

Book Review

Shifting Gendered Migration in Asian Context

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Gender, Emotion and Labor markets: Asian and Western Perspective Ann Brooks & Theresa Devasahayam. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. ISBN 9780415563895.
Intimate Encounters: Filipina Women And the Remaking of Rural Japan Leiba Faier. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009. ISBN 9780520252158.

The postcolonialist critique has become a normative stance for social scientists. It is not disputable that conventional assertions of social science that we consider universal are, in fact, partial in the sense that they are merely based on theoretical and empirical analyses of the European and North American experiences. Accordingly, acknowledging the basic substance of the postcolonial critique, a number of scholars try to examine the world beyond the scope of Europe and North America. In this light, Asia emerges as a new space that requires, or deserves, much attention from scholars - from Asian studies, in particular, and the social sciences and humanities, in general. This review examines the relation between this sensibility of coloniality and how Asia is understood in feminist thought, especially in terms of gender, labor, marriage, and migration. The two books in this review aim to offer an alternative approach to decolonization of Asia and Asian women's migration in the west-orientated analyses, while having different approaches to the goal. In clarifying the different assumptions each project deploys, I aim to evaluate their contributions to challenge and reconstruct pre-existing ideas of Asian and Asian women and the sociological categories associated with them.

As the term "feminization of migration" explicitly implies, in the recent remobilization of migration, women as migratory subjects outnumber men. This conflicts with prevailing notions of women's role in patriarchal ideology; women are localized while men are mobilized. Then, why and how do women start to move from home? In a broad

sense, it is globalization that enables, if not forces, women to move across borders of nation-states as workers. Feminist scholars, mostly from the West, who study women's migrant work under globalization, focus on nannies and maids in affluent countries, whose labor becomes a cheap commodity for emotional labor supports such as caring, cooking, cleaning, and parenting. As a result, the reproductive and emotional labors that used to be part of the First World woman's domestic role have become commodified, through which migrant women from the Third World get jobs at the global level. Needless to say, these feminist studies on gendered migration critically display how orientalized the ideas of non-western women, migrant women, naturalize their labor as merely "women's work," performed by women who come from "premodern" and "traditional" societies. Nevertheless, as I see it, they conform to and, at worst, reinforce such orientalized ideas, by limiting the deployment of concepts of emotional labor and feminization of migration in European and American contexts.

In this light, Brooks and Devasahayam in *Gender, Emotions and Labor Markets* build new research on a sharp critique that previous literatures have described Asia merely as a background where Western concepts of gender, emotional labor, and migration are deployed, as the subtitle of their book, "Asian and Western perspective," implies. By exploring a variety of data, including theoretical debates, empirical research, statistical data, media reports, and policy documents, they point out that a large number of female migrant domestic workers have fulfilled the needs of emotional labor not only in the West but also in Asian global cities, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Ho Chi Minh City. The Asian migration within Asia, the notice of which I find one of virtues of the book, ruptures a prevailing notion of global migration that Asia consists of labor-sending countries and the West of labor-receiving countries, and this alongside the gap of the economic and sociopolitical hegemony of the world. This argument opens up an intellectual space for unpacking Western-oriented perspectives on Asian women's migrations. In other words, the complexity embedded in the constructed space, Asia, enables us to re-approach Asia and women in terms other than those of the naturalized category that simply labels Asian women as exploited, oppressed, and victimized under global capitalism.

Yet, despite the intellectual potential the book embraces, Brooks and Devasahayam do not push it further. Rather than tracing the historical and cultural construction of differences in Asia, they, instead, rest on stereotyped ideas of the West and Asia, a focus that clashes with their own analysis of the highly capitalized global cities in Asia. Again, they simply assume that maid employers are Western women and maid employees are migrant women from Asia. This assumption tells us little about dynamics and tensions within Asia in relation to migration. Further questions, thus, are left unanswered in the book: why and how foreign domestic labors become a popular form of migrant women's labor in the West in contrast to Asia? What makes domestic labor-migrations more acceptable in South East Asia and international marriage-migration in East Asia? To what extent do historical and cultural differences (not only between Asia and the West but also within Asia) produce distinct migration patterns?

