

Book Review

Neilesh Bose, Editor, *South Asian Migrations in Global History: Labor, Law, and Wayward Lives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. xix + 254. \$41, ISBN 9781350197343 (paperback).

South Asian migration is a rich topic where a world history perspective can be productive. This collection contains some fascinating research addressing challenging issues, but does not entirely transcend the fragmented and inconsistent quality often present in multi-author work.

The bulk of this collection addresses indentured labor migration from British India from the abolition of the trade in enslaved labor in the 1830s through the abolition of indenture contracts in 1920; government management of emigration continued through the remainder of the mid-20th century. Indenture systems, formal and informal pathways, conveyed nearly 1.3 million subjects of British India (modern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc.) overseas, mostly to other British colonial or dominion territories. The best-known destination, and most discussed in this volume, was South Africa, famous for the political intervention of then-young lawyer Mohandas Gandhi against the racist legal system and abusive labor practices of white rule. Others went elsewhere in Africa, and to the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, in parallel with 'free' uncontracted migrants, often business people and professionals serving those migrants. Migrants to the Americas only appear in two biographical studies, so famous episodes such as the *Komagata Maru* attempt to circumvent Canadian anti-Asian immigration laws are only mentioned in passing, and the post-1965 boom in South Asian immigration into the United States is not considered. Similarly brief are references to migration to Europe, implied in the cut-off of indentured contract labor in 1917 to serve Britain's need for labor in the war effort, and migration within South Asia, including Partition.

The Prologue, Introduction, and Epilogue take strong historiographical stands. Uma Dhupelia-Meshtrie's opening commentary on "Archives, Paper Regimes, and

Mobility," points to "archival walls set up by colonial systems bent on segregating people and leading to segregated histories" (3). Neilesh Bose's introduction cites the problem of historical discourse that is overwhelmed by British imperial narratives and minimizes "South-South" engagement. He believes further work, including attention to Islamic migrations like pilgrimage and intra-national movement, can complicate or challenge conventional historiography. Renisa Mawani's epilogue highlights the methods of Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (Norton, 2019), whose title also was borrowed for the subtitle of this book: filling in archival gaps with psychological sensitivity and attention to gender. Mawani also talks about the potential for oceanic history to blend and connect communities' stories.

The subtitle foreshadows the main sections: "Impacts of Indentured Labor," "Law in Migration Histories," and "Historical Biography." The first two probably do not need to be separated, though one could make a case for the first chapters to be more about politics, excepting Ashutosh Kumar, "Legal Discourse on 'Coolies' Migration from India to the Sugar Colonies, 1837-1922." Kumar's claim that the government-managed indenture contract system provided sufficient freedom of choice and bargaining power for workers that it should not be lumped with other forms of coerced or unfree labor rests on technical details about language and procedure, as well as at least one incident in which laborers were provided with culturally appropriate food. Literature on the agency of enslaved people often describes compromises and allowances, though. Kumar, among others in this book, attacks Adam McKeown's work, this time for lumping indentured labor in with enslavement as unfree, but does not address that McKeown was analyzing a larger population including Chinese migrant labor. Kumar does not seem to have convinced his coauthors, several of whom echo contemporary critics of indenture as an irredeemably coercive and violent process, and even he admits that the less-regulated personal recruitment systems could be abusive.

The only other author to directly address enslavement is Riyad Koya, "Slavery, Abolitionism, Indentured Labor: The Problem of Exit and the Border Between Land and Sea in Colonial India." This is an interesting analysis of legal distinctions masquerading as geographic designations and impinging on spatial processes, including a discussion of how British interdiction of slave transports failed to impact South Asian practices, and how border-crossing, even between British dominions, inspired nationalism and anti-migration sentiment. Andrea Wright's "Imperial Labor: Labor, Security, and the Depoliticization of Oil Production in the Arabian Peninsula," describes the use of precarious indentured and post-indenture contract labor to eliminate strikes and maintain British strategic control in the Gulf region, as well as highlighting the British use of 'primitivism' as an argument against modern labor protections or state development.

Goolam Vahed's "Gokhale, Polak, and the End of Indian Indenture in South Africa, 1909-1911," is the first of two chapters that directly engage with Gandhi's career, detailing how the Indian National Congress used Gandhi's and Henry Polak's activism against indentured labor's troubles as a rallying cry. Another South African narrative comes from Marina Martin, "Who is Asiatic? Drawing the Boundary in the Legal and Political Framing of Indian South Africans, 1860-1960," which describes the breakdown of British citizenship as a unifying force in dominion territories, and then the diplomatic process by which Chinese, Japanese, and Turkish citizens were exempted from 'Asiatic' status under South Africa's Land Law. The final South African chapter is Devarakshanam Govinden's "A Woman of Peace and Calm: The Story of Senthamani Govender," her grandmother was a child of two indentured immigrants; 'Granny' endured young widowhood, forced relocation, and constant discrimination but has to be considered a successful matriarch of a thriving South African Indian family. Govinden cites "Jacob Dlamini[']s important point that the dominance of the master narrative of struggle history in South Africa makes us forget the way ordinary people lived under apartheid" (217).

The other two biographical studies are particularly engaging; they are also the only chapters whose subjects pass through North America. Editor Neilesh Bose's "Global Biography" of Taraknath Das buries the lede a bit, leaving until nearly the end the story of Das's journalistic engagement with Tolstoy, and then Tolstoy's response to Das inspiring Gandhi to write *Hind Swaraj*. Das gained and then lost US citizenship, spent time in US prison for subversion during WWI, and was tracked by British Intelligence as a radical. Das's defense of violence as a liberation strategy prompted the exchanges with Tolstoy and then Gandhi, and Bose seems to take their side, critiquing Das as being tainted with "liberal imperialism." Another radical pursued across the globe by British intelligence, supported at times by German agents seeking to destabilize the UK, is profiled by Daniel Kent-Carrasco. "Beyond the Reach of Empire: Pandurang Khankhoje's Transit from British Colonial Subject to Mexican 'Naturalizado' (1924-1954)," shows its subject escaping from India to the US west coast, then to the midwest, then to Persia, Europe, then Mexico, and finally back to India. He was a leader in the burgeoning field of agricultural science, gaining positions of substantial authority in Persia and Mexico. Khankhoje's time in Mexico came during revolutionary reforms and modernization, where his radical nationalist background and technocratic training served him very well. A quarter century after attaining Mexican citizenship, he returned to India, but found the reality of independence disappointing.

Overall, this is an interesting snapshot of the state of modern South Asian diaspora studies, and a valuable introduction to a strong group of scholars who will continue shaping the field. It is not a replacement for a general text, but chapters could productively provide depth and diversity in undergraduate or graduate courses.

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