

*Trans-Status Subjects: Gender in the Globalization of South and Southeast Asia*. Edited by Sonita Sarker and Esha Niyogi De. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. 344 pp.

A collection of essays on gender in the experiences of colonialisms and globalizations, *Trans-Status Subjects* explores the gendered dynamics of women's status across South and Southeast Asia. The contributions map women into places of the region, spaces of economic subjection under regimes of colony and nation, and the times of both colonialism and its contemporary aftermath.

The introductory essay shows how gender is engaged across the region by a diverse series of material technologies (urban planning, food production) and discursive strategies (fiction, film) to produce or limit mobility, both physical and social, for women. Through time, these engagements of gender have created and then disrupted mappings of centre and periphery and moved people, with and without their consent, into new places, experiences, and understandings of themselves. Sarker and Niyogi De describe these processes as creating "trans-status subjects" — subjects whose mobility, through either geography or discourse, has created for them a new and contradictory experience of social status.

From this essay, the editors then go on to draw several substantive arguments from the contributions they have collected. They describe how trans-status subjects come to understand themselves as inhabiting spaces where their gender brings discursive constructions and experiential understandings of place and time into conflict. Colonialism, nation building, and globalization make use of gender to position women either as the "lacking and lagging" native subjects of colonial development or the problematic diasporic others, both urban and rural, tied to old ways and other places. Incorporating contributions drawn from Thai urban studies to diasporic South Asian biography allows the editors to illustrate how intersections of space and time differ across colonialist, nationalist, and transnationalist discourses. The editors name this spatially and temporally discrepant experience of subjectivation with a new term "placetime" that marks the ways subjects resist and accommodate

imposed definitions of place. Personal and community placetimes both resist and engage the new uses to which discourses of colonialism, nationalism, and globalization have put concepts of time and space. Thus, following this temporal taxonomy of discourses, the contributions are divided into three sections, each describing the placetimes produced to counter the dominant discourse engaged.

Chapters in the first section, “Figuring Genders in the Colony and Nation: Native and Foreign”, explore the work gender has been made to do in the imaginative constructions of colonies and then nations. This is accomplished through a series of engagements with the themes of post-colonial studies. The chapters in this section cover colonial Borneo, Burma, and Sri Lanka, and then post-colonial Indonesia and Vietnam. These contributions share a focus on the policing of urban space as, symbolically, nation space and the representation of women in the arts.

The second group of chapters appears under the theme of “Transporting Genders between the Village and the City: Representations and Resistances”. This section has a more grounded geographical flavour, engaging with the use of gender in the practical technologies of modern nation-building. Contributors here focus on the gendered practicalities of public architecture in Singapore, gender and the making of place in rural Thailand, the spaces occupied by female food vendors in Bangkok, and the gendered movements of indigenous groups in the Indian Himalayas. These contributions show how the work of gendering moves between urban and rural communities, spatializing the dialogue between urban nationalist modernity and the rural past.

Lastly, the chapters in the third section, “Gendering Local-Global Circuits: Labor, Capital and Subject of Social Change”, explore more personal and community narratives of diaspora. The chapters address both the South Asian and Asian Jewish diasporas, setting them within the creation of local-global circuits. Here, the contributing scholars and activists offer the reader vivid personal narratives drawn from oral histories and biographical sketches. These offerings give voice to the gendered patterns of globalization and describe the contemporary outcomes of the historical processes outlined in previous sections.

Throughout all the chapters, personal experiences of both space and

time are described as relational and contextual by engaging women's quotidian experience, whether in contemporary film or colonial history. This ethnographic approach offers the reader a chance to apprehend the dizzying diversity and complexity of gendered lives within the region.

It is an ambitious task to bring thematic coherence to such a broad array of papers. Unfortunately, the structure of the book does not really do the contributions full justice. Too much, it seems, is left to ride on the work done by the Introduction, but there is a peculiar sense of disengagement between the Introduction and contributors' chapters. The new concepts introduced in the introductory essay — trans-status subjects and placetimes — are not engaged directly, in a meaningful way, in the individual chapters. This is a pity, for they are indeed useful new conceptual tools. Yet, as the text stands, these new terms appear, intrigue the reader and then, for all intents and purposes, vanish into the accumulation of ethnographic details as the chapters progress.

After the impressive variety of contributions, the absence of a concluding editorial voice leaves the reader hanging. In fact, much of the Introduction might be better offered as an interpretive conclusion. A shorter Preface and short thematic introductions to each section might better serve the argument put forward in the structuring itself, that is, that the gendered placetimes produced in response to colonialism, nationalism, and transnationalism have commonalities. At it stands, the Introduction is best read after, rather than before, the chapters it precedes. With this proviso, the volume would be a useful addition to libraries on gender in contemporary South and Southeast Asia, as well as a rich resource for graduate teaching in both Asian Studies and Gender Studies.

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