In this context, I find Faier's book, *Intimate Encounters*, offers another path toward analyses of Asian women's migration and Asia. Faier examines how Filipina migrants come to and live in a rural area of southwestern Nagano in Japan as foreigners, workers at a hostess bar, and wives of the local Japanese men. Through historical research about the geopolitical relationship between Japan and Philippines and depth ethnography in a local domain in Japan, the author navigates "in-between" spaces where relationships form among people, discourses, nation-states, and global capitalistic practices. This attentive methodology, rescuing her analysis from an insufficient structural approach and a naïve agency-orientated perspective, produces insightful knowledge that challenges widespread and taken-for-granted notions of Asian migrant women and Asia.

With this attentive methodology, the book first challenges the prevalent stereotypes of Asian female migrants as "domestic workers," "mail-order brides," or "sex workers." Instead, the book demonstrates women's transition from brides to workers and from workers to brides. In contrast to prevailing images of Asian migrant women, we can find in the book descriptions of their multidimensional roles as wives, workers, mothers and citizens. Within the socio-economically structured relation between Philippine and Japan, most Filipina women in the rural area under consideration came into Japan with entertainment visas and worked in hostess bars. They then married local Japanese men; some

of them quit their jobs and some of them continued working. Interestingly, this synthetic relationship among Filipina women's migration, the hostess bar industry, and international marriage took shape under the discourse of *ii oyomesan*, a term referring to an ideal traditional Japanese bride and daughter-in-law, and one which the local people use to describe some of the Filipina women who married local Japanese men. On the one hand, this shows how patriarchal and nationalistic ideology has worked to construct an acceptable Filipina women's image, and, on the other hand, explains how Japaneseness and Philippineness are reproduced and transformed through Filipina brides.

Also, Faier clearly shows that the significance of the borders of nation-states is always under construction. Quotidian practices of Filipina migrant women and Japanese local residences are, as she convincingly displays, signals of meaning-making - of belonging, community and nationality - in which boundaries of nation-states are not pre-existent and fixed. In contradiction to the popular notion that global subjects simply traverse pre-existing borders, she puts more emphasis on spatiality and process of construction of borders with the concept of "zone of encounter." She highlights this by positioning her nationality as a United States citizen in relation to Japan and the Philippines. Against the historical backdrop of the Philippines' not-so-distant experiences of colonialism by America and Japan, the geopolitical asymmetry is currently interconnected to produce desires of migration. For instance, Filipina women's migration is driven by an "American" dream, and the local Japanese community accepts non-Japanese migrants as new members of their community because the community members want to be viewed as cosmopolitan, affluent, and modern "like the U.S." In this map of desire, Asia is in construction in parallel with the consistent movement of migration within Asia and even beyond Asia.

In conclusion, I recommend both of the books to any reader who wants to understand Asian migration and the gendered labor flows of globalization. Both books question Western-orientated categories, concepts, and frameworks by unpacking Asian women's experience of migration within Asia. However, Faier is more successful: she supplies a piece that is missing in Brooks and Devasahayam's account, since the latter book fails to challenge the legitimacy of the Western understanding of "other" world, in this case, Asia. While Brooks and Devasahayam

have expanded the established understanding of the emotional labor and gendered commodity chain in globalization by adding Asian cases into analysis, their pluralized understanding of migration in Asian as well as the West does not necessarily contribute to calling into question the previous structures of the Western-orientated perspective. I find Brooks and Devasahayam's book a signal to urge us to employ a more *critical* lens for research on Asian and women's migration as opposed to one that nominally presents a balanced perspective between Asian and the Western perspectives (as the subtitle of the book implies). In contrast, dealing with similar topics and concerns, Faier draws our attention to new questions about how Asia is created and contested through Asian women's migrant movements. I believe this kind of work can usefully contribute to restructuring and transforming our understanding of a world still resonating with the intellectual and political goals of postcolonialism.

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