

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**LUIN GOLDRING and SAILAJA KRISHNAMURTI, *Organizing the Transnational: Labour, Politics, and Social Change*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007, 282 p., index.**

The title *Organizing the Transnational* is somewhat misleading in the breadth that it implies. While the collection of essays, edited by Luin Goldring and Sailaja Krishnamurti, does indeed deal with “labour, politics, and social change” as the secondary title posits, it does so almost exclusively through the lens of migrant communities in Canada. This focus is, in fact, one of the book’s virtues as it allows readers to see the ways in which gender, ethnicity, and class intersect to create unique transnational identities amongst groups of people that are more often than not lumped together under the category of “immigrant” in the Canadian popular press and in policy circles.

The editors’ introduction offers a helpful background to the study of migrant transnationalism. The distinction between migrant transnationalism and diaspora is illustrated by outlining the different intellectual traditions within which these concepts developed. They suggest that diaspora, the older of the two terms, emerged out of the humanities, as well as political and cultural studies; while transnationalism originally developed within the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (4). Migrant transnationalism has been applied generally to people who “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (5), while the former has traditionally referred to “displaced” peoples. However, the definition of a diaspora has broadened in the literature to indicate “collectivities of people living in multiple national contexts who identify as having a common history or identity based on language, ethnicity, racialization, and/or religion” (4). This shift in emphasis has allowed for a “potentially large overlap between the two terms” (5).

Goldring and Krishnamurti suggest that the growth in studies on migrant transnationalism can be explained by a number of “interrelated transformations.” They highlight three that seem particularly relevant to the works represented in this volume. First, there are the “changes in migrant practices” owing largely to the ability of people to communicate not only regularly across the globe, but also (and in part because of this) to conduct business and transfer money in a regular and safe fashion (7). Second, there have been a number of “changes in state policies” concerning the political participation of those who live “away,” the militarization of borders, and dual citizenship, as well as the emergence of multiculturalism as an ideology and state policy (7-8).

Finally, there has been a conceptual change in the way migration and diaspora are taken up by researchers and theorists. This change can be related to the “shift

during the 1980s away from Marxist and neo-Marxist structural models (of migration) ... criticized for ignoring human agency” and “orthodox neoclassical models of international migration” which “downplayed or disregarded history and political economy” (9). It is also related to the recognition in the literature that migrants do not necessarily “sever ties or simply lose contact with their homeland” and that many experience “contradictory loyalties, identities, practices, and forms of belonging” (9). Furthermore, and closely related is the “recasting of ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnic and racial’ studies ... into frameworks and language that recognize transnational and diasporic formations and identities” (9).

The editors argue that “transnational studies should include a broad set of institutional actors and processes.” However, they see the “field” of transnational studies as focused on immigrants and state policies (13). While connecting the study of migrant transnationalism to the “broader context of macrostructural changes commonly referred to as globalization” (6), the editors completely ignore other bodies of literature which lay claim to the study of transnationalism within the context of “globalization.” There seems to be an attempt here to foreclose the term. Thus, “advocacy networks” are considered “transnational,” capital has “mobility” and production is organized at the “international” level. If the intention is to affix the term “transnational” to something specific, such as migrant communities or the networks they create, the argument should be made explicit.

Such an argument may be difficult. There are numerous ways in which people residing in Canada act transnationally or are enmeshed in transnational networks. Shopping is one example. The struggle over the Palestinian/Israeli conflict among university students, many of whom have never set foot in the Middle East, at York, Concordia and other universities is another example. The cross-borders coalition politics that developed in opposition to the FTAA, as illustrated in this volume by Rusa Jeremic’s research, is yet another. The point is that the term has broad meaning and that this needs to be acknowledged, regardless of the focus on a particular manifestation of transnationalism.

Transnational subjecthood is undoubtedly shaped in numerous ways. However, a couple of influences appear significant for a number of authors. There is, of course, the concern that individuals have for the communities and families they (or their parents) left when they moved to Canada. As the editors note in the introduction, the “five Ts of transnationalism” have had a profound impact on the ability of people to participate in the life of more than one community (7). The five Ts of transnationalism (telecommunication, transportation, tourism, trade, and money transfer mechanisms) are apparently borrowed from Manuel Orozco. Concern for the political and economic life “back home” has undoubtedly always been a concern for migrants and diasporic groups. However, as a number of authors in this volume point out, the ability of transnational communities to influence the politics and economics of their countries of origin has been enhanced to such an extent that R. Cheran argues in his article on Tamil community networks that “those who leave and those who remain should be conceptualized as a single socioeconomic and political field transcending the traditional boundaries and boundedness of nation-state” (130-131). Relatively

small Tamil diasporic networks in Canada have played a significant role in the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka (Sarah V. Wayland; R. Cheran).

