, and even political ecology in developing countries.

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