The efforts of Tamils outside of Sri Lanka to sustain the struggle for a Tamil homeland, and the refugees that this struggle has produced, may have contributed to a cohesive and highly visible community in Canada. Cheran suggests that this is related to the ethnic divisions which characterize the struggle in Sri Lanka. A different reaction to ethnic and religious strife in South Asia is the South Asian Left Democratic Alliance (SALDA). As Aparna Sundar explains, this organization, initially comprised of university students and faculty with ties to South Asia, developed in reaction to religious chauvinism both in South Asian countries and South Asian diasporic communities (206). Whereas the case of Tamils in Canada may be seen as one of an ethnic minority (in Sri Lanka as well as Canada) uniting around a common struggle, SALDA represents the unity of individuals from a number of ethnic groups united in a common struggle against ethnic/religious bigotry. Yet transnational engagement in struggles rooted in countries of origin does not by necessity lead to such examples of unity. For Filipino communities in Canada, according to Philip F. Kelly, “continued engagement with political processes in the Philippines has, in the past, led to divisions” rather than cohesion, which he sees as a factor in the relative invisibility of Filipino-Canadians as a political force in Canada (216).

Transnational subjecthood is also shaped by the state policies of both sending and receiving countries. The articles by Stan Raper; Kerry Preibisch; Gaby Motta, Carlos Enrique Terry and Luin Goldring; and Pablo S. Bose illustrate, in part, how a number of countries have tapped into the concern shown by diasporic and migrant communities, largely as a means of increasing financial remittances or to gain more control over them. In some cases, such policies are couched in the language of reaching out to diasporic communities, as in the Peruvian government’s Advisory Councils for Peruvians Abroad (Motta, Terry and Goldring). In other cases they are less subtle, for instance the state of Gujarat’s frank request for financial support from non-resident Indians to finance the Narmada Valley dam project (Pablo S. Bose). In the case of temporary workers who come to Canada through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, consulate officials even participate in the disciplining of their nationals, presumably to maintain their country’s participation in the program, a program which contributes directly to their foreign currency reserves (Ofelia Becerril).

A number of authors also offer convincing evidence of how transnational ties are both facilitated and shaped by the state policies of receiving countries, such as Canada. Uzma Shakir argues that the retention of transnational links by non-white migrants has often been related to state policies, such as disallowing family migration, designed to prevent the establishment of stable non-European communities. Although those who migrate to Canada are no longer prevented from bringing their families with them, they very often find themselves in precarious employment that does not reflect their education or skills. Patricia Landolt’s excellent essay, drawing on over ten years of studying Salvadoran migrant organizations, offers a thorough analysis of the different settlement patterns of Salvadoran migrants in Toronto and Los Angeles. Her research leads her to the conclusion that while the context of forced migration is of critical

importance to refugees' "interpretation of their migration as temporary or partial" (204), of equal importance is how "state and non-state institutional engagements with a newcomer population" create varied outcomes (205).

This interaction of receiving countries' state and non-state institutions with migrant groups comes through in a number of other articles as well. Preibisch, Raper, and Becerril all provide excellent examples of hyper-exploitation in the agricultural sector in Ontario, but also illustrate how unions, churches and social justice groups are reaching out to these workers. The contradictory response of Canadians to migrants is also covered by Myer Siemiatycki and Valerie Preston's article on the wave of Hong Kong migrants who arrived just prior to the handover of Hong Kong.

As suggested at the beginning of this review, the great virtue of this volume is that its treatment of "transnationalism" is far more specific than the title would lead one to believe. The focus, largely on the transnational lives of those who have migrated to Canada, allows the topic to be explored in a great deal of depth. This collection is a valuable contribution to the study of migrations, diasporas and state policies directed towards migrants. It would make an excellent reader for courses relating to these topics or Canadian studies more broadly.

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